From Messages to Voices: Understanding Girls’ Educational Experiences in Selected Communities in the Akuapim South District, Ghana

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
the College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Collins Annin

March 2009

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This dissertation titled
From Messages to Voices: Understanding Girls’ Educational Experiences in Selected Communities in the Akuapim South District, Ghana

by

COLLINS ANNIN

has been approved for
the Department of Educational Studies and the College of Education by

Francis E. Godwyll
Assistant Professor of Educational Studies

Renée A. Middleton
Dean, College of Education
ABSTRACT

ANNIN, COLLINS, Ph.D., March 2009, Curriculum and Instruction, Cultural Studies

From Messages to Voices: Understanding Girls’ Educational Experiences in Selected Communities in the Akuapim South District, Ghana (245 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Francis E. Godwyll

This dissertation is a phenomenological study that sought to understand girls’ educational experiences from the voices and from the perspective of selected stakeholders, particularly girls, at the Akuapim South District of Ghana. Notwithstanding the exponential increase in mass education since Ghana’s independence, educational differentials between boys and girls persisted. The issue is exacerbated by the weaknesses in the quantitative approaches used to address problems in education, which often lack the ability to highlight the day-to-day experiences and the quality of girls’ educational experiences. Adopting a qualitative approach, this study was conducted in four selected rural/urban communities in the Akuapim South District. Data collection was done through focus groups, interviews, and direct observation. Participants for the study included teachers, community leaders, parents, education officers, and girls.

From the four communities studied, I found consistency in the stories and challenges girls continue to face in their education. In their own voices, girls and other stakeholders reported that their education is inhibited by lack of financial support, workload at home, negative parental attitudes’, inadequate school infrastructure, negative teachers’ attitudes and low expectation of girls, sexual maturation, as well as attitudes of male students. There were several differences between the views of girls and teachers,
parents, and other participants of the study. The insight from the girls’ perspectives justifies the importance paying attention to the voices of children in developing programs which affect them. Furthermore, the study found that the problems girls face is not because of the lack of programs; rather, it is because of the inadequacies, lack of effectiveness, lack of comprehensiveness, and poor quality of programs as well.

The study concludes that girls’ educational problems are complex, intertwined, and multifaceted, situated in the home, school, and community as well as a result of the inadequacies in state-run programs. Reaching the goal of quality education for all by 2015 in Ghana will depend on the collaborative effort of the international community, the state, parents and community involvement, and teachers’ commitment and support. The effort should take the form of adequate financial support, change in attitude toward girls’ education, improvement in teacher training and incentives, and effective system of monitoring.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Francis E. Godwyll

Assistant Professor of Educational Studies
DEDICATION

To my sweet wife, Phyllis; my lovely daughter, Ayeyi; my caring mother, Comfort; my extended family, and my in-laws through whose support and encouragement I completed this dissertation journey.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is an adinkra symbol from Ghana in Africa called “woforo dua pa na yepia wo” which literally means “he who climbs a good tree deserves a push”. In the course of this research journey there were many individuals who inspired, challenged, prayed and pushed me to finish the mark. While I am considered the sole author of this work, I sincerely and appreciatively acknowledge the people who touched my life and influenced my work in many ways. All praise to God for his provision, protection, and his purpose for my life. Dear Lord, you have always had my back and to this, I say, thank you.

This dissertation would not have been completed without the unwavering support of my family. I am grateful to Phyllis, my wife, for her feedback and suggestions, and my daughter Ayeyi for her patience during the long hours in the library. I am grateful to my Mom Comfort Afriyie for all her love, sacrifices and support during my school years.

Also, I am indebted to my advisor, Dr. Francis Godwyll, whose support, suggestions, feedback, and enthusiasm helped me reach the finish line on time. I am indebted to all my committee members- Dr. Godwyll, Dr. Collins, Dr. Romano, and Dr. Tickamyer- for their devotion, sincere feedback, and their personal resources they shared with me. Furthermore, I am also grateful to Rev. William Ofosu-Addo who introduced me to the site of the study. He made my field experience worthwhile through the people, schools, communities and leaders he introduced me to. Last but not the least, I am thankful to the precious girls who granted me interviews and shared their stories and experiences with me, as a researcher.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In most societies, children are often seen and not heard but in patriarchal societies the situation is even worse for girls compared to boys. The lack of serious attention rendered silent the voices and experiences of girls, contributing to the failure of several educational interventions that seek to promote girls’ education. Currently in Ghana, campaigns are mounted to create awareness about the importance of girls’ education to families, to girls themselves, and to the society as a whole. Research reveals that education of girls and women is the single most important investment in empowering them and in boosting national development. Yet patriarchal norms and mores push back any such reform movement and gender gaps in education continue to impede girls’ access, performance, participation in education, particularly higher education (Tanye, 2008). In Ghana and other developing countries, girls continue to drop out of school in many developing countries. With the exception of enrollment, the challenges girls and women face in education are reflected in the relative rates of school dropout and repetition, of completion and achievement (Rao & Smyth, 2005). Additionally, although enrollment figures have been used to celebrate the progress in girls’ education, the reality does not call for celebration. The issue of absenteeism, poor performance, low quality of learning outcome, and girls’ negative experiences are widespread.

These challenges for girls justify the compelling need for questioning some of the approaches employed to promote girls’ education. Top-down approaches and one-size-fits-all policies, which are often devoid of the views and experiences of girls, need to be
revisited. It is important that we provide opportunity for girls and other significant adults to share their experiences and thoughts about girls’ education, which are critical in the effort to promote girls’ enrollment, retention, and performance. Perhaps listening to the voices of girls and their experiences will provide a wealth of knowledge and insights that could help explain the persistence of gender inequality in primary education in terms of enrollment, retention, completion, and performance in Ghana and other developing countries.

The purpose of this research was to understand Ghanaian girls’ schooling and educational experiences in Ghana from the perspective of girls, parents, teachers, community leaders, and education officers. In privileging the voices of girls and other significant adults, I provided an alternative means to understanding girls’ educational experiences. As Jonathan Kozol (1992) points out, many conferences and symposia held about children unfortunately lack the voices and views of children. There are several media messages encouraging parents to send their girls to school, particularly in developing countries. In addition, several studies indicate that girls’ enrollment in Ghana has increased (Girls’ Education Unit, 2006). However, the reports do not tell us about the daily struggles and experiences of girls in school. Many girls are still out of school and increasingly, are dropping out before they complete primary school, or they never make it to senior high school. This study provided opportunity for girls, teachers, parents, education officers, and community leaders to share their thoughts about girls’ education and thereby provide the baseline knowledge in understanding girls’ experiences.
Another dimension that is critical to this study and discussion on girls’ educational experiences is the concept of messages to voices. Messages are statements made about a condition or a situation without the reader necessarily being concerned about the one who made the statement and its intended purpose. In many studies about children, the voices of the children themselves and their daily experiences are often missing. As adults we often try to act in the best interest of children but fail to find out from them their interests, experiences, opinions, and thoughts (Boylan & Ing, 2005). For instance, enrollment figures in education have been used to inform the public about the progress that has been made about girls’ education, but less attention is paid to girls’ daily experiences. Therefore, girls, compared with boys, persistently continue to drop out of school in Ghana.

Furthermore, messages are not value-neutral and therefore may be influenced by the position and the ideology of the one presenting the message. When studies talk about children without providing the opportunity for them to talk about themselves and their experiences, we ignore their power to speak for themselves. In this study, messages to voices mean privileging the voice of girls to share their lived experiences.

“Voices” here is defined as the opportunity for the participants of the study to share their lived experiences, their indigenous knowledge, their perceptions, and their words, are expressed in their own voices (Lykes & Coquillo, 2007). According to Hesse-Biber and Piatelli (2007), “Feminist research takes people as active, knowing subjects rather than passive objects of study” (p. 147). In providing the opportunity for the voices of girls and marginalized groups, power and privilege are shifted from the researcher to
participants. In the *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, various authors present insightful ideas and cautions about doing feminist research. According to Lykes and Coquillo (2007), it is critical for feminist researchers to situate themselves as “facilitators of the voices of the community participants with whom they work by creating opportunities through which they are enabled to tell their stories…” (p. 315).

Similarly, Fine (2007) suggests that researchers, who speak over or for participants, often contribute to misinformation, obscuring the respective and varied roles and voices of participants. The fundamental basis for feminist inquiry is the recognition of power and its relationship to how knowledge is built.

My goal in this study was to excavate key voices and perspectives that are often silent, powerless or subordinated (Stewart & Cole, 2007). This required, as a researcher, face-to-face interactions with the girls, so that the girls were comfortable in sharing their experiences. Several feminist researchers indicate that listening, interacting, sharing, and translating are some of the techniques feminists have developed to foster greater connectedness, understanding, and self-empowerment (Devault, 1990; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; Oakley, 1981; Smith, 1987).

The significance of privileging the voices of girls is that radical, active listening helps create knowledge that challenges ruling regimes and ideologies, rather than supporting them (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). Also, the central claim of feminism is that women’s voices and perspectives have often been silenced or ignored; as a result, an increased interest in active listening for gaps, absences in women’s talk, and considering
underlining meanings to explicit speech have become the focus of many feminist researchers (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007).

**The Position and Role of the Researcher**

The researcher serves as the direct tool for data collection; hence, it is important that his/her role and position are spelled out in the study. The advantage of human beings gathering data in qualitative inquiry is the ability of humans to interact with the situation, respond to environmental cues, collect information at multiple levels simultaneously, perceive situations holistically, process data as soon as they are available, provide immediate feedback and request for verification of data, and explore atypical or unexpected responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Hoepfl, 1997). However, this role of the researcher if not monitored, may considerably influence the outcome of the study. Researchers to carry personal values, beliefs, experience, and biases which tend to shape their perception and role in the data collection process.

As a male social researcher doing feminist research, my study is based on the premise that feminist research is not only limited to women researchers nor is it only about women as subjects. According to Visweswaran (1997), “women should not be seen as the sole subjects, authors, or audiences of feminist [research]” (pp. 593, 594). Therefore, I bring my interest and experience with feminist studies to my research. In addition, I acknowledge the fact that everyone bears multiple identities; hence as a researcher, other issues I was conscious of during the data collection process were age, class, language, religion, and ethnic background of participants. I also believe that not only does education benefit women, but the lack of education and gender inequality
harms women, perpetuates disparities, and hurts the future generation, as well (World Bank, 2001). This is part of my position, belief, and philosophy as a researcher.

I am a Ghanaian and I lived in Ghana for over 30 years before moving to the United States for further studies. Prior to leaving Ghana, I worked with the Ark Foundation in Ghana, a nonprofit organization, which sought to promote the rights of women and children. I attribute my keen interest in studying about girls’ educational experience to my mother, my work at the Ark Foundation, my personal observation in Ghana, and my experience as a graduate student in the United States.

My mother is a brilliant woman who professionally and skillfully manages her business without any business school experience or formal training. I have always wondered why she did not go to college. My mother grew up in a very patriarchal society where male education was given more emphasis than female education. She was raised in a large family and in a rural community where women role models were lacking. My mother continues to inspire me with what she continues to accomplish without any higher education. While she has worked hard against the odds to excel in her business, I am positive that her life would have been different, if had she been given the opportunity to continue her education. She has been my inspiration and support for me to achieve what she never had the opportunity to possess-quality higher education. While my mother grew up prior to Ghana’s independence, I believe her story resonates with several women living in Ghana and other developing countries today. Therefore, for this history and story not to be repeated there is the need for all women to have access to quality education.
Secondly, my interest in the subject of girls’ education comes from my years of work with the Ark Foundation. At the Ark Foundation I was given the opportunity to work with highly motivated women who believed in themselves and had a great passion to make the world free of all forms of violence against women. As one of the few men who worked in this organization I came to appreciate the capabilities of women and what they could accomplish if they are given the chance. It was evident that education was a significant investment in empowering the life of women. Unfortunately, many women drop out on the way and never realize their full potential. Also, I had the opportunity to work with community schools to create awareness about sexual victimization and violence. Some of the stories narrated by the children, particularly girls, were shocking and outrageous. This was the beginning of my attention and interest in the radical voices of children that are often overlooked or silenced.

As a student at Ohio University and as a residential coordinator I have observed the extraordinary capabilities of many female students and the opportunities offered them. Several colleges in the United States have 50% of female student representation while in Ghana, women’s education take the form of a pyramid. Thus, more women at the basic level but they drop out by the time they get to college. As a researcher I begun to ask critical questions such as, how do we explain the disparities between female education in Ghana and in the United States? Why are females in Ghana dropping out of school despite the progress that has been made? From my experience as an educator and from my observations as a Ghanaian, my conclusion is that many females in Ghana
continue to face economic, social, and cultural barriers that considerably affect their education.

As a male social researcher my interest in girls’ perspective about their own educational experiences, my national identity as a Ghanaian, my familiarity of the local language and culture of the district influenced the study throughout the data collection process.

The Akan language, which is the predominant language of the district, helped me to relate and interact both with participants and community members. I was conscious of what was considered as culturally appropriate behavior and what that meant for my data collection. For example, in most of the schools, the participants saw me as an authority figure and introduced me as “Sir”. This revealed the power relation between me as a researcher and the girls as participants. To minimize the power relations, I introduced myself with my local name, outlined the purpose of the study, read to them their rights as participants, and assured them of confidentiality.

Statement of the Problem

Growing evidence and research support the importance of investing in girls’ education (Herz & Sperling, 2004; UN Millennium Project, 2005). Since the period prior to, and just after, Ghana’s independence in 1957, there have been several efforts to improve girls’ enrollment, retention and performance at all levels of education. The Ghana Statistical Service (2002) indicates that 67% of boys and 59% of girls in the 6 to 11 age range were enrolled in school in 1987/88. While the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) for girls at the primary level was 71.43% in 1992/93, boys GER, was 83.71%. At
the JSS level (now Junior High School), GER for girls in 1992/93 and in 1999/2000 were 48.90% and 53.3% respectively.

Table 1

*Gross Enrollment rates at Primary and JSS Levels by Sex, 1992 to 2000 Ac. Years*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross Enrollment Rate</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td></td>
<td>JSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Girls %</td>
<td>Boys %</td>
<td>Total %</td>
<td>Girls%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td></td>
<td>71.43</td>
<td>83.71</td>
<td>77.58</td>
<td>48.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
<td></td>
<td>72.19</td>
<td>84.07</td>
<td>78.14</td>
<td>50.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td></td>
<td>70.51</td>
<td>81.28</td>
<td>75.90</td>
<td>50.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td></td>
<td>69.50</td>
<td>79.70</td>
<td>74.61</td>
<td>51.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td></td>
<td>71.54</td>
<td>81.54</td>
<td>76.55</td>
<td>51.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td></td>
<td>68.61</td>
<td>76.83</td>
<td>72.53</td>
<td>51.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998/99</td>
<td></td>
<td>68.6</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td></td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry Of Education, SRIMPR Division Accra

The period after 2000 marked a significant period in the history of girls’ education in Ghana. The two major events after the year 2000 were the United Nations Millennium Development Goals declaration and the reaffirmation of Education For All declaration in Dakar. The goal was to achieve primary education for all by 2005 and 2015. To achieve the 100% net enrollment rates at the primary level by 2015, Ghana
needed to increase the rate of enrollment by 2.5% per year from the 1998 level of 57.9% (ISSER, 2004).

Much of the literature on girls’ education, as well as the use of enrollment figures by governments and international organizations, failed to adequately explain the whole story about girls’ overall educational experience. As Skelton (2006) puts it, in the same way that people continue certain dress styles, even when they are considered “outmoded” so certain research traditions that retain allegiance to particular theoretical perspective, are adhered to. For instance, while girls’ enrollment has increased in Ghana there are still a large number of girls dropping out before completion of high school. Girls’ education in Ghana persistently takes the shape of a pyramid with huge number at the basic level; yet, unfortunately, girls drop out as they progress through the educational ladder. In reference to Table 1, the annual average dropout rate for girls and boys in 1994-2000 were 6.00% and 4.60%, respectively. This trend is consistent with the Sutherland-Addy (2002) study which revealed that the differences in promotion rates increase in favor of boys as pupils move from grade 1-6 in primary school and is highest between grades 5 and 6. The reasons behind this tendency of girls dropping out make this study critical and necessary. It is not enough to enroll girls in school without the necessary support to keep them there. The inability to achieve gender equity in primary schools and keep girls in school in Ghana raises a general concern that has to be addressed. Takyi-Amoako (2008) contends:

For developing countries to reap benefits from female education and significantly reduce poverty, it is crucial that the attainment of gender parity in educational
planning and management is not focused only on redressing the imbalance between female and male enrollment rates at the primary or basic education level. Gender inequality needs to be redressed in areas such as retention, completion, access to quality education, and progression to higher levels. (p. 198)

This research seeks to understand girls’ educational experiences from the perspective of girls, parents, teachers, education officers, and community leaders. What are girls’ educational experiences? What factors are influencing girls’ education? What programs are available to support girls’ education in the Akuapim South District? Understanding girls’ educational experience is critical because it goes beyond limited attention on enrollment to a broader perspective of girls’ education.

When girls manage to get to the school, the challenges they face never end. They confronted with difficulties from home, school, and community. Several studies have cited a number of barriers behind Africa’s poor performance toward gender equity in education. These include poverty, cultural practices, poor school infrastructure, low quality, conflict, natural disaster, and conflict (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Hyde, 1993). At home girls, in addition to their school work are expected to fulfill many gender roles such as cooking, fetching water, working to family income and others. Also, the rural-urban differentials and where a girl lives have been found to be significant to their educational success (Hyde, 1993). In school, teacher’s attitude toward girls, availability of facilities, school’s friendliness toward girls, and financial demands all impact girls’ educational experience. According to Hyde (1993),
Actions that result in entering, continuing, or dropping out of school occur at several sequential points or decision nodes. At each point the decision for or against schooling may be influenced by characteristics of the individual, the home, the community, the school, and the school system. (p. 110)

Many studies have been conducted on girls’ education in Ghana, but not many have been undertaken to highlight and understand girls’ lived experiences (Hyde, 1993; Tanye, 2008). This study seeks to understand how the factors already mentioned affect girls’ educational experience in the Akuapim South District. More research focusing on both micro level and macro level factors are needed to understand the factors influencing girls’ education. The multiple factors influencing girls’ education combine in a complex and unique fashion; therefore, it requires active listening to the girls’ experiences to understand the complexities involved. For example, the National Vision for Girls’ Education in Ghana prepared by the Girls’ Education Unit (2002) asserts, “Barriers to girls’ education are multifaceted and interrelated….Indeed, overcoming barriers to girls’ education will require multiple perspectives and multisectoral partnerships” (p. 13).

Additionally, a variety of programs have been implemented to promote girls’ education in Ghana, such as capitation grant, free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE), School Feeding Program, and the establishment of Girls’ Education Unit. Notwithstanding the programs that have been implemented in Ghana to promote girls’ education, girls are increasingly dropping out. The perspectives of beneficiaries of a program are critical in creating a responsive program; therefore, this study provides participants with the opportunity to speak for themselves and about their experiences. By
actively listening and highlighting the voices of girls and other adults, I am providing an alternative way to understand the challenges and prospects of girls’ education. There are multiple factors which shape girls education; therefore, providing girls the opportunity to speak about their own experiences is not only necessary but also pivotal to unraveling Ghana’s inability to achieve the goal of education for all. This approach to understanding girls’ education is also critical in designing future interventions in the communities under study.

**Purpose of the Study**

First, the purpose of this study is to understand girls’ educational experiences, through their own voices and the voices of other significant adults. The study explores the everyday experiences of girls in upper primaries, junior high schools, and senior high schools in the Akuapim South District. Through focus groups, interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, I seek to understand the educational experiences of girls as they tell their own stories. This approach stems from the persistence of Ghana’s inability to achieve gender parity in basic education despite the numerous efforts undertaken by the state, religious organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other civil society organizations.

Second, the study seeks to highlight some of the multiple factors influencing girls’ access to education, and their retention, performance, and completion. The study provides context-specific baseline knowledge that would be useful to state and local government, education officers, and civil society organizations interested in designing girls’ education interventions in the district. In light of this purpose, it is crucial that I
hear the stories and voices of the girls; parents, teachers and community leaders who play significant role in the decisions about girls staying in school or dropping out.

Furthermore, the study seeks to understand girls’ expectations of parents and teachers. The home and school partnership is important to the teaching and learning process, especially for girls. Parents and teachers’ aspirations for and support of girls have been found to be significant to girls, overall performance (Diaz, Pelletier, & Provenzo, 2006).

Lastly, this study seeks to understand programs already available to promote girls’ education in the district. Knowing what is already available is an important step in the process of finding ways to enhance girls’ educational experience. While researchers have evidence of programs that work to promote girls’ education, it would be a disservice to transfer successful programs wholesale from different countries and attempt to implement them in different settings.

**Research Questions**

The central research question that guided this study was: In their own voices, what is critical between girls and parents, teachers, education officers, community leaders and government officials about girls’ educational experience at the Akuapim South district? Other related research questions that guided the study were:

1. What is different or even radical about girls’ perception of their experiences in contrast to the messages given by government officials, community leaders, parents, and other stakeholders?
2. What are the major challenges affecting girls’ education identified by:
   a. Rural girls vs. urban girls
   b. Rural teacher vs. urban teachers
   c. Public schools vs. church-affiliated public schools
3. How do parents make the decision whether to keep their girls in school or take them out?
4. What kinds of intervention have been found to be effective based on the data from this research?

**Significance of the Study**

The rationale for this study stems from the persistent disparity between girls’ and boys’ access to primary education and the inability to keep girls in school. Unfortunately, the voices of children, particularly girls, are often missing from programs, conferences, and research about them (Kozol, 1992). The findings from this study will provide international organizations, civil society, governments, parents, and communities with relevant data that will inform the design of future interventions to promote girls’ education. More importantly, interviewing teachers, girls, parents and community leaders will help policymakers to understand the complexities involved in the factors that influence girls’ education in the Akuapim South District.

The second significance of this study is to provide the knowledge needed by stakeholders to advance girls’ education in the district. It is hoped that understanding the needs of girls and the impediments to their access to basic education will be useful in designing future interventions. In many instances, programs are designed based on
research findings from a different context as a result; certain programs fail to achieve the expected outcomes. The outcome of this study will serve as a needs assessment which is necessary for designing successful programs specific to the Akuapim South District.

Furthermore, this study has the great potential to generate knowledge that is context specific. My field visits, observations, interviews, and experiences give a firsthand narrative of girls’ daily life in the district. These reports will influence the approach to promoting girls’ education. Although this study is not the first attempt to understand girls’ education in Ghana, it provides an alternative approach to understanding the deeper issues. The study provided girls with the unique opportunity to speak and share their experiences which may not be captured by other methods of inquiry. Therefore, the voices of the girls and adults involved in this study bring perspectives beyond educational statistics on enrollment and access.

In addition, the results of the study will be useful in an effort to inform and educate parents, teachers, policymakers, and government officials on their role in promoting girls’ education and the effects of their attitudes on girls’ overall success. The results will be used to show that increase in enrollment alone is not the answer to the challenges girls face in their education. The findings will be relevant for policymakers and development practitioners in Ghana and other Sub-Saharan countries which are lagging behind in achieving the Millennium Development Goal of achieving education for all by 2015. While I acknowledge the fact that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other contexts, some of the findings and the approach to the study could be useful for future studies in a different context.
Furthermore, the findings of the study are intended to help District Girls’ Education Officers, Girls’ Education Coordinators, teachers, parents, and community leaders to understand girls’ educational experiences. The findings will aid them in developing school-based programs and the home support needed for girls’ educational success. The overall value of this study and the data gathered through my fieldwork rest upon the successful dissemination of results to appropriate organizations, constituencies, and all others who have the power to effect change in the state of girls’ education in Ghana.

**Delimitations**

This study was limited to the understanding of girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District in Ghana. The focus was on girls, parents, teachers, community leaders and education officers. The study was conducted in 4 out of 20 communities in the district. Also, all the schools involved in the study were public schools with or without church affiliation. No attempt was made in comparing girls’ educational experiences, particularly between girls in the private and public schools. In addition, the participants involved in the study are not representative of the district. As with all qualitative research, my findings are not intended to be generalized to other contexts. My goal was to have a deeper understanding of girls’ education at the Akuapim South District. This was to provide baseline knowledge for development of future girls’ education interventions in the district. While the scope of this study was limited to the Akuapim South district, literature on the district was limited. Therefore, scholarly work and literature from similar studies in Ghana and elsewhere were reviewed.
**Definition of Terms**

Social concepts and words mean different things in different contexts; therefore, to avoid ambiguities and provide clarity for this study, the following terms are operationally defined.

*Akuapim South District*: Akuapim South is one of the 110 administrative districts in Ghana. It is found in the Eastern region and share borders with the Greater Accra Region. It is one of the 17 districts in the Eastern region.

*Capitation Grant*: The Capitation Grant is a government subsidy to support schools. Each child is given 30,000 (equivalent to $3). Since the money is paid according to number of pupils enrolled, schools with low levels of enrollment in the rural areas tend to receive smaller grants.

*District Girls’ Education Officer*: The District Girls’ Education officers are appointed officers who work with the District Education Office to coordinate girls’ education activities in the district. They are charged with school visitations, training of girls’ education coordinators, design and implementation of girls’ education programs, and they make recommendations to the district on girls’ education promotion.

*Dropout*: Dropout refers to students not completing an educational program. This can occur either at the primary or secondary level of education (Balde, 2004). In Ghana, a dropout is defined as a child who has not completed the nine years of basic education ((Fentiman, Hall & Bundy, 2007).

*Girls’ Education Coordinator*: The Girls’ Education Coordinators are teachers in the school who are directly responsible for girls’ education in the school. They organize after
school programs for girls, serve as the liaison with the District Girls’ Education Officer, and accompany girls to seminars and other training opportunities. This position is an extra work for teachers undertaken on top of all their teaching and school assignments. 

Girls’ Education Unit (GEU): The GEU was established within the Ministry of Education by the government in 1997. The unit is responsible for the promotion of girls’ education in Ghana. The unit works through the Regional and District Girls’ Education officers who work directly in the region, district, and the schools.

Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER): The GER is the total number of children enrolled in each level of school expressed as the total number of children who belong to the age group who should be enrolled at that level of basic education (Fentiman, et al. 2007).

Junior High School (JSS): The junior high school has come to replace the junior secondary school system since the introduction of the new educational reform in 2007. It is a three-year post primary education prior to attending senior high school. The new educational reform in Ghana has restructured the current Basic Education System to provide universal compulsory basic education comprising of 2 years of kindergarten, 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior high and then 4 years of senior high.

Messages: Messages includes all the top-down approaches and all the one-size-fits-all strategies used to change a social phenomenon. It includes all the rhetoric to change the state of girls’ education without understanding the experiences of girls.

Nsawam: Nsawam is the capital of the Akuapim South District. The District Assembly and the District Education Office are located at Nsawam. Nsawam links two major cities in Ghana, Accra, and Kumasi. This has made Nsawam a large commercial area.
Primary School: In Ghana, primary level is the pre-secondary level of education and it is from primary 1 to primary 6. The primary excludes the preschool and the kindergarten but many primary schools also have kindergartens on the same school premises.

Senior High School: Senior high school is the post-primary education which is for 4 years. At the end of the junior high level, students take the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) before they are admitted to the senior high school. Under the new educational reform, the senior high is for four years. Unlike primary schools and junior high schools, not all communities have senior high schools.

Voices: Voices is a communication which empowers disadvantaged people, children, communities, and societies to advocate for themselves from their own perspectives.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five main chapters with subsections under each chapter. Chapter 1 provides the introduction of the study including background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, and definition of operational terms. I also explain the concept of messages to voices in this chapter.

Chapter 2 gives a brief profile of the state of education in Ghana as well as the socioeconomic background of the context of the study. It highlights Ghana’s economy, the history of education in Ghana, Ghana’s educational strategic plan, and the current state of education in Ghana.

Chapter 3 addresses a very important part of the study, literature review and the theoretical framework which informed the study. The literature review provides synthesis
of already existing studies about the history of girls’ education in Ghana, the state of girls’ education in Ghana, significance of girls’ education in Ghana and factors influencing girls’ education. The section on the theoretical framework discusses the main theory informing the study, the Ecology of Human Development by Urie Brofenbrenner.

Chapter 4 also highlights the methodology, description of the site of the study, participants of the study, the data collection instrument, and the data analysis procedure. Chapter 5 presents the major findings following my field visit. The findings are categorized according to the emerging themes, are presented in the voices of participants; further literature is cited to support claims made by participants.

Chapter 6, which is the final chapter, provides the summary of the study, major findings, suggestions and the conclusion.
CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATION IN GHANA

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of Ghana’s economy and a brief history of education in Ghana. The chapter also discusses educational reforms in Ghana, Ghana’s Educational Strategic Plan, the state of girls’ education, and the efforts to promote girls’ education in Ghana. My goal in this chapter is to provide the context in which many girls in Ghana find themselves. The state of education in Africa, including Ghana, must be understood within the context of the socioeconomic experiences of the many countries on the continent (Anderson-Levitt, Bloch, & Soumare, 1998). Similarly, the conditions of schools in Africa must be examined within the context of a broad international framework. Anderson-Levitt et al (1998) suggest that these international frameworks should recognize not only “the increasingly difficult economic conditions of most African countries but (also) the complex reasons that maintain or increase poverty within the African context” (p. 99). Girls’ lived experiences do not happen in isolation; they are significantly shaped by the economic, cultural, social, and political history of the country. Therefore, to understand girls’ educational experience in Ghana, it is important to understand the history, the economy, the reforms, and the strategies available to promote the education of girls.

Overview of Ghana’s Economy

Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) is a country in West Africa bounded by Burkina Faso, Togo, and Ivory Coast, with a total land surface area of 238,537 sq. km. The World Bank (2005) estimates Ghana’s population as 22.1 million with an annual population
growth rate of 2.0 %. The female population in Ghana is estimated at 51% compared with 49% for males. Children (population under 18 years) make up 54 % of the total population while adolescents, aged 10 to 19 years, make up 23% of the population. Fertility level in Ghana has decreased significantly over the years. The number of births per woman in 1977 was 6.5 but the figure dropped to 4.79 by 1998 (World Bank, 2001; Sackey, 2005). The factors contributing to this trend include improvement in the literacy levels of women, the availability of better healthcare, and the increased access to family-planning services.

There are 10 regions in Ghana with the Ashanti and the Greater Accra regions being the most densely populated regions. The 10 regions are further categorized into 110 administrative districts. The five major distinct ethnic groups in Ghana are Akan, Ga-Adangme, Ewe, Gonjas, and Mole-Dagbani. While English remains the official language, Akan, Dagbani, Ewe, Ga, and Hausa are spoken by a large section of Ghanaians. Due to internal migration, most parts of Ghana have mixed ethnic groups especially in the urban areas.

Ghana is considered a poor country with about 31% of the population living in poverty (World Bank, 1995). In Ghana, there is a poverty disparity between the rural and urban, regions, gender, and agro-ecological zones. It is estimated that around 80% of Ghana’s incidence of poverty is rural, and 60% of the poor are women, children, and unemployed youth (Asenso-Okyere, Nsowah-Nuanmah & Albersen, 1997; Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). Table 2 highlights selected welfare indicators in Ghana and the change between 1998 and 2003. The extent of poverty is reflected in the standard of
living and the quality of life of the population. While 25.9% of males have never attended school, 37.4% of females have also never attended school in 2003. The data also suggest that there was only about a 5% gain in the children aged 6 to 15 attending school between 1998 and 2003. Other studies also report that about half of Ghana’s population has little or no access to safe water, adequate healthcare, high quality education, adequate electricity, or transport and communications (Asiabi, 2000; Donkor, 2002).

Table 2

*Selected Core Welfare Indicators in Ghana 1998/1999 and 2000*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1998/1999</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males who never attended school</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females who never attended school</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate in urban areas</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy rate in rural areas</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children aged 6-15 attending school</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>85.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to safe source of water: Urban</td>
<td>92.3%</td>
<td>87.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>: Rural</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>63.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households using electricity</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) 2006-2009

Overall, Ghana’s economic growth has not succeeded in transforming the economy from overdependence on agriculture into a solid industrial economy. According
to Aryeetey and Kanbur (2005), sustained economic growth would normally be accompanied by major structural transformation, but the trend in Ghana’s economy shows, hardly, any structural changes. Table 3 illustrates the sectoral distribution of real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1970 and 2000. The average GDP of the three sectors between 1970 and 1975 were agriculture 52%; industry 19%; and service, 29%. After the introduction of Economic Recovery Program (ERP) in 1984, there were no major changes in Ghana’s overdependence on agriculture. Between 1995 and 2000 agriculture, industry, and service average Real GDP were 39.5%, 27.5% and 33% respectively.

Table 3

*Sectoral Distribution of Real GDP (period Average (%))*

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The implication of Ghana’s economic structure and overdependence on agriculture is the increased vulnerability of the country to many external factors, which are difficult to control and predict. Aryeetey and Kanbur (2005) stated that “the rigid economic structure with a rapidly growing population may be expected to create problems for any economy, thus leading to poverty among the population” (p.14).
Agriculture products are influenced by an unstable world market and perennial dry or flood seasons which destroy crops.

Various factors have been cited to explain Ghana’s economic crisis and poverty, including poor farming practice; infertile lands; lack of access to credit; and poor roads, storage, and marketing facilities. Other factors include low productivity, low educational levels, lack of skills for production, unemployment and poor job markets (Ashiabi, 2000; World Bank, 1995). Also, the economic condition in Ghana and many other African countries has considerably been influenced by tighter structural adjustment programs prescribed by international institutions such as the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund. Economic prescriptions from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) influence government spending on social services including education. Anderson-Levitt, et al. (1998) argue that

Any analysis of schooling must be situated within a broad international framework that recognizes not only the increasingly difficult economic conditions of most African countries but the complex reasons that maintain or increase poverty with African context. (p. 99)

In situations of extreme poverty women and children suffer more than any other group of people. Poverty potentially affects children’s health, schooling, and social relationships, as well as their future (Ashiabi, 2000). The lack of access to social amenities mean that women will be spending more time to fetch water, prepare food, and do other household chores which culturally have been defined as women’s work.
For instance, there are three major categories to sources for drinking water in Ghana; pipe-borne water (indoor plumbing, inside standpipe, water vendor, tanker, and private or public standpipe); well (with or without pump); and natural sources (river, rain, lakes, and springs). According to Ghana Statistical Service (2000), 42% of households in 2000 had access to pipe-borne water, 34% use water from wells, and 24% depend on natural sources for drinking water. Several rural areas have limited access to pipe-borne water compared with the urban areas. The lack of access to clean sources of water has a significant impact on the health of children and adults.

Additionally, almost two-thirds of the households in Ghana use wood as their main source of fuel for cooking. In urban areas, while 57% use charcoal for cooking, 84% use wood for cooking in the rural areas (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). What this means for women is extended time to search for firewood and fetch water to prepare food for their families. In most situations, the search for firewood and the fetching water of become part of the girl’s chores. This means that girls have to share their time between their school work and house chores.

Another emerging trend important to the discussion is the increase in female-headed households. In Ghana, female-headed households increased from 25.7% in 1960, to 28.6% in 1970, to 31.9% in 2000, and to 33.85% in 2003 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). Although studies from many developing countries show the relationship between female-headed households and the incidence of poverty, the relationship in Ghana is inconclusive. A study by Lloyd and Gage-Brandon (1993) in Ghana concluded, “The increasing proportion of households reported as female-headed in Ghana does not
indicate a growing concentration of poverty among women, although it does suggest their increasing primary economic responsibility and their growing vulnerability” (p. 131). They add that female-headed households are not a homogenous group in Ghana, and old women and widows are more likely to be poor and vulnerable than other female-headed households (Lloyd & Gage-Brandon, 1993).

Ghana’s economy poses a greater risk for women and increases their vulnerability. Awumbila in his study, “Gender equality and poverty in Ghana: Implications for poverty reduction strategies” (2006) revealed that gender inequality is the main reason to explain women’s vulnerability to poverty. He argues that gender inequalities in Ghana are manifested in opportunities, capabilities, and empowerment in terms of production resources, vulnerability to risks and crisis, and gender divisions of labor. Women in Ghana have limited access to productive resources, especially land which is central to agriculture. Awumbila (2006) cited a study by the Ghana Statistical Service that less than one-third (31%) of households headed by women own land compared with 40% of households headed by men, with a greater gap in rural communities.

Another inequality which makes women more vulnerable to poverty is in the labor market. In Ghana, 43% of women are economically active in the labor market compared with 44.6% for men. However, there is gender segregation with about 91% of economically active women employed in the informal sector as petty traders, farmers, or as unpaid workers on family enterprises (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000, Awumbila, 2006). Thus, gender segregation in the labor market makes women more susceptible to
poverty. Awumbila (2006) contends: “women’s greater vulnerability to poverty compared to men is not only in their differential access to employment but also to lower earning capacity within the labor market, as well as longer hours of work” (p. 155).

Ghana’s socioeconomic condition significantly affects the local governments, communities, and parents in the provision of high quality education for children, particularly girls. Although education is seen as one of the best investments that can be made to change the vicious cycle of poverty in families, many families cannot afford to send their children to school. Governments in Ghana, in the past and present, have initiated different programs to promote education, but, education in Ghana continues to face many challenges. To understand the state of education in Ghana, especially girls’ education, we need to understand the history of education in Ghana.

This background reveals that Ghana’s economic condition and the incidence of poverty cannot be addressed without taking the appropriate steps to address the barriers that make many women vulnerable. However, Ghana’s economy is situated in a peculiar sociopolitical context which needs to be understood when discussing the state of education in Ghana.

**History of Education in Ghana**

Prior to the advent of a Western form of education in Ghana and other African countries, there existed traditional/indigenous forms of education. These forms of education were based on the “principles of functionalism and sustained the practical, social, spiritual and intellectual needs of communities within which they practiced”
Traditional forms of education were orally transmitted and an integral part of daily socialization and interaction. According to Egbo (2000), “learning was largely experiential as children learned by doing, imitation and participation in ceremonies” (p. 62). He admits that although traditional education was largely informal and less structured as compared with Western education, its design was appropriate for the needs of Africans.

The Western form of education in Ghana was introduced by the Europeans who traded with Africans even before the 15th century. Two main reasons have been cited by many scholars to explain the introduction of Western education in Africa: first, as a medium for propagating Christianity and second, as a means of subjugating local authority to sustain the colonial administration (Egbo, 2000; Foster, 1965). Egbo (2000) strongly contends that “colonial education …in Sub-Saharan Africa, were essentially Eurocentric, exploitative, assimilationist, discriminatory and hegemonic” (p. 63). Thus, the type of formal education offered was for the interest of the colonial administration and not necessarily to empower the colonies.

There were reports of schools in the castles, built by the colonial administration, but, according to Foster (1965), the demand by local people was limited. Most of the children in the castle schools were recruited from the castle “mulattoes”; wealthier African merchants, and, later, the children of the chiefs. The expansion of education in Ghana (Gold Coast) became more evident in the nineteenth century. By 1874, the British had already completed their colonization of Ghana and other African countries. However, the colonial administration did not take the responsibility for making education accessible
to all. According to Foster (1965), there was no public body charged with the provision of education in Ghana until 1870. The lack of colonial government involvement in the provision of education was consistent with the provision of education in England. Foster (1965) indicated that “in England, it was only in 1833 that an Education Committee of the Privy Council was empowered to administer grant-in-aid to voluntary schools” (p. 49). In addition to the nature of funding, the structure, organization, and curricula used in the Gold Coast were prototypes of England’s educational system. Unfortunately, “Africans themselves appeared to desire European-type education based on reading, writing, and arithmetic” (Graham, 1971, p. 181).

Lack of a colonial administration investment in education for all resulted in high levels of inequality in education in terms of gender, class, and geographical location. For instance, education in the castle was limited to the children of the rich merchants, children of chiefs, and rich African merchants; recruitment was based on a person’s social standing. Foster (1965) cited article 9 of the British Treaty of 1817 which stated:

The kings agree to commit their children to the care of the Governor-in-Chief for education at Cape Coast Castle, in full confidence of the good intentions of the British Government and of the benefits to be derived therefrom. (p. 60)

Furthermore, the disparity in education between Northern and Southern Ghana was influenced by the way the colonial administrations directed their investment. (Bening, 1990) asserts that the colonial system directed their investment to well-endowed regions and by so doing retained the poor areas as “sources of labor for the exploitation of natural resources” (p. 251). Also, official policies deliberately limited the activities of the
missionaries in the northern areas but allowed the missions considerable freedom in the southern areas.

Another significant inequality in education was gender. As in England, girls’ education in the Gold Coast was not given the emphasis it deserved compared with the early attempts to educate boys. Even in situations where girls’ education was encouraged, girls were prepared to become homemakers and not for public participation. In Britain, the middleclass established a domestic ideology which best explains the unequal treatment of women (Purvis, 1991). The industrial revolution in the West also marked a significant period when many women were displaced from the labor force and sex-role dichotomies identified the domestic domain as the reserve of women and the outside world as the domain for men (Smock, 1981). Women were confined to their homes and even there they were dominated by their husbands, the breadwinners. The private became the sphere of women while the public became the sphere of men. According to Purvis (1991):

The influence of the middle-class domestic ideology in Victorian society helped to create and maintain gender stereotypes: thus femininity became identified with domesticity, service to others, subordination and weakness while masculinity was associated with life in the competitive world of paid work, strength and domination. (p. 4)

It was this mind-set that guided the provision of education by the colonial administration in the Gold Coast, especially for girls. Girls’ enrollment at the primary schools in 1948 was only 20% (Earl, 1983). Several factors have been
cited to explain the low enrollment of girls (Egbo, 2000; Foster, 1965). Mothers were reluctant to spare their daughters from household work, girls’ education was too much focused on preparing them as homemakers and not for public occupation, and the colonial administration showed no direct interest in the provision of education. However, in Ghana, the role of missionaries was significant in the provision, and expansion in primary and secondary education, including girls’ education. The next section provides an overview of the role of the missions in the provision of education.

**The Role of the Missions**

The provision of education was the responsibility of missionaries and European merchants who saw education as a means of converting the locals to Christianity and for the purposes of trade. Two missionary organizations that played significant roles in the expansion of educational facilities in Ghana were the Wesleyan Missionary Society and the Basel Society (Foster, 1965). These two missionary societies adopted different educational approaches. While the Wesleyans used English as the medium of instruction, the Basel society preferred to use the vernacular. It was difficult for the missionaries to provide education for the whole colony because at this time Africans’ interest in European education had increased and demand was high. By 1851, the Wesleyans had 84 schools with a total enrollment of over 3,000 pupils, with over 100 teachers (Graham, 1971).

The attempts in the 1800-1850 period to promote girls’ education were largely influenced by the work of the missionaries. The Basel Mission established a girls’ school
at Akropong in 1850 which was later transferred to Aburi in 1854 (Graham, 1971). The Wesleyan missionaries started a girls’ school in Cape Coast in 1821. Progress in girls’ education was consistently made by the missionaries, and by 1850 a strong foundation had been laid for girls. Table 4 illustrates the average number of girls in attendance at mission schools with the exception of the Basel Mission. It is clear that there were more girls in mission schools than government schools. Although the Basel and the Wesleyan Missions played significant roles in girls’ education at the beginning, the German Mission also contributed to the provision of girls’ education in Ghana.

![Table 4](image)

By the twentieth century, the colonial government has begun to show more interest in the provision of education. However, the active participation of religious organizations in the provision of education persisted, even to contemporary Ghana.
Several attempts were made at the dawn of the twentieth century to improve education. At this point, there were a number of secondary schools, teacher training colleges, vocational schools, and technical schools in the colony. Also, several missions, such as the Bremen Mission, Ahmadiyya Mission, and Catholic Mission, had also come in to provide education. Although both the Europeans and Africans had become interested in the provision of education, both desired education for different reasons. While the European administrators were interested in locally trained human capital, the Africans, on the other hand, “desired European-type education in order to attain equality with, and even perhaps challenge the Europeans” (Graham, 1971, p. 182).

In 1925, a new education ordinance was passed which was overseen by the Board of Education. According to Graham (1971), the ordinance made it possible for any school to qualify for a grant by attaining standards of efficiency (p. 157). The government assistance resulted in an appreciable rise in educational opportunities at all levels. Through the period, many committees were established by the government to look into the provision of education. For instance, in 1944 the Department of Education and the government initiated a series of educational surveys in the colony (Graham, 1971), which resulted in a call for educational reforms. An Accelerated Development Plan for Education was introduced in 1951. This plan and other reforms in education in Ghana are discussed in the next section.

**Education Reforms in Ghana**

Prior to Ghana’s independence in 1957, the need for educational reform became apparent to many Ghanaians. The major preoccupation of the government around this
period was to correct the irrelevance of the inherited colonial school curriculum and regional educational imbalances to expand educational facilities and increase enrollment (Egbo, 2000). The 1951 Accelerated Development Plan for Education was one of the initial efforts to promote and increase access to education. The main objective of the plan was to help promote free universal primary education, expand educational facilities, promote teacher training, and increase educational funding. The six years (1951-1957) before the declaration of Ghana’s independence was marked by a remarkable increase and expansion in educational facilities in almost all parts of the country (Graham, 1971). It is estimated that by 1958 there were 3,402 primary schools, 1,030 middle schools, and 38 secondary schools. Teacher training was also given serious attention during the six years of the plan (Graham, 1971).

The Accelerated Development Plan of Education has been criticized because the standard of education was lowered by the emphasis on expansion. Also, the curriculum used during the colonial period was maintained, and the European model persisted. Furthermore, the expansion in education resulted in teacher shortage; therefore, the government was forced to employ the services of untrained teachers. This in a way compromised the quality of education in Ghana. Foster (1965) maintains that the criticism leveled against the development plan is unwarranted. According to him, it is impossible for any immediate proposal “to radically restructure curriculum” and any quick deviation would have been regarded with suspicion (p. 185).

Another significant reform in the history of education in Ghana was the reform recommended by the Dzobo Committee in 1974. This reform introduced the concept of
Junior Secondary School (JSS) with particular emphasis on academic and practical skills for all (Ministry of Education, 2004). The Dzobo reform was not implemented nationwide until 1987 during the President Rawlings administration. This reform has also been criticized for not adequately preparing graduates in literacy, numeracy, and technical skills, which it purported to achieve. One of the fundamental weaknesses found in the 1987 reform is that too many subjects were taught at the primary and JSS levels. These subjects were also poorly taught due to inadequate teachers, materials, and facilities in the schools (Ministry of Education, 2004). The result was that pupils were not able to continue to the secondary level and become internationally competitive. The technical and practical skills were not achieved at the end of the primary level when most pupils were still children. The survival rate at the primary level and the transition between primary and the JSS was less than satisfactory. It is estimated that one out of every eight children who entered through the JSS stage did not complete that level of schooling (Ministry of Education, 2004). In terms of female education, the level of attrition at the secondary level was also an issue of concern. According to the Ministry of Education (2004), only 42.7% of secondary school (SSS) students were females. These inadequacies ushered in a new review committee in 2002, which recommended the current educational system in Ghana. The White Paper Report submitted by this committee stated:

The education process should lead to improvement in the quality of life of all Ghanaians by empowering the people themselves to overcome poverty….They should be equipped to create, through their own endeavors, the wealth that is
needed for radical socio-economic and political transformation of this country. (p. 10)

Since 2007, the present government of Ghana has implemented the new educational reform which requires a continuous 11-year universal and compulsory basic education. Currently, the 11 years of basic education include:

- Two years of kindergarten,
- Six years of primary and
- Three years of junior high school.

The emphasis in the new educational reform for the primary level is literacy, numeracy, problem-solving skills, creative arts, physical education, and Information and Communication and Technology (ICT). The emphasis in the junior high schools is also on vocational, technical, agricultural, and general education. Fewer subjects are taught at the primary level and the junior high school serves as an entry stage for a comprehensive senior high program. The goals of the new educational reform are outlined in the Educational Strategic Plan, which is the focus of the next section.

**Ghana’s Educational Strategic Plan**

The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) outlines Ghana’s educational policies, targets, and strategies for the period 2003 to 2015. The ESP was informed by various documents including Ghana’s New Partnerships for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS), Education Sector Policy, and Education For All (ESP, 2003). The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG), ending in 2015, also
informed the development of the ESP. The ESP is based on the philosophy and the mission of Ghana’s Ministry of Education, which seeks:

To provide relevant education to all Ghanaians at all levels to enable them to acquire skills that will assist them to develop their potential, to be productive, to facilitate poverty reduction and to promote socioeconomic growth and national development. (Government of Ghana, 2003, p. 7)

In order to fulfill the mission statement, the Ministry of Education has set four goals, which include basic education for all. The ESP provides the framework in the realization of the goals of the Ministry of Education, and the plan is guided by four main principles illustrated in table 5. They are equitable access to education, quality of education, educational management, and science, technology, and technical, vocational education and training (TVET). Table 5 also outlines the specific goals set for each of the four principles. The ESP has significance for girls’ education both directly and indirectly. For instance, one of the goal areas under the principle of equitable access is girls’ access to education. Also, quality and management in education has the potential for enhancing the overall educational experience for girls.
Table 5

_Ghana’s Educational Strategic Plan Focus Areas_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Equitable Access to Education</td>
<td>1. Pre-school education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Access and participation in education and training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Girls’ access to education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Quality of education</td>
<td>1. Quality of teaching and learning for enhanced pupil/student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Academic and research programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Health and environment in schools and institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Prevention and management of HIV/AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Educational Management</td>
<td>1. Educational planning and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Science and technology education and training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ESP also outlines the strategic framework through which the four focused areas would be realized. Each of the four areas is further broken down to policy goals. Each of the policy goals shows indicative targets and possible strategies to realize it (Ministry of Education, 2002). Girls’ education is one of the policy goals, “to provide girls with equal opportunities to access the full cycle of education” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 23).

The ESP explicitly states the four policy objectives in relation to girls’ education:

1. Promote gender equity in enrollment and retention.
2. Prioritize female education at all levels, including technical and vocational education.
3. Promote the recruitment and deployment of female teachers.
4. Strengthen the girls’ education unit including Regional/District Girls Education Teams.

It also addresses issues of management, implementation, monitoring, and funding of the educational strategies. To achieve the goals for girls’ education and the overall educational goals, the government has adopted a sector wide approach (SWAp). SWAp is defined as “a holistic approach to sector development, a process that includes the sector, the stakeholders and the beneficiaries in their entirety” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 34). The Ministry of Education is charged with the overall management of the ESP.

Monitoring the implementation of the plan, targets, and progress of the indicators. The monitoring system also seeks to provide a comprehensive evaluation framework, which will yield timely, relevant, and evidence-based information for decision-making.
However, the Ministry of Education collaborates with other stakeholders in the implementation of the strategic plan. These stakeholders include private sector, nongovernmental organizations, and community-based organizations: School Management Committees, Parent Teachers Associations, local governments, representative of regions and districts, and development partners.

The last chapter of the ESP addresses the financial framework through which the goals set for education will be met. The government of Ghana is the main financier of the provision of education. The government, on average, contributes 91% of the annual cost of education and a large percentage of the government’s contribution goes into salaries (Ministry of Education, 2002). Other sources of educational funding includes: District Assembly Common Fund, the GETfund, the Scholarship Secretariat, and monies from the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. In 2000 and 2001, the government spent 973 and 1,300 billion cedis, respectively, on education, representing 94.2% and 91.5%. The remainder is provided through donor support.

The Ministry of Education has also been given the mandate to periodically review the ESP. The ESP states that “the purpose of the review process is to ensure that there are effective returns on the investment being made in the education sector and that the intended beneficiaries, students, children, parents and all other stakeholders, are indeed benefiting” (MOE & S, 2002, p. 41). The ESP continues to shape and influence girls’ education in Ghana. The next section highlights the state of girls’ education in Ghana after several years of effort.
Current State of Girls’ Education in Ghana

Since independence, Ghana has shown concern and commitment to girls’ education by signing international documents and also developing national legal frameworks to promote girls’ education. These include the Education Act of 1961 and 1990, the World Conference on Education For All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, and Ghana’s 1992 Constitution. *A National Vision for Girls’ Education in Ghana and a Framework for action: Charting the way forward*, provides the framework to understand girls’ education. The national vision document examines the regional disparities of girls’ education. The vision for girls’ education in Ghana states:

All Ghana’s girl-children-- and their brothers-- are healthy, attend safe, welcoming schools, are well-taught by qualified teachers who understand their needs, achieve according to their potential, graduate and become productive and contributing members of our nurturing society. (Girls’ Education Unit, 2002, p. 15)

In addition to the national framework, girls’ education has been influenced by the Educational Strategic Plan (ESP), the Education For All, and also the United Nations Millennium goals. Out of the eight Millennium goals two pertain directly to primary education and gender equality: to achieve universal primary education and to promote gender equality and empower women. As a follow up to the Millennium goals, targets were, as illustrated by Table 6, to be reached by 2015.
Table 6

*The Millennium Goals and Targets in Relation to Girls’ Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Target 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve universal primary education</td>
<td>Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal 3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Target 4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote gender equality and empower women</td>
<td>Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education not later by 2015.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (2005)

The government of Ghana recognizes that girls’ education is influenced by multiple but interrelated factors. Therefore, over the years different strategies have been implemented to promote girls’ education by the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, district assemblies, and civil society organizations.

The government of Ghana has decentralized the delivery of education by region and by district. Each of the 110 districts within the 10 regions has a District Education Office, responsible for the implementation of educational strategies within the districts and also for the allocation of budgets across the district schools. In addition, to that the office is incharge of the day-to-day supervision and inspection of schools. Each regional and district office is supposed to have a Girls’ Education Officer, who coordinates activities related to improving access for girls at that level (Girls’ Education Unit, 2000).
There are also increased sources of funding to support education. For instance, in addition to government funding (through sector allocations and the earmarked 2.5% Value Added Tax), alternative sources of funding (such as the Otumfu Eminent Fund, the Northern Education Trust Fund), and NGOs have supported educational initiatives (Ghana Government, 2003). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department for International Development (DfID), the European Union (EU), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA), the United Nation’s Children Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank have all played significant roles in promoting girls’ education. Recently, the government of Ghana (2003), under the “Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy”, has introduced school feeding programs in primary schools. The feeding program is now being piloted in some selected schools but the plan hopes to extend the program to all public schools in Ghana.

Efforts at providing girls’ education in Ghana have yielded mixed results. Enrollment of girls has significantly increased at all levels, but Ghana has not been able to achieve the primary Education For All (EFA) goals. Table 7 illustrates the percentage of national enrollment at primary, JSS, and SSS levels by sex. Comparing 1994/95 with 2000/01, it is evident that girls’ enrollment at all levels of education has increased over the years. However, it is also clear that girls drop out more than boys at all three levels of education. It is important to mention that girls’ enrollment may differ from region to region and from district to district. For example, in the northern region, the disparity
between girls’ and boys’ enrollment is wider than many regions (Girls’ Education Unit, 2002). Also, there is a significant difference between girls’ and boys’ in many rural areas.

Table 7

Percentage Enrollment at Primary, JSS, and SSS Levels by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>JSS</th>
<th>SSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994/95</td>
<td>46.10</td>
<td>53.80</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995/96</td>
<td>46.20</td>
<td>53.70</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996/97</td>
<td>46.30</td>
<td>53.30</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997/98</td>
<td>46.70</td>
<td>53.30</td>
<td>44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999/00</td>
<td>46.90</td>
<td>53.10</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>47.20</td>
<td>52.80</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education & Sports, SRIMPR Division

The other areas in which progress has been made in girls’ education are retention, performance, and interest in courses traditionally dominated by males. Several factors have contributed to the progress made in girls’ education in Ghana. These include the establishment of the Girls’ Education Unit (GEU) in 1997, the introduction of the free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) program in 1992, awareness created through campaigns, and improvement in infrastructure. The primary goals of GEU are to increase the enrollment, retention, achievement of girls, and the governments’ commitment to the Millennium goals.
Furthermore, the dramatic increase in the literacy rate of women in Ghana has served as motivation for many girls. Educated mothers, serving as role models, have gained access to well-paying jobs, therefore increasing their ability to provide for their families. In addition, several schools now have girls’ clubs which are supported by Girls’ Education Coordinators and teachers. Other efforts include Girls’ Education Week celebration, and community participation. Heads of schools are also required to monitor enrollment, attendance, retention, and achievement of girls. Together, all these initiatives have provided a supportive system to keep girls in school.

Unfortunately, recent statistics by the Ministry of Education reveal that gender disparity in education still persists in Ghana. In 2005, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for boys and girls was 86.2% and 80.3% respectively. This means Ghana has not achieved the MDG goal of primary education for all. With its rate of growth, it is feared that Ghana may miss out if steps are not taken to improve the situation. Factors influencing girls’ education and the theoretical framework, which helps to explain this phenomenon, are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The main objective of this study is to understand girls’ educational experiences from the perspective and in the voices of girls, parents, community leaders, teachers, and education officers in the Akuapim South District, Ghana. The study specifically explores the factors influencing girls’ education in the district. This chapter addresses two pivotal and fundamental issues, pertinent to the objectives of the study: literature review and theoretical framework. The literature review section draws from previous scholarly work, various institutional reports, dissertations, and academic journals to understand girls’ educational experiences in developing countries, particularly Ghana. The literature review is organized into five main thematic areas:

- Gender in education
- Factors influencing girls’ education in Africa and Ghana
- Importance of girls’ education in Africa and Ghana
- Strategies to promote girls’ education
- Challenges to promoting girls’ education in Africa and Ghana

These themes were selected because they are consistent with the research questions set up for this study. It is imperative for any discussion on girls’ education to begin with the issue of gender in education. In many ways, gender in education provides the foundation in explaining the disparity between men and women in education and other spheres of life. Also, factors influencing girls’ education help to
explain the gender gap in education. Sufficient literature and studies provide evidence to support the importance of girls’ education to countries. However, Ghana, like many other developing countries, has not, unfortunately, been able to achieve quality education for all. Based on this evidence, it is necessary that we continue to seek ways to promote girls’ education. Being aware of best practices elsewhere is helpful in not making same mistakes. The final theme, the challenges in promoting girls’ education, explains why Ghana and other developing countries have been predicted to fail to achieve education for all by 2015, if drastic measures are not taken now.

**Gender in Education**

Inequalities in educational outcomes have been examined from different perspectives. There has been a persistent disparity between the rich and the poor, and between the rural and urban population. Gender analysis at all levels of educational outcomes reveals a significant level of inequality between women and men, which may be covert or overt (Hyde, 1993; Smock, 1981; Unterhalter, 2008). Although progress has been made in many countries, women continue to face various forms of challenges in education. Many girls come to school with multiple identities related to gender, religion, economic status, age, and geographical location, which impact their overall educational experience. These factors together combine as a strong force that affects girls’ enrollment, retention, achievement, and performance. For the purposes of this study I have singled out gender as a focus of discussion and as a variable for analysis.

All societies maintain a sex differential between males and females, and this dichotomy has a powerful effect on everyday life. However, what is considered to be the
appropriate behavior and activity for males or females differs significantly from one society to another (Francis, 2006; Delphy & Leonard, 1992). Francis (2006) indicates that there are two main perspectives about the concept of gender: idea of innate differences, which views males and females to be naturally different, and idea that the gender expressions are social constructions. This latter view is also shared by social learning theorists who explain that gender identity is learned through social institutions such as the family, school, and mass media.

These two ideological positions are intertwined in political standpoints. Francis (2006) suggests that while Western feminists tend to support the social constructionist perspective of gender, many conservatives and men’s movements are more inclined toward the biological difference explanation of gender (Salih & Butler, 2008).

Anderson-Levitt et al (1998), writing on gender and education, contend that analysis of girls’ educational experience should be guided by two main fundamental principles. First, the differences between boys’ and girls’ educational experience are not attributable to innate biological differences. Second, they argue that several participants such as teachers, parents, and boys, as well as girls themselves, are involved in the social construction of gender (Anderson-Levitt et al, 1998). While the two schools of thought provide convincing arguments about gender as an innate difference as well as gender as a social construction, this study examines gender from the perspective of the latter. It is irrefutable to argue that gender behavior is to some extent socially constructed, “given that these behaviors, and those assigned appropriate to one gender or the other, vary between cultures and historic periods” (Francis, 2006; p. 11). Thus, the behaviors
assigned to different genders are neither stagnant overtime nor the same across cultures. In a study to reduce school failure in Ghana, Godwyll (2008) found no significant difference between the abilities of boys and girls in school. He added that there are no overt policies discriminating against girls but there are several factors that could inhibit girls’ education. The socially assigned roles of males and females, coupled with certain cultural practices, have resulted in different forms of inequality between males and females. The gender differentials often put women at a disadvantage in terms of their access to resources, participation in the democratic process, access to economic opportunities, and their voices being heard. The overall lack of resources in developing countries, poor infrastructure, and substandard quality of life affect many citizens. However, owing to social inequalities and hierarchies, these factors affect the poor, women, rural population, and other disadvantaged groups more than the relatively privileged (Ramanchandran, 2002).

The concept of gender in education has been used in a variety of ways to assess patterns of educational provision, to examine factors contributing to gender inequality in educational attainment and outcomes, and to evaluate the relationship between schooling and educational mobility and incomes (Smock, 1981). In this study, gender inequality in education will be used in a relatively narrow sense to refer to girls’ access to formal education, attrition or completion rates, the nature of programs targeting girls’ education, and, overall, girls’ educational experience. When educational statistics are compared by sex in Ghana, one finds a disparity between males and females in many instances. Also, girls’ educational experiences tend to be different from boys. It has been documented
that, besides the huge number of children who are already out of school, 150 million children currently enrolled in school worldwide will drop out before completing primary school; sadly, 100 million of these children are girls (Herz & Sperling, 2004). The World Bank (2002) has also noted that only 36 of the 155 developing countries have achieved 100% primary school completion rates. In the Gender Achievement and Prospects in Education report by UNICEF (2005), of the 24 countries in West Africa only 5, including Ghana, were predicted to achieve gender parity in primary education by 2005, which included Ghana. Unfortunately, Ghana failed to achieve the goal of primary education for all in 2005. Currently, Ghana is even behind in achieving education for all by 2015 if nothing is done to boost the rate of growth.

**Approaches to Gender in Education**

There have been several attempts to conceptualize gender in education, which is significant in finding appropriate remedial action to resolve the phenomenon of gender inequality (Unterhalter, 2008). Three approaches and perspectives that have informed gender in education are needs, rights, and capabilities approaches. In “Global Values and Gender Equality in Education: Needs, Rights, and Capabilities”, Unterhalter (2008) delineates how needs, rights, and capabilities, as values, inform governments, multilateral institutions, and civil societies in their effort to end gender inequality. In an earlier study, Unterhalter (2006) suggests that these approaches were popular in different time periods

1. the Women In Development (WID) period from the 1970s,

2. the Gender And Development (GAD) period,

3. the Post-structuralism period from the 1990s, and
4. the Human Development period from the 1990s to the present.

For the purposes of this study the needs, rights, and capabilities approaches are discussed with reference to the four periods outlined by Unterhalter (2006).

First, the needs approach is the view that education is a basic need and that gender equality entails an opportunity for all women to have access to this basic need. Theorists holding this view emphasized that there is a normative basis to needs (Unterhalter, 2008). They argue that provision of needs is the basis for human to flourish and “failure to ensure a certain level of humans flourishing---meeting basic needs ---would constitute harm” (Unterhalter, 2008, p. 25). Provision of education is seen as one of the basic needs. Similarly, the WID period stresses the need to include women in development planning as a way of improving efficiency. The basic need perspective influenced many development initiatives such as the fCUBE. Unterhalter (2008) indicates that “in monitoring education systems the commodity of a set number of years of schooling came to stand for the notion that basic learning needs had been met” (p. 26). The implication was that organizations began to measure gender equality by comparing enrollment figures between boys and girls.

The limitation to the basic need approach is that it does not address the deeper issues of gender inequality in education, such as quality of education, performance, retention, and girls’ overall educational experience. According to Unterhalter (2006), this perspective does not “necessarily [challenge] the multiple sources of women’s subordination” (p. 98). Unfortunately, this and other perspectives have considerably influenced the policies aimed at improving girls’ education. Interestingly, while girls’
enrollment has improved in many developing countries, the fundamental challenges to girls’ education still persist. The way the needs and the WID approaches have shaped policies is that efforts to improve access through free education, food programs, and development of infrastructure and others have been emphasized. Although all these are critical to girls’ education, the weaknesses in the content of what girls’ learn and the quality of education has not been adequately addressed (Unterhalter, 2006).

Second, the rights approach assumes that access to education is a basic right for all; therefore, governments are to ensure that no child is denied the right to be educated. The rights approach is associated with the use of international and national legal documents to advocate for women’s right to education. Similarly, GAD theorists argue that gender equality is only achieved through the removal of the structures, discriminatory laws, labor market practices, the exclusion of women from public and private participation, and inequitable distribution of resources (Unterhalter, 2006). This is achieved through national and international legal frameworks which seek to promote women’s well-being. Some of the legal documents that have been used include the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), Convention on the Rights of Children (1989), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979). In Ghana, for instance, the basis of providing free education is enshrined in the 1992 national constitution. In terms of education for girls, these international legal frameworks have been criticized for the clauses that exempt certain actions on the basis of religion, culture, marriage, inheritance, and work (Stamatopoulou, 1995; Unterhalter, 2008). The Education for All goal only focuses on primary education,
which means that girls who plan to pursue higher education need to find alternative sources of funding. Although the CEDAW seeks to protect the rights of women it does not adequately address women’s rights to education (Friedman, 1995; Unterhalter, 2008). According to Takyi-Amoako (2008), “there is the danger that efforts to achieve gender parity in basic education will be undermined and will not yield the outcomes that will reduce poverty if post-basic education is neglected, for the latter is dynamically linked to the former” (p. 205).

The capability approach toward gender equality was proposed as a result of the limitations found in the basic need and the rights approaches. While WID addresses the issue of human capital, the capability approach is based on the understanding of human capabilities (Unterhalter, 2006). The capability approach was proposed by Amartya Sen in his popular book, *Development as Freedom*. Sen (1993) defines capability as “a person’s ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; [it also] represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be” (p. 30). In terms of gender equality in education, capability, according to Unterhalter (2008), entails considering the interplay of obligations between individuals, states and civil society in order to secure the freedoms to expand a capability set and give all women and men equal conditions to reflect on and achieve dimensions of learning, education and schooling they have reasons to value. (p. 30)

The capability approach acknowledges the deeper issues of gender which the basic needs and the rights approaches fail to address. Thus, equal enrollment between boys and girls does not address gender differentials in the choice of courses,
performance, retention, and job opportunities. Unterhalter (2006) contends that while “these may entail ensuring that each person acquires a certain level of educational attainment...they undoubtedly entail ensuring the freedoms that allow valued outcomes to be articulated and achieved” (p. 104). Like the other approaches, the capability approach has been criticized for failing to recognize group-based social mobilization (Stewart, 2005; Unterhalter, 2006).

The broader issues of gender have to do with power relations and privilege in both the public and private arenas. Therefore, to understand girls’ education and also to address issues confronting girls, it is important to put these three approaches into proper perspective. While improvement in girls’ enrollment is significant, it is not sufficient to explain girls’ educational experience. Since girls’ education continues to be of concern in many developing countries, further studies on the approaches to end gender inequality in education are needed. Understanding the factors affecting girls’ education will provide direction in studies that seek to end gender inequality. The next section examines the multiple factors influencing girls’ education in Ghana.

**Factors Influencing Girls’ Education in Africa and Ghana**

The significance of this sub-section is that understanding the factors contributing to gender inequality in education is critical in confronting the current situation of girls’ education in Ghana. The factors are categorized under: economic, cultural, social, home-based, community-based, and school-based factors. It is these factors that influence the decision about girls staying in school or dropping out. It is important to mention that
factors discussed here are not peculiar to Ghana or Sub-Saharan Africa but could also be found in other regions where gender inequality in education is pervasive.

**Economic Factors**

Economic factors have been used to explain gender inequality in education. The trend of inequality in education is related to the rising level of poverty at the household and the state levels (Gachukia, 2004). At the household level, poverty has the potential for reducing the capacity of families to provide for the basic needs of their children. For poor homes, girls going to school are a trade-off, for they are then unable to work to help support the family. Having a girl go to school, sometime, means losing the income, this could have been earned from asking girls to engage in economic activities. A girl may be asked to work on the farm, at the market, or sell to directly support the family. In Ghana several girls go to school and also work after school to support their families. Although this may not affect enrollment in all circumstances, work after school affects the hours girls have to study and do their homework. Economic inequality in Ghana affects both boys’ and girls’ education. However, in situations of scarce resources, girls are the most affected (Onsomu, Kosimbei & Ngware, 2006). According to Hyde (1993), “Girls who come from socio-economically advantaged families are much more likely to enter and remain in secondary school than are girls from disadvantaged families” (p. 112). In *What Works in Girls’ Education: Evidence and Policies from the Developing World*, Hertz and Sperling (2004) provide a synthesis of factors influencing girls’ education and suggest some best practices for combating gender inequality in education. They indicate that cost of education might influence the household decision of sending a child to school-direct
fees (tuition), indirect fees (Parent-Teacher Association fees), indirect cost 
(transportation, clothing, safety) and opportunity cost (chore time, contribution to family 
income). While primary education is said to be free and compulsory in Ghana, parents are 
still required to pay extra charges which are often higher than the free tuition provided by 
the government. The charges include books, stationery, exams fees, uniforms, 
contributions to building funds, levies imposed by the school management committees, 
extra classes, and travel costs (Global Campaign for Education, 2005; Stromquist, 2001). 
According to Hertz and Sperling (2004), “In Uganda, Bangladesh, Zambia, and Nepal, 
education spending ranked on average as the second or third major household 
expenditure, in a survey of poor households” (p. 42).

Also, at the national level several, scholars have cited a number of economic 
reasons to explain Ghana’s inability to provide quality education for all (Hyde, 1993; 
Stromquist, 2001). Among the reasons cited are the implementation of structural 
adjustment programs (SAP) that are often accompanied by the policy of cost sharing, 
poor economic performance by many developing countries, and reduction in foreign 
assistance, and the increase in debt servicing (Gachukia, 2004). Several governments 
have cut down on the provision of social services to be able to service their debts and also 
governments are currently spending 40% or more of their revenue on debt servicing” 
(p.3). This means that less money is at the disposal of governments to fulfill the need for 
free education for all. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) have significantly affected 
many countries and how much they invest in education. Stromquist (1999) indicates a
strong association between SAP measures and reductions in national educational budgets. They state: “African countries without SAPs had a 30% decrease in access to first grade compared with countries without SAPs” (Stromquist, 1999, p. 21).

Towards Gender Parity in Primary Education in Ghana, a report submitted by the Girls’ Education Unit (2006), revealed that resource allocation for primary education has been gradually dropping from 39.7% in 2003 to 30.7% in 2005. The report added that primary education received 39.4% of the total education sector allocation. Donor funds also supplement the government efforts towards primary education. However, the funding for primary education, especially girls’ education, is not sufficient when assessing the magnitude of the problem. The lack of funding for education has led to poor infrastructure, lower-quality public education, and inadequate salaries.

Cultural Factors

Another factor limiting girls’ education in Ghana and other developing countries is the social and cultural factors. Although several studies confirm the positive relationship between a country’s GNP and the government’s investment in education, sociocultural factors may prevent girls from reaping the full benefit of a good investment in education (Stromquist, 1999). The sociocultural factors influencing girls’ education include families’ attitude toward girls’ education, social class, and parents’ education, selective education decision by family, child labor, marriage, and childbearing practices. Although all these factors may not be present in all situations, they may combine as a strong force that limits girls from benefiting from education. A study in Ghana revealed
that female students at the secondary level in Ghana were disproportionately drawn from educated families compared with male secondary school students (Hyde, 1993).

Early marriage practices, place of residence, and selective education have been found to be common factors contributing to girls’ lack of access to education. In some countries, certain cultural practices encourage early marriage may prevent women from pursuing their educational career because of the increased responsibilities that come with marriage. Hyde (1993) contends: “Although the enrollment of married students is not unheard of, pregnancy and childbirth usually ends a school career” (p.116). Another study done by Fox (1999) in Papua New Guinea revealed that parents with less than a year or two of schooling tended to show a general lack of interest in formal education.

Cultures in many developing countries have often been seen as a hindrance to social development. Many of the studies conducted about culture and education highlight the ways that culture negatively affects girls’ education. Yet, there are some cultural practices that promote girls’ education. In Ghana, the extended family system plays an important role in the education of children. In Ghana, it is common to find school children who live with family members or are financially supported by family members. Girls who have been supported by family members are more likely to stay in school and continue their education. Family systems in Ghana serve as a social capital which, when available, can help enhance children’s educational experience.

**Home-Based Factors**

The type of home and family children live influences the children’s educational experiences. Girls who grow up in poor homes, with only one parent, and with guardians
other than their own parents, are more likely drop out of school. This is because, lack of financial support to help the girls continue their education. Also, parents’ relationship with their daughters, (interest, support, and involvement) positively impact girls’ education. In a study in Kenya, it was found that schools that had children from homes with good-quality housing, sufficient possessions, and better-educated parents were estimated to perform better than children from poor homes, with poor housing, and less educated parents (Onsomu et al, 2006).

In addition, in many poor homes, girls are needed to do house chores or work outside the home to supplement the insufficient family income. A study in rural India reported that poor girls are expected to clean the house, wash clothes and utensils, fetch water before school, collect firewood, cook the evening meals, look after young siblings, and feed cattle (Global Campaign for Education, 2005). Furthermore, parents’ perception about girls’ education influences the support, investment, and time they put into their daughters’ education. Parents’ low expectation of girls is influenced by general discrimination in socioeconomic domains of the society. The returns to the family for a girl’s education are often lower than a boy’s; therefore, it makes more sense for parents to invest in boys’ education than in the education of girls.

The proximity of school to home is also a big challenge confronting girls’ education in many developing countries. Fearing for the safety of their children, especially girls, mothers may prevent them from going to school. There is empirical evidence suggesting that provision of infrastructure and proximity to school to the home contribute to the increase in girls’ enrollment. For example, in Egypt constructing, new
schools in rural areas in the 1980s increased girls enrollment by 60% while rural boys’ enrollments increased by only 19% (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Rugh, 2000). In another study in Malaysia, it was found that the absence of a secondary school in the community lowers the probability of girls’ attendance by 17% and boys’ by 13% (World Bank 2001, Hertz & Sperling, 2004).

**School-Based Factors**

The school environment in general affects girls’ educational experience. The environment encompasses sufficient school supplies, school facilities, gender roles for girls in the school, and teachers’ attitudes toward girls. Children who had enough learning materials were estimated to achieve better than those who hardly have any learning materials. Also, children who had their own working places in class had better achievements than children who shared working places or had no working places at all. Also, many schools in Ghana have poor and inadequate toilet facilities for girls. The pit latrines used by schools are dirty, poorly serviced, and maintained, lack the privacy girls need, especially during their menses. Girls feel embarrassed to use these toilets (Elimu Yetu Coalition, 2005). For instance, a Pakistani study found that parents require latrine facilities for girls. The study found that if parents are to enroll children, they expect a school to be solidly built with a boundary wall and have a water pump and latrine (Herz & Sperling, 2004; World Bank, 1996). In another study of 30 African countries findings noted girls in a school without a latrine or a place of privacy were more likely to skip school when they had their menses (FAWE, 2001; Herz & Sperling, 2004). The Global Campaign for Education (2005) states that “failure to provide adequate physical facilities,
such as toilets and running water, are inconvenience for boys, but a disaster for girls” (p. 41).

In addition, several studies have revealed that teachers’ attitudes, behavior, and teaching practices have significant implications for female persistence and academic performance (Casely-Hayford, 2008; Chimombo, 1999; Chimombo, 2005). If teachers pay more attention to boys or embarrass students in front of the class, then girls become less motivated to participate in class activities. Rose and Tembon (1999) found that teachers’ low expectations of girls, compared with boys, contribute to the amount of attention teachers pay to girls in the classrooms. A study in Nigeria showed that interaction of teachers and students were more positive towards boys than girls, especially in the upper primary. Also, teachers were found to spend more time helping boys than girls (Global Campaign for Education, 2005; Rugh, 2000). In another study in India, teachers were found to routinely use biased language, which reinforced discrimination based on class, caste, and gender (Global Campaign for Education, 2005; Ramachandran, 2004). Rose and Tembon (1999) suggest that as long as women are perceived, or perceive themselves, as subordinates, they will be denied the opportunity to an equal education.

Furthermore, girls do not work at home only; they also work around the school and are used by teachers to run errands, fetch water, and buy food. Gender roles are perpetuated in schools by the different roles teachers assign to girls and boys. If girls spend the greater part of their day taking care of other people’s business, they will have less time for themselves and invariably their academic endeavors.
Again, female teachers serve as encouragement and role models to female students; however, in many countries there is a disproportionate number of female teachers. In addition to that, several books used in many developing countries still have materials that perpetuate sex roles. As Hyde (1993) pointed out, although there is no available study to confirm the impact of these images on the choices made by women, they have the potential for shaping the reality of the female student. Hyde (1993) states: “The presence of female teachers in schools and classrooms is often held to be a strategy for countering these images” (p. 123). Therefore, the problem is exacerbated by the absence of female teachers who will serve as role models and counselors for female students.

Smock (1981) suggests that “the influence of European educational models is apparent in Ghana and Kenya in the conspicuous absence of females from discussions of agricultural production, society at large, and history” (p. 57). Until recently, the educational system of many developing countries was the legacy of the colonizers. Little was done to change the system of education for many developing countries after their independence. Therefore, educational programs and their accompanying textbooks continue to reflect the ideology of European colonizers. Although most these European countries that influenced education in the developing world have made huge changes and progress toward gender equity in education, former colonial countries continue to adhere to outdated curricula and programs. The result in Ghanaian is the absence of women in Ghanaian history, economy, society, and politics. Furthermore, females are
overrepresented in humanities and arts, they are underrepresented in the area of science, engineering, and other related fields (Smock, 1981).

Girls’ educational challenges do not end when they make it to the school. They continue to face sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of intimidation from both their teachers and male students. A study by Elimu Yetu Coalition (2005) in Kenya indicates that teachers seek sexual favors from girls in the school and are sometimes in competition with male students. Unfortunately, girls’ abuses are either under-reported and abuses that are reported are often met with silence or inaction on the part of local and national authorities (Global Campaign for Education, 2005).

**Geographical Location (Rural and Urban Divide)**

In Ghana there is high level of income inequality between the rural and the urban population. Also, many rural communities lack social infrastructure, including high-quality schools. Studies in Ghana have found poverty to be predominant in rural areas. The lack of resources and quality schools in the rural areas impact girls’ education considerably. Lack of reliable sources of potable water and fire for cooking means girls have to spend more time fetching water and preparing food. Also, the turnover rate for teachers in the rural areas is higher than teachers in the urban areas. Teachers, posted to these areas transfer to the urban areas after a while, especially those with families. In a study conducted in Ghana about teacher’s experiences in poor rural areas, Casely-Hayford (2008) found that there are no courses in teacher training or at the university that better orient teachers about teaching in the rural areas. Therefore, most of the teachers posted to the rural areas serve their two-year posting and leave immediately afterwards. It
is common in Ghana to find teachers who work in the rural community keeping two
homes or commuting every day from the city to the village. In the absence of a reliable
transportation system, it is evident that teachers will often be late to school or not show
up at all.

In addition, the rate of poverty in rural areas makes it difficult for parents to
provide all the school supplies for their children. The lack of school supplies makes it
difficult for teachers to engage their pupils. The result of this is the poor performance,
low enrollment, and low retention.

The lack of social amenities, cultural practices, and increase in poverty in the
rural areas push many girls to migrate to the city to improve the quality of life for
themselves and their families. According to Stromquist (2001), “in some cases, this is
accomplished by taking menial jobs, in which case grades are of relative unimportance.
In fewer cases, women are forced to engage in prostitution, which, again, has no
particular educational correlate” (p. 45). In Ghana, girls migrate from the rural areas,
especially from the northern region, to the city to seek greener pastures. These girls
become vulnerable in the street without an education, employable skills, and good
housing.

**Importance of Girls’ Education in Africa and Ghana**

Several studies have documented the positive outcome in investing in girls’
contends that investing in girls’ education yields higher returns than all other
development investments. It yields both private and social benefits that accrue to
individuals, families, and society at large. Many scholars have indicated several benefits of girls’ education in health, economic, environmental gains, moral, and social benefits (Hertz & Sperling, 2004).

First, there are moral reasons that justify the call for education for all and gender equality in the world. Oxfam (2005), in Beyond Access for Girls and Boys: Education and Gender Equality series states that “education is a right. Girls who are not in school and women who are illiterate are being denied their right to an education” (p. 1). Equal rights of men and women in access to resources and opportunities are enshrined in several international legal frameworks. The preamble to the UN Charter of 1945 includes the need “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person”. The recent attempt of world bodies to reiterate their commitment to ending gender inequality was the unveiling of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) supported by 189 governments in 2000 (UNDP, 2005). Of the eight MDG, two are directly related to gender inequality. It is argued that for the world to continue to have confidence in the global community and international bodies, achieving the MDGs, therefore become a test. The Human Development Report (2005) commenting on the importance of the MDG achievement in 2015, referred to a speech Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The report concluded:

The MDGs can also be thought of as a promissory note. Written by 189 governments to the world’s poor people that note falls due in 10 years time. Without an investment of political will and financial capital today, it too will come back marked “insufficient funds.” Beyond the immediate human costs,
a default on the scale in prospect will have implications for the credibility of the governments that made the pledge and on the future of international cooperation to resolve global problems. (p. 39)

Several studies have also attempted to put cost on failure to achieve the MDG by 2015. A report by Save the Children indicates that, more than 1 million childhood deaths would have been prevented if gender parity as stated in the MDG was achieved by 2005. Already several countries are off track in achieving the MDG by 2015 if nothing is done to change the current trends. UNDP (2005) estimates that “By 2015, approximately 19 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa will still be out of school if current trends continue. Thus, Africa’s share of the global out of school population will have increased to 40%” (p. 3).

Furthermore, girls’ education has many economic benefits. Primary and secondary education increases women chances of entering into the formal labor force and thereby likely increasing their economic earnings. World Bank studies have concluded that an extra year of education beyond the average boosts girls’ eventual wages by 10% to 20% (World Bank, 2002). A recent cross-country study found returns to primary education averaging 5% to 15 % for boys and slightly higher for girls (Hertz & Sperling, 2004; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2002).

Several studies have shown that girls’ education significantly reduces child mortality rate, improves children’s health, advances family nutrition, prevents HIV/AIDS infection, and reduces fertility. Also, with the increase in female-headed homes in most developing countries, girls’ education provides a means for mothers to earn wages.
Winter and Macina (1999) suggest that women with a few years of education are more likely to seek pre-natal and post-natal care, which is critical for reducing child and maternal mortality. Studies in Sub-Saharan countries found education for girls to be related to the overall fertility rate among mothers. The argument here is that in some countries, girls’ education postpones marriage and, in addition, also educated women often prefer fewer children. Shabaya and Konadu-Agyemang (2004) state that “in most cases, educated women have the tendency to choose to have fewer children than their non-educated counterparts” (p. 398). Another study on Africa reveals that children of mothers with five years of primary education are 40% less likely to die before age 5 than children with uneducated mothers. Also, mothers in Africa and Asia with a basic education are 50% more likely to immunize their children (Sperling, 2005; Summers, 1994).

HIV/AIDS infection has become blight on the socioeconomic progress of Africa. Surprisingly, women have become more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. However, several studies have confirmed education as the most powerful tool in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. Oxfam (2005) asserts that there is a strong evidence that programs that promote gender equality in education contribute significantly to the reduction of HIV infection of vulnerable groups, especially women and girls. According to the Global Campaign Report (2005), a study in 2004 concluded that universal primary education has the potential to prevent 700,000 HIV cases per year. Another study in rural Uganda revealed that, in compared with young people with no education, those with some
secondary education were three times less likely to be infected with HIV while those with primary education were about half as likely to be HIV positive (Sperling, 2005).

Furthermore, studies have found a negative correlation between mothers’ education and child mortality, especially in developing countries. Educated mothers are more likely to engage in safe health practices, have enough resources to provide for their children and also encourage their children to go to school. For example, a study by Hill and King (1995) revealed that increasing girls’ enrollment in primary and secondary school by 10% is associated with an average decline in infant mortality of 4.1 and 5.6 deaths per 1,000 births, respectively.

Democratic involvement and civil society participation have become crucial in the sustenance and growth of democracy. True democracy requires the involvement of all to participate in dialogue and governance. Education is significant in building citizens’ capacity to participate in public debates and dialogue. Several researchers have concluded that educated women are more likely to be active in civil matters in their communities than are women without education (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyeman, 2004; USAID, 1999). If women represent half of the world’s population then anything that hinders them from participating in the democratic process is a hindrance to true democracy. Democracy cannot be said to have been achieved in any country if half of its people are deprived of their right to participate because of their lack of education. Democracy is about representation of interest groups; therefore, it is important that women are empowered through education to articulate their own needs and challenges. For women will understand their own issues better thereby well articulate their own interest in public
dialogue. Education will help women to understand their own issues better and thus be in a position to articulate and express themselves in public dialogue.

The benefits of female education both to women themselves and to the society as a whole, has been documented extensively. All things being equal, educated women have smaller families, have low child mortality rates, the surviving children live a healthier life, and are better educated. Also, educated women are more likely to enter into the labor market, thereby earning higher wages which is critical, especially for female-headed homes (Bellew & King, 1993).

**Strategies to Promote Girls’ Education**

The section on factors influencing girls’ education outlined some of the constraints explaining gender gaps in education in many developing countries. Notwithstanding these constraints, many countries have made significant progress in increasing girls’ enrollment, retention, performance, completion, and overall educational experience. This section explores some of the strategies that have been used to promote girls’ education. The section also examines some of the best practices from other developing countries and the progress being toward reaching the MDG by 2015. To achieve this goal, various organizations: government, communities, donors, and international institutions, have adopted various interventions at different levels to promote girls’ primary education. At the governmental level, girls’ education is overseen by the Ghana Education Service (GES), Regional and District Girls’ Education Offices (RDGEO), Science, Technology and Mathematics Education (STME), and Women in Technical Education (WITED). The civil society supports include by community-based organizations, national nonprofit
organizations, and international organizations. Examples include FAWE-Ghana, ActionAid, World Bank, the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), CENtre (for) COmmunity Studies, Action (and) Development (CENCOSAD), Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), OXFAM International, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The 2002 Impact Assessment of Girls’ Education Programme in Ghana, by Efua Southerland-Addy, was one of the interventions identified to address three main issues: enrollment, retention, and educational achievement. Among the interventions identified in Ghana were:

- Free Compulsory Basic Education (fCUBE)
- Introduction of text books user fee
- School mapping
- Formation of girls’ clubs
- Microcredit schemes
- Construction of classroom blocks
- Advocacy and sensitization of communities
- Scholarship schemes,
- Institution of girls’ schools
- Organization of science clinics
- Use of the double shift system
According to ISSER (2004), there are some government and civil society initiatives, such as the school feeding program and fCUBE. In spite of the numerous efforts toward achieving universal primary education, Ghana failed to achieve the Millennium Goal in 2005 and studies have shown that unless something is done now, Ghana may not be able to achieve primary education for all by 2015. Progress has been affected by low incomes, poorly motivated staff, lack of teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and, most recently, the threat of HIV/AIDS (ISSER, 2004). Southerland-Addy (2004) outlines some of the factors militating against girls’ education in Ghana, including poverty, lack of parental involvement, opportunity cost of sending girls to school, quality of education, distance, lack of girls-specific facilities, cultural practices, and inappropriate curriculum.

It is estimated that more than 115 million children of primary school age do not receive an elementary education and of this number, over 60% are girls. In addition to this, of the 100 million children who drop out of primary school before completing four years, two thirds are girls (Gachukia, 2004; UNICEF, 1999; UNICEF, 2007). Among the 155 countries that are expected to achieve universal primary education by 2015, only 37 have achieved this goal. Another 32 countries are said to be “on track” to reach universal primary education for all by 2015. However, it is estimated that 86 countries are at risk of not reaching the goal unless progress is accelerated (Bruns, Mingat, & Rakotomalala, 2003). Faced with the challenge of several developing countries that are at risk, “off track,” or “seriously off track,” we need to look at the best practices of countries that have been able to achieve the MDG of universal primary completion. What have these
countries done to achieve universal basic education for all? What do they have in common, and what can they teach the other developing countries lagging behind achieving the MDG of primary education for all by 2015? The exemplary countries include Botswana, Cape Verde, Gabon, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe (UNESCO, 2003). Uganda’s approach to promoting girls’ education was by making school affordable. In 1997 Uganda introduced free schooling at the primary level. With this initiative, primary enrollment nearly doubled from 3.4 million to 5.7 million children rose to 6.6 million in 1999 (UN Millennium Project, 2005). The total girls’ enrollment increased from 63% to 83%, while enrollment among the poorest fifth of girls rose from 46% to 82% (UN Millennium Project, 2005; World Bank, 2002).

In 1994, Bangladesh initiated a Female Secondary School Assistant Program, and girl’s enrollment more than doubled. The stipend covered tuition, books, uniforms, and transportation (Herz & Sperling, 2004; World Bank 2001). Under the program the criteria for eligibility includes maintaining a minimum of 75% attendance, obtaining a minimum of 45% in annual school exams, and remaining unmarried up to the Secondary School Certificate examination (SSCE) in year 10 (Raynor, 2008). In 2002, the program extended its activities to recruit more teachers and upgrade school infrastructure, and to make it much more-friendly to girls. The impact was an increase in girls’ enrollment, attendance, and school involvement and a proportional drop in percentages of early marriages of girls (Herz & Sperling, 2004; UN Millennium Project, 2005). Girls benefiting from the program rose to 2.25 million by 2004 (Raynor, 2008). Four main
interventions are being addressed concurrently: school affordability, provision of decent school facilities, making school more welcoming to girls, and proximity of schools to home. Raynor (2008) indicates that the increase in girls’ enrollment cannot solely be attributed to this program, still “it is one of many education initiatives in Bangladesh” (p. 87). Another issue with the program concerns reports of widespread corruption that is undermining the success of the program (Raynor, 2008).

Kenya’s approach to achieving universal primary education was done in different ways, through the introduction of free education, school-based health and feeding programs. In Kenya, since school fees were eliminated in 2003, 1.3 million students enrolled, for a total of 7.2 million students (Lacey, 2003; Herz & Sperling, 2004). In another study that evaluated a small program in Kenya, it was found that, uniforms, textbooks, and classroom construction to 7 of 14 poorly performing schools increased the completion rate by 15% after five years (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Kremer, Moulin & Namunyu, 2002). Furthermore, a randomized evaluation of a preschool feeding program in Kenya found the meals increased both school attendance and test scores. The evaluation found attendance was 30% higher in the 25 schools that offered a free breakfast compared with 25 control schools. Moreover, even though the provision of meals cut into instruction time, as long as the teachers were well trained, test scores still rose by 0.4 standard deviations compared with scores in control schools (Vermeersch & Kremer, 2004). Another randomized study in Kenya found that school-based health programs increased attendance. The program that provided twice-yearly school-based mass treatment with inexpensive deworming drugs found health and school attendance
rates increased (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Miguel & Kremer, 2004). Another successful program in Brazil is the National Bolsa Escola Programme. The program provides income subsidies to families with children in school on condition that beneficiaries will ensure their children attend school 90% of the time (Colclough, 2004). Colclough (2004) estimates that over 2 million children benefited from the program. The principle behind this program is that in contexts of extreme deprivation, free education alone may not necessarily address the issues that keep girls out of school. Comprehensive programs that recognize the complex nature of girls’ education tend to be more successful. Free tuition should be supplemented with scholarships, school-feeding programs, and cash transfers to families to cover the lost wage of a working child (Colclough, 2004).

**Challenges to Promoting Girls’ Education in Africa and Ghana**

The previous section highlighted some of the successful strategies that countries used in achieving universal primary education. I am by no means suggesting the transfer, infact, of these strategies to another context for implementation. Strategies to promote girls’ education must be context-specific and must be based on research findings of the specific country. Becoming aware of the challenges involved in these interventions is critical before any decision is made about their adoption. The choice of intervention in promoting girls’ education by governments, communities, and donors largely depends on the characteristics of a specific context, including the supply of schools, the quality of education, prevailing sociocultural norms, families’ incomes and productive activities, and women’s opportunities of entering into the formal labor market (Bellew & King, 1993). Multiple factors come together to explain why girls are not in school or are
dropping out; therefore, the adoption of interventions must take into consideration all the possible factors and their impact on girls’ education. The most successful programs have been those based on findings in a specific context. Even in the same country, regional disparities must be taken into consideration before specific interventions are used. Further studies will be necessary to address the effectiveness and the efficiency of each intervention. The six main issues related to girls’ educational interventions are examined under the following themes: *affordability, responsiveness, quality, sustainability, comprehensiveness, and effective monitoring.*

Girls’ lack of education is one of the problems in many developing countries with a known solution. Unfortunately, the high incidence of poverty makes it practically impossible to provide a decent, high-quality and continuous education, yet, several studies have concluded that making education free and affordable resulted in a dramatic increase in school enrollment, particularly for girls (Sperling, 2005; UN Millennium Project, 2005). For instance, in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania it is reported that when school fees were abolished there was a remarkable increase in enrollment: from 3.4 million to 5.7 million students in Uganda in 1996; from 5.9 million to 7.2 million in Kenya in 2003; and from 1.5 million to 3 million in Tanzania in 2002 (Sperling, 2005).

In Ghana and many developing countries, primary education is free but the hidden and indirect costs are enormous for both parents and the government. These indirect costs include fees for extra classes, PTA dues, and infrastructure, examination fees, and development fees. According to Anamuah-Mensah, Koomson, and Godwyll (1996), in Ghana households spend between 18 and 23% of their overall household income on
education at the primary and JSS levels in public schools. Both the direct and indirect cost for education, coupled with other factors, serve as a disincentive for parents to keep their children, especially girls, in school. To curtail the problem of affordability, some countries have implemented different strategies, including scholarship programs, provision of cash grants to poor families, school feeding programs, as well as take-home food rations (UN Millennium Project, 2005). Two key points have to be made here. First, making quality education affordable requires a huge investment from both national and international stakeholders. Second, making school affordable alone will not eliminate all the sociocultural factors hindering girls’ education. Teachers, families, and communities must also change the attitudes and perceptions about girls’ education in order to reap the benefits that come through free education.

It would be a disservice to girls to talk about education without a critical look at the quality of the education provided, particularly when we cannot be confident in the accuracy of statistics from many developing countries. Some of the statistics and the indicators of girls’ education do not tell the whole story about the quality of education programs (Tabachnick, & Beoku-Betts, 1998). Enrollment figures, therefore, are not adequate measures of progress in education so far as quality is concerned. It is the type of education girls are introduced to that considerably determines their future prospects and opportunities. Beoku-Betts (1998) suggests that using access, attainment, and accomplishment are better measures of educational outcome and patterns of gender disparity. He adds that “these indicators show the type of education girls will have once in the school system and what their future prospects might be, irrespective of enrollment
levels” (p. 159). Additionally, announcing new programs by governments are not always a good measure, especially when it comes to girls’ educational experience. Tabachnick and Beoku-Betts (1998), writing on the quality of school experience, note that for a holistic analysis of the quality of girls’ school experience, observation studies are needed to understand the covert and overt teacher-students’ interaction, students interactions with their peers and families. Unless the idea of quality guides girls’ education initiatives, programs will not be successful (Sperling, 2005).

Sustainability as a concept defies a common definition. In the context of this study, it means the ability to put a mechanism in place to ensure that the needs of the present generation as well as those future generations are met. Related to the issue of sustainability is the issue of investment in education. Many girls’ education programs have been supported by governments and external funds, which, when discontinued, often lead to the collapse of programs. While improvement in education is a top priority for many governments in developing countries, the investment and expenditure accompanying it fluctuates. Since many educational programs do not yield immediate results, it is critical for resources to be available for a period of time. Educational spending in many African countries continues to decline or stay the same in the face of increases in the demand for basic education (Beoku-Betts, 1998). While overall educational spending in Ghana increased over the years, in actuality, the increase was not adequate to match the increase in the demand of education. The trend of educational spending in Ghana and other developing countries has largely been shaped by poor economic performance and structural adjustment problems (Beoku-Betts, 1998).
Several studies have attempted to estimate the financial cost of achieving gender equality in education in the world. It is estimated that to achieve gender equality in primary education through universal enrollment in Sub-Saharan Africa alone will require an increase in public spending to about 30% annually (UN Millennium Project, 2005; World Bank, 2001). This will require developing countries to allocate more resources towards the achievement of gender equality. UNESCO (2003) states that: “Half the countries with data were spending less than 3.4 percent of national income on education in 2000—lower than the 4.1 percent average for developing countries” (p. 4). Also, several developing countries continue to spend a substantial amount of the earnings on debt servicing.

Another way of mobilizing funds for gender equality projects is through foreign aid. However, overall, bilateral and multilateral assistance to education fell between 1998 and 2001 in the some developing countries (EFA, 2003/2004). The current estimate of donor contribution to primary education is quoted as $1.4 billion which many development practitioners believe is inadequate (Herz & Sperling, 2004; Sperling, 2003). Similarly, Bruns et al (2003) estimated that $2.5 billion was needed every year by 48 low-income countries to provide high-quality education for all by 2015. Unfortunately, this amount is almost three times the current aid for primary education to these low-income countries. Therefore, these financial challenges may hinder the realization of the numerous benefits that could come out of the implementation of these interventions. The commitment of both internal and external stakeholders in girls’ education is essential in determining whether girls’ are enrolled in school, stay to completion, and continue after
primary education (Bruns et al, 2003). I acknowledge financial resources are not the only missing piece in gender equality in the world. However, we cannot underestimate the critical role funds serve as a catalyst to promote girls’ education.

Also, the factors influencing girls’ education are complex and interrelated; therefore, it is necessary that efforts to help girls’ education to be comprehensive. Programs seeking to increase girls’ enrollment may not necessarily address all the other issues facing girls’ education such as absenteeism, poor performance, repetition, and dropout rate. Girls’ education programs should be designed so that multiple problems can be addressed together.

In addition to the comprehensiveness of girls’ education programs is the issue of responsiveness. Responsive here simply means the ability for programs to respond to the needs of beneficiaries. Inherent in the idea of responsiveness is that educational programs should be able to address the needs of beneficiaries to prevent failure. Interventions should not only be necessary in the case of failure but also be able to prevent problems from happening.

Lastly, effective monitoring is an important issue associated with successful programs. When structures or programs are put in place without effective monitoring, it is likely that such programs may not meet their expected goals. For instance, poor school management and lack of teacher discipline has been found to be related to school program ineffectiveness (Dunne, et al., 2005). In a report prepared by Dunne et al. (2005) for DFID titled Gendered School Experiences: The Impact on Retention and Achievement in Botswana and Ghana, it was found that many of the poor schools also had poor
management as well as lack of teacher discipline. Poor management leads to teachers’ absenteeism, lack of punctuality, and disinterest in fulfilling their daily responsibilities.

Similarly, in a recent study on teachers’ attitude toward attendance conducted by the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) in 30 public primary schools revealed that 57% of professional teachers were not present in their classrooms at least once a week, compared with 36% of the nonprofessional teachers. This behavior of teachers is not because of the absence of a code of conduct; rather, it is the lack of effective monitoring of teachers’ behavior. The CDD (2008) study indicates that an overwhelming 87% the majority of teachers has never received any form of sanctions, such as written queries, salary suspension, or verbal warning in the past 12 months. Head teachers have not been effective in enforcing the code of conduct because many of them are also involved in such behavior. Unfortunately, the lack of effective monitoring system is largely seen in rural and poor schools, thereby adding to the problems these schools face.

It is evident from the literature review that the progress that has been made in girls’ education has not been able to eliminate all the problems confronting girls’ in the developing world. Additionally, the problems facing girls’ education are complex, situated at different levels of the society, such as the family, school, community, state, and at the international level. While certain problems are peculiar to certain countries and regions, many of the developing countries commonly share the challenges facing girls’ education. To understand girls’ overall educational experiences will require the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. While the use of statistics is the traditional
approach that has been adopted by governments to report on girls’ education, this study uses a qualitative approach to understand girls’ experience, in their own voices.

**Theoretical Framework: The Ecology of Human Development**

Theoretical framework, which is the focus of the second section of this chapter, is a lens through which I conducted my investigation. This study was grounded in the Ecology of Human Development, which provides the perspective in understanding the phenomenon of girls’ education in Ghana. The argument here is that gender is a social concept influenced by multiple factors; therefore, to promote female education requires the adoption of a multifaceted strategy. As Anderson-Levitt, et al. (1998) indicate that “girls’ enrollment, persistence, and success in school depends on many factors beyond the classroom and the school itself” (p. 103).

In his book, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiment by Nature and Design*, Urie Brofenbrenner applied the tenets of the theory to help understand the experiences and development process of children and their families. Although Brofenbrenner utilized the Ecology of Human Development theory, he was influenced by the ideas of Kurt Lewin (1935). Brofenbrenner is of the view that development is influenced by a person and his/her environment; however, traditional models tend to focus on psychological outcomes for the individual. Little attention is paid to the environment in which an individual grows. The Ecology of Human Development theory is one of the early attempts to pay attention to the role of environment in human development. Bronfenbrenner (1971) “…recognizes the centrality of the person in the process of developing within a variety of interacting contexts over time” (p. 283).
situations in which children often find themselves are different from the settings in which many research experiments take place. While many experiments take place in the laboratory or under controlled conditions, the lived experiences of children are in the family, playground, school and other places (Brofenbrenner, 2005). Brofenbrenner (2005) defines the Ecology of Human Development as:

the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, through the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 107)

This definition was first published in 1979 but the statement “through the life course” was later added. Bronfenbrenner’s main argument is that human development is a product of the interaction between the growing human organism and his/her environment (1979). His definition of the Ecology of Human Development reveals three main features. First, “the developing person is viewed not merely as a tabula rasa on which the environment makes its impact, but as a growing, dynamic entity that progressively moves into structures in the milieu in which it resides” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21). Second, the environment influences the developing person; however, the developing person’s interaction with the environment is two-directional. The third feature of the definition, according to Bronfenbrenner is the environment. The environment is “relevant to developmental processes, not limited to a single, immediate setting but is extended to incorporate interconnections between such settings, as well as to external
influences emanating from the larger surrounding" (1979, p. 22). The last feature is the
dimension of time. The issue of time was not originally part of Brofenbrenner’s definition
but was added in his later work. In the course of development, changes occur in the
individual and in his/her environment. While the individual matures, grows, and change,
the community also changes, build personal relationships and social networks over time
(Cairns & Cairns, 2005). Cairns & Cairns (2005) suggest that it is important for
researchers “to track these simultaneous developmental changes in persons and social
contexts and to determine the interrelations among them” (p. 17, 18).

Bronfenbrenner conceptualizes human development as a set of nested circles, each
building on each other (Brofenbrenner, 1979; Mertensmeyer & Fine, 2000). He called the
four levels of interdependent structures the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem,
and the macrosystem. First, he defines the microsystem as “a pattern of activities, roles,
and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with
particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). Second,
he defines mesosystem as “the interrelations among two or more settings in which the
developing person actively participates (such as, for a child, a relations among home,
school, and neighborhood peer group; for an adult, among family, work, and social life)"
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). The exosystem, on the other hand, refers to “one or more
settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which
events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the
developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25). The last structure, which he identifies
as the macrosystem, is defined as “the consistencies, in the form and content of lower-
order systems (micro, meso and exo) that exist, or could exist, at the level of subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p.26).

Figure 1: Diagram of the Ecology of Human Development.

Figure 1 illustrates how Brofenbrenner's concept of the microsystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem relate to each other. The argument being advanced here is that there are multiple factors that could affect the behavior of an individual. The inner circle, which is the microsystem, explains the immediate factors that affect a child. Examples include family, parents, and classroom. The mesosystem, which is the second
circle, explains settings that are not very immediate or remote from a child, examples include school setting, church, mass media, and the community. Brofenbrenner (1996) indicates that “besides the family home, the only setting that serves as a comprehensive context for human development from the early years onward is the children’s institution” (p. 132). Children spend an appreciable number of hours in school daily; therefore, it is important we become interested in what happens there. The quality of their interactions with teachers significantly affects their development. At the exosystem level, are institutions where children and families do not directly participate; however, they may be greatly impacted by policies and programs that are established by these institutions (Mertensmeyer & Fine, 2000). The outer circle explains the macrosystem, the remote factors that could affect the behavior of a child. Examples include the political system, culture, and economics of a country. According to Mertensmeyer and Fine (2000), the last level refers to the culture that affects the inner circles, and ultimately, children and families.

**The Relevance of Ecology Theory to Girls’ Education**

What could this theory mean in concrete terms? What usefulness or applicability has Brofenbrenner’s theory to girls’ education in Ghana? How does it help us understand the gender inequality phenomena in education? To what extent are girls’ educational experiences attributable to environmental factors?

Child development is generally believed to be influenced by heredity and environment. As mentioned earlier, the bone of contention among researchers has been how much of each of these two factors affect children. My goal in this study is not to add
to the argument but to limit myself to the contextual or the environmental factors influencing girls’ education in Ghana. Bronfenbrenner (1979) indicated that to understand a behavior, we must first understand the “setting” in which it occurs. Since contexts have different meanings for different people, understanding the effect of setting on girls’ education should be approached from the perspective of participants of that context.

As previously stated, girls’ education is largely shaped by environmental factors and cultural factors including parental support, parents’ education, parents’ work, teachers’ attitudes, and cultural practices. The daily life of girls in many developing countries happens in different contexts. They engage in different activities daily such as home chores, school work, and work to contribute to the family income.

Furthermore, gender as a concept is a social construction which has its roots in social structures such as culture, government institutions, families, schools, society, and economic systems. These factors affect girls’ educational experiences which include their performance, retention, enrollment, attendance, completion, and continuation. The result of these factors is the persistent disparity in girls’ education in many developing countries. This characteristic of gender as a socially constructed is consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s theory of human development. The ecological perspective as postulated by Bronfenbrenner focuses on the development of the individual as he or she relates to various systems within the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Munroe, 2004). I believe it is appropriate for gender inequality in education to be addressed from a multisectoral perspective (Tietjen, 2000). According to Tietjen (2000), “Girls’ schooling is particularly well suited for multisectoral support. It is a culturally embedded issue, in which many of
the constraints impeding girls’ educational participation are found outside the classroom and are beyond the reach of education ministries" (p. 3). Since barriers to girls’ education are mostly situated in the social context, it is particularly appropriate that these barriers are targeted by all stakeholders (Tietjen, 2000). The ecological perspective indicates that the social environment involves all conditions, experiences, and human interactions that encompass human beings. This includes one’s dwelling, educational provisions, occupation, access to material goods and wealth, and laws and social rules (Munroe, 2004). Several studies have shown that whether girls are enrolled in school or drop out depends on several factors, such as cultural practices that encourage early marriage, poverty, perception about women, opportunities for women in the labor market, quality of school infrastructure, proximity of school, and teachers’ attitude to girls, among others (Hyde, 1993; Smock, 1981). The four systems of the ecology theory embrace many of the factors influencing girls’ education. Overall, the Ecology of Human Development as discussed in this study helps to explain the environmental factors influencing girls’ education. Brofenbrenner (2005) suggests that “knowledge of what might be called the ecology of human development is especially essential for the design of programs intended to foster the children’s cognitive, emotional or social growth” (p. 28).

As with all other social theories, there are certain weaknesses and critiques that have been leveled against the Ecology of Human Development theory. Brofenbrenner’s theory is criticized for the lack of a definitive answer to the all the parties involved in children’s education. Aldridge and Goldman (2002) argue
trying to account for all of the endless interactions and variables affecting a child is exhausting and impractical. How would we ever have enough information about the child’s temperament, activity levels, attentional states, or learning capacities as they relate to the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem? (p. 72)

While we may not be able to gather all the information about what affects children, it is without question that the factors influencing education are complex and situated within the systems outlined by Brofenbrenner.

**Summary**

This chapter has addressed two major issues that are pertinent to the study: the literature review and the theoretical framework. The literature revealed that disparity in girls’ education continues to be persistent in Africa despite the several studies that have indicated the importance of girls’ education. Influencing girls’ education are cultural, school, economic, social, and economic factors. This study was grounded in the Ecology of Human Development framework. It provides the perspectives to understand the phenomenon of girls’ education in Ghana. The argument here is that gender is a social concept influenced by multiple environmental factors and social factors; therefore, to improve girls’ educational experiences demands the use of a multifaceted approach.

There is a popular African proverb which states that “it takes a village to raise a child.” This means that girls’ education requires the concerted effort of various stakeholders, such as parents, community, teachers, district assembly, and the government. The next chapter describes the methodology that was in the whole process of data collection.
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the qualitative approach used in this study and explains the rationale behind the selection of this research method. In this chapter, I provide a brief description of the research site, the participants, and the data collection and data analysis procedures used. Here, the voices of primary school girls and other voices are privileged in accordance with a feminist research perspective. The main purpose of the study was to understand girls’ educational experiences in their own voices at the Akuapim South District in the Eastern Region of Ghana.

The main research question which guided the study was: From the perspective of girls, what are their educational experiences at the basic level. What are girls’ educational experiences from the perspective of parents, teachers, education officers and community leaders? In privileging the voices of girls, I am acknowledging that children’s perspectives are often missing in research, even in studies that are about them. Many of the young girls involved in the study hold multiple identities, of gender, age, economic background, and growing up in different types of families. Gender was the main focus for the study.

To this end, I used qualitative methodology grounded in a feminist perspective to investigate the lived experiences of primary school girls as they are related in their own voices. The following section discusses in detail the research design and the feminist perspective that were adopted in the context of this study.
Research Design: Phenomenological Study

Specifically, a phenomenological approach, which is one of the many types of qualitative research, was adopted to understand girls’ educational experiences. This approach is highly appropriate for studies that seek to explore, describe, understand, and stress “the importance of context, setting, and subjects’ frame of reference” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 46). The phenomenological approach aimed for a deeper understanding of educational experiences of girls.

The father of phenomenology is frequently cited as Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who was a German philosopher, as well as a mathematician (Patton, 2002; Spiegelberg & Schuhmann, 1982). According to Patton (2002), phenomenology, from the perspective of Husserl means the “study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses” (p. 105). Similarly, Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenology as a human science (rather than a natural science) since the subject matter of phenomenological research is always the structures of meaning of the lived human world (in contrast, natural objects do not have experiences which are consciously and meaningfully lived through by these objects. (p. 11)

Although there are different views about the concept of phenomenology, they all “focus on exploring on how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2002, p. 104).

Phenomenological studies do not just seek for the facts or the causes of certain incidents; rather, they are often aimed at understanding the lived experiences of people through the various acts of consciousness. My interest in understanding girls’ educational
experiences cannot adequately be met by a quantitative approach. The unique characteristic of phenomenological approach which makes it relevant to this study is its intersubjectivity. According to Moustakas (1994), intersubjectivity means

the subject and object are integrated—what I see is interwoven with how I see it, with whom I see it, and with whom I am. My perception, the thing I perceive, and the experience or acts interrelate to make the objective subjective and the subjective objective. (p. 59)

In the context of this study, the phenomenological approach was very useful in understanding the perception of girls, teachers, parents, and community leaders about girls’ educational experience in Ghana. To carefully describe and thoroughly capture participants’ experience of the phenomenon of girls’ education requires a methodology that could gather such data (Patton, 2002).

In line with the phenomenological method, I visited the site where my subjects lived, attended school, played, worked, sold, and bought items. The interactions with participants were done one–on-one interviews, participant observations, and focus groups. I primarily used semi-structured interview guides to solicit the views and experiences of participants. I also used participant observation and document analysis to validate some of my findings. Although a phenomenological approach guided my research design, a feminist perspective informed my methodological approach and my interest in privileging the voices of my participants, especially girls.
Feminist Perspective

As mentioned earlier, the primary goal of this study was to understand and listen to the educational experiences of schoolgirls, especially, and other selected stakeholders. The idea to hear and listen to the experiences of girls in their own voices was drawn from the work of many feminist researchers (Gilligan, 1977; Gray, 2007; Harding, 1997; Hyams, 2004; Morris, 1995). Feminist perspective is not another method of inquiry; it uses most of the techniques both in qualitative and quantitative inquiry. Harding (1997) asserts:

Feminist researchers use about any and all of the methods...that traditional androcentric researchers have used” (p.161). Contemporary feminist scholars have different perspectives about feminist research, but they all tend to agree to the concept of privileging the voices of subordinated others, “groups variously categorized and marginalized by gender, sexuality, race, age, and so on (Hyams, 2004, p. 105).

According to Smith (1988), a feminist perspective is characterized by a method which “creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience, that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday world” (p. 107). The purpose of this study was to create the space for young girls, their caregivers, teachers, community leaders, and education officers, to share, their experiences about girls’ education. This approach is particularly important when it comes to studies involving children because they are often left out in research works, conferences, and policies formulated about them. Marshall and Rossman (2006) revealed that “increasingly, there are calls for including children’s perspectives as
relevant and insightful in learning more about aspects of their worlds” (p. 106). A feminist research perspective provides an approach in understanding the educational experiences of schoolgirls. It helps to create the space for the voices of these girls to be heard and listened to by policymakers, teachers, and parents, as well as community leaders. A feminist research perspective is based on the assumption that “women experience oppression and exploitation, and that this experience varies, considering the multiple identities each person holds” (Glesne, 2006, p. 16). The girls and the adults who participated in the study also bear multiple identities, including gender, different ages, economic background, religion, and family structure.

Although feminist research perspectives are divergent, most of them share certain characteristics. First, feminist researchers believe that marginalized groups need the space to speak out in their own voices about their experience. Second, exploring the emotional experience of the researcher in the research process is a productive and meaningful resource for feminist scholars (Blakely, 2007). Third, feminist researchers are not only interested in voices but also the moments of silence in the research process (Hyams, 2004). Although these are not the only characteristics of the feminist perspective, these three characteristics were the guide informing this research process. Additionally, qualitative research has been used by many feminist researchers to privilege the voices of women and other marginalized groups (Gilligan, 1997; Harding, 1997; Hyams, 2004). Specifically, in-depth group discussions, interviews, observations, and focus groups have been used to listen and to understand the experiences of marginalized groups, including women.
Research Site

The study was conducted at the Akuapim South District in the eastern region of Ghana. I selected this district for the study for two main reasons. First, as a commuter of the Accra-Kumasi road, I observed the many girls that sell on the road side daily. I became interested in understanding the dynamics of the district. Second, in Ghana, when the problems confronting girls’ education are mentioned, we often overlook the urban areas and the communities in the south. Problems with girls’ education are often associated with poor communities and the north of Ghana, where the incidence of poverty is high. I was interested in understanding the state of girls’ education in a community close to the national capital.

The district is 1 of the 22 districts in the eastern region. Akuapim South District, hasNsawam as its district capital. It is located within a gap along the main highway between Accra and Kumasi and is just 23 km from the national capital, Accra. The district also shares boundaries to the south with Ga District and Tema Metropolis, both of which are part of Greater Accra Region. To the north-west its neighbors are Suhum-Kraboa-Coaltar, Akuapim North, and West Akim Districts, respectively. Appendix A is a map of Ghana illustrating the 10 regions of Ghana including the eastern region where the study was conducted (Ministry of Local Government, 2006).

The Akuapim South District has 5 nursery schools, 47 kindergartens, 90 primary schools, 41 junior secondary school, and 5 senior secondary schools. There is also one technical/vocation institution, one agricultural training college, and one teacher training
college. The pupil-teacher ratio is 1: 64 for public schools and for private schools, it is 1:30. Akuapim South District has a district hospital, four maternity homes, two eye clinics, one orthopedic center and three private clinics. It also has one Level A Primary Health Center and four Level B Primary Health Centers (Ministry of Local Government, 2006).

The research was conducted in four communities in the Akuapim South District. Two of these communities, Adoagyiri and Nsawam, are urban (towns with population of more than 5,000). Because of their geographical location, Nsawam and Adoagyiri are huge commercial towns in the district. The other two communities, Nkyinikyini and Fotobi, are rural (towns with population less than 5,000). Nkyinikyini and Fotobi are largely farming communities. There is huge disparity between the rural and urban communities in terms of standard of living and availability of social amenities.

**Description of Participants**

The data were collected from different categories of people. While girls’ voices were the main focus of the study it was important to hear the perspectives of those who work closely with girls. This was the purposes of understanding the contradictions and the patterns in the perspectives. The primary sample for the study consisted of 6 categories with a total of 102 participants. Table 8 provides a summary of the participants involved in the study and the breakdown of the type of community where they were selected. The communities are categorized into rural and urban. Rural community is described as a community with less than 5,000 people, while urban is more than 5,000 people. In Ghana there are major socioeconomic differences between rural and urban
communities, which may be relevant to this study. Incidence of poverty is larger in rural than in urban communities. While rural communities are predominantly inhabited by farmers, urban dwellers are more diverse in their occupation type. These and other differences affect the quality of education in many ways including teacher-pupil ratio, performance, and the quality of the teaching learning process.

Table 8

Summary of Participants Involved in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants/Communities</th>
<th>Rural (N)</th>
<th>Urban (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups with Girls</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Officers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, 7 schools were selected to participate in the study, while 2 of the schools were rural schools, 5 of them were urban schools. Also, only one of the schools was a senior high school. In the rural communities the schools selected were the only primary schools there, but in the urban communities I selected schools that agreed to participate in
the study. In addition, while all the schools were public, 5 of them were also church-affiliated schools. The difference between only public and church-affiliated public schools is that church-affiliated public schools are managed and supported by churches as well as the government support. Some of the churches directly involved in education in the district are Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist. Some of these churches have been working in the district even before Ghana’s independence in 1957. Public schools are funded through the government funding. This study may be biased because private schools were not involved. There are several differences between private and public schools in Ghana. Private schools in Ghana are not free, they are privately owned, and usually found in urban areas. At the basic level, private schools tend to perform better than public schools. Surprisingly, public schools tend to have more trained teachers than private schools at the basic level. The public and church-affiliated public schools involved in the study included:

- Nsawam Presbyterian Primary/JSS School
- Fotobi Local/Authority (L/A) Primary School
- Nkyinikini Presbyterian Primary School
- Adoagyiri Primary/JSS School
- Father Wiegers Roman Catholic School
- Nsawam Senior Secondary School

In qualitative inquiry there are no strict criteria for sample size (Patton, 1990; Hoepfl, 1997). However, several factors were taken into consideration in selecting the 102 participants for the study. For the three months of fieldwork this number was
manageable. Also during my data collection I noticed some consistency in the views of the participants. After interviewing some of my participants, no new views or trends were emerging. Furthermore, by selecting from the diverse groups, I was able to validate my findings and sought further confirmation when necessary (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Thus selecting girls, parents, teachers and others gave me a broader perspective about the phenomena under study. The most useful strategy for qualitative enquiry is maximum variation sampling, which is important in reducing the possibilities of bias perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1995; Hoepfl, 1997).

The girls who participated in the study were girls still in school or who had recently dropped out of school. They were selected from primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. The girls I interviewed identified themselves with two main religious groups, Christianity and Islam, and their ages ranged between 10 and 18 years. Also, these girls lived in different types of family groupings, such as two-parents, one-parent, mixed families, extended family members, or with a guardian other than a family member.

My rationale for selecting girls at different grade levels was to understand the different factors contributing to girls’ dropout rate or persistence at different education levels. I selected upper-primary school girls and high school girls, because many children drop out of school at this transition stage when both girls and parents have to make a decision to continue or end their education. A recent study conducted in Ghana revealed that a number of children are not making the transition from the final year in primary school to junior secondary school (Fentimen, Hall & Bundy, 2007). In addition, many
girls at this stage of their life face the biggest challenges because of the socioeconomic and cultural factors that influence girls’ continuous access to education. In their teen years, these girls are confronted with the decision to stay in school or withdraw so as to help support the family or be married.

The other groups of participants were selected because of their direct or indirect role in promoting girls’ education in the Akuapim South District. They included parents, teachers, girls’ club coordinators, District Director of Education, District Girls’ Education Officer, chairs of the School Management Committee (SMC), religious, and community leaders. All the parents who participated in the study at least had a daughter who was currently in school and lived in the Akuapim South District. The number of years participants had lived in the district ranged from 1 to over 25 years.

**Participants Selection Method**

Purposive sampling was used in selecting participants for the study. According to Merriam (1998), “Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn most” (p.48). Purposive sampling is also known as criterion sampling in that the researcher needs to set criteria on the basis of which respondents will be selected. Two main purposive sampling methods were used in this study: Snowball, or chain, sampling and stratified purposeful sampling. My rationale for using the two methods for this study was due to the different categories of the participants selected for the study and also my interest in selecting “information-rich” participants. Stratified purposive sampling illustrates characteristics of particular subgroups of interest (Patton, 2002). The stratified
purposive sampling helped me to select a specific number of participants from groups who contribute, in some way, to girls’ education. My rationale for using stratified purposeful sampling was to avoid sampling from the same group that may have held similar perspectives about girls’ education. Sampling different groups helped me confirm information gathered from different perspectives in the same district. It also helped me to select broad information-rich subjects whose input helped illuminate the research questions outlined for the study. The logic and power of using purposeful sampling for this study was derived from my quest for an in-depth understanding of girls’ education in the Akuapim South District.

The second purposeful sampling I used was snowball sampling. According to Patton (2002), “snowball sampling identifies cases of interest from sampling people who know people who know people who know what cases are information rich, that is, good examples for study and good interview participants” (p. 243). At the end of each interview session, I asked teachers to recommend other teachers. Similarly, parents recommended other parents, and community leaders suggested other community leaders to participate in the interviews.

In addition to the one-on-one interviews with adults, I used focus groups with the girls participating in the study; I started from the schools that I was first introduced to before I even went to the field. This was very helpful for me in gaining entry to other schools and communities. The interviews and the focus groups with the teachers and the girls were conducted first because the schools were preparing to vacate for the Christmas holidays, and there was no time to waste before their break.
The girls participating in the study were selected by the head teachers in consultation with some of the other teachers. I had hoped to have had access to the classrooms to select the participants but that opportunity was not granted. I informed the head teachers that my study was limited to girls in upper-primary school or high school. I had the impression that the head-teachers probably selected the girls who were more eloquent, assertive, and likely to share their experiences on the subject.

Most of the teachers I interviewed were those recommended by the head-teachers. They were teachers for the grade level of the girls I interviewed or the girls’ education coordinators based in the school. The other teachers interviewed were recommended by other teachers. At the end of any teacher interview, I asked if there were other teachers in the school or elsewhere in the community I could talk to. Some of the teachers also recommended other schools I could use for the study and suggested possible places in the community I may find girls who were out of school. The names and addresses of the executive board of the School Management Committees and school local managers were also provided by head teachers and teachers for me to follow them up for further interviews.

The Presbyterian minister for the district, who was also my host during the whole period of my fieldwork, introduced me to the District Education Office. He specifically introduced me to the District Director of Education and the District Girls’ Education Officer, who graciously granted me one-on-one interviews. The parents who participated in this study were selected through the teachers. In addition, I made personal visits to the market, communities, and social gatherings. Through church services I attended, I met
potential participants and visited them in their homes as well as their workplaces, some community leaders whom I also met were invited to participate in the study.

**Data Collection Method**

Data collection sources are significant to the outcome of any study. I used a variety of data collection methods, such as face-to-face interviews, focus groups, direct and participant observations, and document analysis to gather as many perspectives and data as possible. Patton (2002) suggests that “qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of data collection: (1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents” (p. 4). For this study I used face-to-face interviews to gather data from girls who had dropped out of school, parents, teachers, community leaders, and education officers. In addition to the interviews, I used focus-group discussion to collect data from girls in primary schools, junior high school, and senior high school. Patton (2002) summarizes the significance of data sources in qualitative studies noting: “Interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge…” (p. 4). The interest of this study to understand girls’ education required that all possible data sources be explored. In gathering data for this study, I conducted my fieldwork for a period of three months. In the next section of this chapter, I briefly describe the methods I used in collecting data for this study.

**Interviews**

I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to solicit responses from teachers, community leaders, parents, and education officers. The advantage in using semi-structured interviews is that it gave me the privilege and
flexibility to make modifications, probe, and ask for clarification. I am of the view that to have a holistic insight into the state of girls’ education it is important that all those who have a stake in girls’ education are interviewed (Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interview guides were developed for different participants. Samples of the interview guide are attached in appendices C, D, and E. Some of the items in my interview guide were adopted from Chawla (2004) unpublished doctoral dissertation titled: Increasing Girls’ Participation in Education: Understanding the Factors Affecting Parental Decision-Making in Rural Orissa, India. The interview guides were used in situations when subjects were not forthcoming with responses. According to Chawla (2004), “this method has the added advantage in that it allows the interviewer to play a role in the management of and keeping the conversation focused on the issues at hand” (p. 80).

The interviews were conducted so as to go beyond their observable behaviors to enter into their perspective, experience, and how they construct meaning (Patton, 1990). Seidman (1991) also asserts: “If the researcher’s goal…is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing people provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (p.4). Teachers were the first group I conducted one-on-one interviews with. I sent introductory letters to the schools in the district where the study was to be conducted. The letter described the purpose of the study, the benefits, and also assured participants of confidentiality (by not asking for names and assuring them that data were kept in a safe place with restricted accessibility). Reflection notes
were taken immediately following interviews to document descriptive notes on the behavior, verbal and nonverbal, of participants (Merriam, 1998).

**Focus-Group Discussion**

In addition to the one-on-one interviews, I conducted a series of focus group discussions with girls from the upper primary, junior high school and senior high School in the Akuapim South District. Each focus group consisted of 6 to 10 girls from the same grade level. Overall, I conducted eight focus groups: primary level (4), junior high school (3), and senior high school (1). Each focus group discussion lasted between 60 to 120 minutes. The two hour period gave me enough time in situations of prolonged discussion or delays due to lateness (Morgan, 1997; Glesne, 2006). Focus-groups should be “carefully planned” to obtain perceptions of discussants in a comfortable environment (Krueger, 1997; Patton, 2002). Interviewing children together on specific subjects is useful because children often need company to be encouraged to talk (Glesne, 2006). Glesne (2006) noted that focus-group designing requires certain basic considerations: Where, who, how, how long, how many, and when are necessary in guiding the process.

The focus-group discussions with the girls were all conducted in the school premises. These places included head teachers’ offices, classrooms, and school libraries. Admittedly, the venues for the interviews were not private enough for the girls to talk freely about their experiences. However, as a researcher I tried to make the most out of the situation by conducting the focus groups in the absence of all teachers. In almost all the schools, focus groups were held during lunch break. The teachers had distributed the consent forms to the selected girls to give to their parents, which were returned to the
teachers the next day. In addition, I verbally read the assent form (see appendix B) to my young participants before each focus-group session; I assured them of confidentiality and also explained to them the purpose of the study. I also sought the permission of the girls before recording the discussions.

Before going to the field I planned to use English as the medium of communication during focus-groups and interviews. Also, in almost all the schools I visited, children were not allowed to use their native language in the school premises. During my first focus group discussion I realized some of the girls were not able to express themselves adequately in the English language. I broke the school protocol and asked the girls to use the language they were comfortable with. The freedom for the girls to use their native language during the focus groups made a considerable difference in their participation and contribution to the discussion. During the focus groups I usually asked the questions in English and translated them to the local language. Since I speak Akan (one of the local languages in Ghana) fluently, changing the plan to use the local language did not pose any challenge or threat to the study; rather it enhanced the quality of responses.

**Triangulation**

In addition to interviews and focus groups, triangulation was used to validate data gathered from different participants. Triangulation was very useful for this study because, in addition to the girls’ who were interviewed, the views of teachers, parents, community leaders and education officers were sought. Berg (1995) indicates that “triangulation does not merely involve a combination of different data collection methods; rather, it is aimed
at relating the different methods in order to counteract the threats to validity identified in each method” (p. 5). Perceptions gathered from one group of respondents were compared with the views of other participants to identify common and emerging themes. I used data triangulation to validate the different data sources (interviews, focus groups, observation, and document analysis). In summarizing the use of triangulation, Patton (2002) notes, “some studies intermix interviewing, observation, and document analysis. Others rely more on interviews than observation, and vice versa. Studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks (p. 248).”

**Data Collection Process and Community Entry**

My step-by-step process in data collection included the following:

- My first contact with the district was through a Presbyterian minister from the district who had come to the United States to study. When I met him he had finished his graduate studies and was going back to Ghana. I shared my proposal with him and he assured me of his support. We continued to communicate through e-mails and phone calls.

- An introductory letter and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval letters from Ohio University were sent to the Akuapim South District Education Office to the Director of Education through the minister. The letters stated the purpose of my study and the protocol I followed in ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of my participants.

- By the time I got to the field, the minister had distributed the letters to some of the schools and also contacted the District Girls’ Education Officer, in-charge of
girls’ education in the district. Initially, the minister contacted some important stakeholders before my arrival at the site. Also, the District Girls’ Education Officer’s access to the schools in the district gave me an easy entry to the schools.

- The whole period of my field work was about three months (November 2007 to January 2008). I was received by my contact who also became my host during the whole period of data collection. I used the first few days to visit the District Education office, communities, and schools. Living in the community and spending time there helped to develop trust between the community leaders and me. According to Glesne and Peshken (1992), “Time is a major factor in the acquisition of trustworthy data. Time at research site, time spent interviewing, time to build sound relationships with respondents--all contribute to trustworthy data” (p.146). Personally, I wish I would have spent more time on the field to do more classroom observation and follow-up on some of the stories I heard.

- During my visit to the schools, offices, and the communities, I set up appointments with potential participants. The focus groups with the girls were conducted during the school period, either during long breaks or during class hours with permission from the teachers. They were all conducted in the school premises that were assigned to me by the school authorities. Each focus group and the interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 120 minutes.

- The one-on-one interviews were conducted in homes, workplaces, church premises, and any other location chosen by participants. Parental consent forms were given to the teachers who also distributed them to girls’ selected to
participate in the study. Appendix C attached has samples of the parental consent and other consent forms. Since girls participating in the study were minors, parental consent was necessary as required by the Ohio University IRB. In addition, an assent form was read to the girls at the beginning of each focus group. In all my fieldwork, no participant refused to grant me an interview after reading them the consent forms, although some appointment days and times had to be rescheduled. My visit of the communities, introduction by the Presbyterian minister, and the company of the District Girls’ Education Officer to the schools contributed to my easy access to the community.

Data Recording

Data recording is an important step toward effective data collection and analysis. Both the interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital voice recorder. I sought the permission of participants to have interviews and focus groups recorded. In some instances, only notes were taken during the interviews or I simply listened and took notes afterwards. In some situations it was practically impossible because of locations where interviews were conducted.

The limitation with the use of voice recorder was that I could not capture important information that was observed. To address this limitation I kept four different diaries, one for each community I visited, to take field notes and for my personal reflections. In keeping four different diaries, I avoided the possibility of confusing the different sites of data collection. My field notes consisted of description of participants, description of school physical settings, observations, accounts of particular events, and
activities as well as the explanation of my interactions with respondents (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996; Nyirongo, 2005). Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) suggested that using questions such as “Who was observed?” “How many people were involved?” and “What was going on?” are helpful guides for intentional observation. Following this guide it was helpful for me to record important observations that added to my data.

I also kept a personal diary to record my reflections and thoughts about my field experience. This diary helped me to distinguish between my direct observations and my personal opinions and reactions. According to Nyirongo (2005), periodic review of reflection notes is useful in reducing biases about accounts and experiences reported by participants. This was useful in helping me think about the contradictions and patterns between what I found in the literature and from my interviews.

My full field notes were taken during the field visit or immediately following every field visit, when I moved into a place of relative privacy. I made an effort to record key words and phrases while I was in the field and also noted the sequence in which a situation was observed. In addition, I established a regular time and place for writing up my notes (including the date, time, and location of the observations) and if necessary duplicated notes for safety reasons (Berg, 2001). Notes taking helped me to increase the accuracy of my data collection, thereby increasing the validity of the study. Data were directly and immediately recorded as incidents happened, thus reducing the possibility of forgetting important information and providing a means for further probing. Also, in some instances the use of the digital voice recorder was impossible; therefore note taking
was more effective. For instance, when I conducted some interviews in the market and at the road side, it was easy for me to take notes due to the level of noise and interruptions.

As a qualitative researcher it is imperative that one spends time in the community where the research is being conducted. Accra is not very far from Nsawam and spending time in the community with the people revealed a lot of information that I would not have known through the interviews. My field experience did not follow any schedule because there were so many times that different things came up which were important to the outcome of the study. Living in the community helped me to be flexible in scheduling interviews and also offered me enough time to take notes at the end of each day.

**Data Analysis**

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) define qualitative data analysis as “working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others” (p. 145). It is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). All my interviews, observations, and documents, put together, became voluminous. It was important that I arrange, categorize, and reduce the data to make sense to readers. This section explains the step by step procedure I used to construct meaning from the data gathered for the study. I need to mention that Carol M. Roberts’ (2004) book, *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*, was highly informative regarding my data analysis and interpretation process. A five-step process was adopted to analyze the data for this study.
Step 1: Transcription and Initial Reading of Transcription

My main sources of data were one-on-one interviews, focus groups, participant observation, direct observation, and document analysis. In all, 35 voice-recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed. In addition, four journals of notes (one for each of the communities), and one reflection journal from field experience, were transcribed. This provided me a repertoire of information in a soft copy format, which made it easy for me to cut, paste, sort, code, and categorize in the analysis process. Doing the transcription myself was very useful in the whole process of data analysis. I was able to prioritize all the data by their quality, reflect over possible codes, and identify common trends together with emerging themes.

I started to read all the transcripts thoroughly to develop an initial list of themes, patterns, and categories. I had already developed a list of patterns and themes during the data collection process. In most qualitative studies, which take place in a natural social context, there is no clear distinction between data collection and data analysis because patterns and themes evolve in the course of fieldwork (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), “recording and tracking analytical insights that occur during data collection are part of fieldwork, and the beginning of qualitative analysis” (p. 436).

Step 2: Coding and Categorization of Responses

Next, all the responses transcribed were coded with different colors for each research question, outlined in chapter 1. This was done to make data retrieval and categorization simple and less burdensome. Patton (2002) contends that unless there is
some sort of classification and categorization of raw data, “there is chaos and confusion” (p. 463).

Coding, according to Merriam (1998), “is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (p. 164). Each research question was assigned a short phrase and a color code. As I read through the responses, I highlighted important information provided by each participant with the appropriate color code and phrase. After going through all the transcripts and coding every possible response, I categorized and grouped the responses according to the color code. In many instances, there were more than one color codes for each research question. This was because of the several themes that emerged or were identified under each research question.

**Step 3: Organization of Patterns and Themes**

At this point, the research questions indicated in chapter 1 and the theoretical framework discussed in the chapter 3 were used to sort the highlighted codes. According to Bell (1988), “a hundred separate pieces of interesting information will mean nothing to a researcher or a reader unless they have been placed into categories…groupings, patterns and items of particular significance” (p. 137).

**Step 4: Final Review of All Transcripts to Validate Patterns and Themes**

At this stage, data were already organized so as to make sense and draw meaning out of the data. It was necessary that I read the transcripts several times again to complete the final coding and to validate my findings. During my review new codes, themes, and patterns were identified which were added to my findings.
Step 5: Completion of Data Analysis and Report of Findings

The last step in the data analysis process was presenting my findings. Chapter 5, which presents the findings, examines how my data answered the research questions set forth in chapter 1. A continuous comparison was made between my findings and relevant literature to ascertain which findings supported or contradicted the literature on girls’ education (Roberts, 2002). Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study in detail based on the emerging themes, patterns, and categories that were derived during the data analysis process. The emerging themes were largely categorized based on the research questions for the study. It is important to mention that pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity of all participants.

Limitation of the Study

This study largely focuses on girls’ educational experiences at the Akuapim South District in the eastern region of Ghana. Since there are 110 districts in Ghana and 22 districts in the Eastern Region, the results of this study are not generalizable to the whole Ghanaian population. However, the similarities among certain communities provide important lessons for other communities.

Additionally, the participants involved in this study were not randomly selected; therefore, their views may not always be the true reflection of the community. Notwithstanding the lack of random sampling of participants, the findings of this study are equally important and credible because the qualitative approach helps in understanding girls educational experiences. A quantitative approach may not be able to sufficiently document the experiences of girls’ in their own voices.
Another limitation of this study was the limited time frame for my field work. There was not sufficient time for me to do more follow-up interviews with my participants. Staying a little longer in the field would have been helpful in interacting more with participants in the district and providing more observations of girls’ experiences in different settings. However, the time constraints, my work, and my academic schedule did not allow me to extend the period of my fieldwork. Furthermore, limited time frames are often inevitable for graduate students conducting studies on a limited budget. More importantly, due to the time of the study, fewer classroom interactions were observed. Most schools were in exams week, and students and teachers were preparing for exams. More observation of classrooms and teacher-student interaction would have been extremely helpful in understanding girls’ experiences.

Furthermore, the locations in which some of the focus groups were held did not promote an atmosphere for free expression of some of the girls involved in the study. In about three instances, the focus groups were held in the head teachers’ office with a limited level of privacy. I am sure that if the focus groups were conducted in a natural setting, the fear of the girls in sharing their experiences would have reduced. As a researcher, I tried to create privacy by asking teachers to excuse us during the focus-group discussion. To address this problem, I took advantage of conditions that were favorable to probe into issues that came up in other focus-group sessions.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have described the methodology used to study girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District, Ghana. The qualitative inquiry and feminist
research perspective were the approaches used in the research process. The qualitative approach entailed one-on-one interviews, focus-group discussion, observations, and document review. The feminist perspective as used in this study is based on the premise that children’s voices are often missing from research that is about them. Therefore, to understand girls’ experience, it is important that space is created for them to share their experiences in their own voice. The study was conducted in four main communities with two considered as urban and two considered rural. The participants involved in the study included primary and high school girls, teachers, parents, community leaders, the District Director, and the District Girls’ Education Officer. I have also outlined in this chapter the data collection procedure, characteristics of the participants, and the steps used in data analysis. In the next chapter I present the findings of this study in detail.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter seeks to provide the findings and reflections on the data gathered to answer the study research questions. The data emerged from document analysis, observations, focus groups, and interviews involving primary school girls, their parents, community leaders, teachers, and education officers. The main goal was to understand girls’ educational experiences through the voices and experiences of participants, particularly girls. Privileging the voices of children in this research was a radical shift from the view that children are to be seen and not to be heard. Girls candidly told their stories, experiences, and expressed their feelings about their education.

As a social researcher, I played the role of an active listener, observer, sounding board, and outlet for girls and other adults to share their experiences and perspectives about girls’ education. However, as an active listener, I also provide reflection on the stories I heard, the documents I read, and the situations I observed through the lens of the literature on girls’ education reviewed in chapter 3. While their stories in many ways support existing literature, some of the findings contradict and challenge popular perspectives about girls’ education. The central research question that guided this study was: In their own voices, what is the major difference in the views of girls and parents, teachers, education officers, community leaders and government officials regarding girls’ educational experience at the Akuapim South district?
Portraits of Selected Participants

What was central to this study was to give girls the platform and the opportunity to speak about their experiences in their own voice. This was an attempt at privileging the voices of children, which are often silenced, powerless or subordinated. Through focus groups and interviews, many of the participants passionately and boldly articulated their feelings and experiences with girls’ education. To provide background to the findings, I share the profiles and stories of some of the girls participating in the study. I also share the profiles of some of the teachers I interviewed.

Profile of an Urban Girl (1)

Abigail is a 14 year-old girl living in Nsawam, the district capital, with her parents and her three siblings. Abigail attends a public junior high school which is about 15 minutes walk from her house. Abigail describes her family as poor but with hardworking parents. Her mother is a petty trader in a local market and her father recently lost his job as a local company driver. Like many children, Abigail has dreams, and she hopes to become a nurse to save lives and support her family. However, Abigail fears she may not be able to continue her education after completing junior high school. She reported, “I am only 14 years but my parents expect me to fend for myself, buy my own basic needs as well as supplement my family’s insufficient income. This means I have to work and go to school at the same time”. Due to Abigail’s juggling act of working and schooling at the same time, she has to miss school on some market days to sell in the market or on the road side. This and other assigned house chores, such as cleaning, fetching water, and cooking, considerably affects her performance and her ability to keep up with school
demands. While basic education is free, Abigail’s school has several indirect charges required of them such as Parent-Teacher Association/Parent-Teacher Organization (PTA/PTO) fees, extra classes, printing fees and a building project. Abigail noted she sometimes skips school, if she owes money, to avoid the embarrassment she and her classmates receive from teachers, who intentionally call them out in the classroom. She added, “How can I concentrate and be attentive in class on an empty stomach when I have other things to think about? Therefore, it makes sense for me to skip school, sometimes, to work to be able to buy all my basic needs. As a young girl it is not everything that I could ask my parents to provide for me.”

Abigail admitted she would have loved to pursue her passion and dream, but it is not likely she will continue to senior high school where the expenses and school demands are even more than junior high school. Abigail reported, “Since it is practically impossible for my family to support my secondary education, there is no need for me to worry about doing well in school. I am just waiting to finish with junior high so I will figure out what to do with my life”.

**Profile of a Rural Girl**

Janet is 13 years old and is in grade 6 at a public school in her village. Her parents divorced when she was 8 years, and since then she has been living with different family members at different times. This back and forth living arrangement interrupted her education many times and has made her to be one grade behind her peers. When her parents divorced, Janet went to live with her father shortly but was asked to go and live with her auntie in the city because it was difficult for her father to provide her basic
needs. Janet reported, “Initially, my auntie loved me, provided for me and talked to me nicely. However, my auntie’s attitude toward me changed after I babysat for her to help her go to work. She insulted me and accused me for no apparent reason. I had to come back to the village to live with mother, although she doesn’t have enough.” Janet helps her mother to maintain a farm which is the main source of their family income. During harvest seasons, Janet carries pawpaw and pineapples from plantations in the village for export to supplement her family income and support her school needs. Unfortunately, she is often late or skips school to help in the plantation or help her mother in the farm. She loves school, her teachers and all the friends she has made in the school. However, she fears her education may end at the Junior High level due to the lack of emotional and financial support from her parents.

**Profile of an Urban Girl (2)**

Gifty is a 14 year old girl living in one of the urban communities in the Akuapim South District. She is in junior high and attends one of the best church-affiliated public schools in the district. Although the school is not nearby Gifty’s house and a little more expensive, her mother is committed to giving her quality education. Gifty lives with her single mother, who owns a local bakery, through which her education is supported. Gifty also has uncles who frequently support her financially. According to Gifty, her mother sees her education as the only investment she can give her; therefore, she is always the first to pay her bills in school. She stated, “I am fortunate to have a family that understands the value of education. Not that my family is rich but they know that giving me a good education will provide better opportunities for the family in future”. Gifty is
confident, always in school, and has good grades. In a typical day, Gifty sweeps her house in the morning, goes to school, helps her mother prepare dinner, and she does her homework before she goes to bed. Unlike many of the girls in the community, Gifty doesn’t have to sell to supplement the family income but only helps out in her mother’s bakery if they need more hands. She looks forward to applying to the best girls’ senior high school in the district and continuing to college with the goal of becoming a journalist.

**Profile of a Rural School Teacher**

Ms. Angela is a young woman teaching in a village at the Akuapim South district. She taught third grade as well as serving as the girls’ education coordinator. When she was first posted to the village, she and the head teacher were the only female teachers in the primary school. Ms Angela used to commute everyday from the district capital to the village, but the lack of reliable transportation forced her to move to live in the village. Ms. Angela revealed that she and other teachers who commuted usually got to the school late or had to leave early to catch the last vehicle leaving the village. According Ms Angela, her status as a single woman made it easier for her to relocate but she does not intend to live in the village for a prolonged period of time. She noted that the lack of social amenities in the village, such as quality schools, electricity, and potable water, will make it difficult for her to raise her family.

Ms. Angela described her school as a church-affiliated public primary school with six classrooms and a small library, donated by philanthropists from the United States. The school serves most of the surrounding villages, which means children have to walk
long distances to school. She noted that children who walk long distances to school get there late, tired, or wet during rain seasons. While the school benefits from the government free education program, the community and school are faced with challenges including a high rate of poverty, single parenting, inadequate school facilities, and poor social infrastructure. Since she moved to the school she has witnessed some of the girls becoming pregnant, skipping school to work on pawpaw and pineapple plantations, or quitting school to live with relatives in big cities. Ms Angela reported being personally harassed and called names by young men in the village when she first moved there.

Notwithstanding all these challenges, Ms. Angela has served as a role model and a beacon of hope to many girls in the village, through the personal relationship she has built with the girls. She serves as the girls’ education coordinator, guidance and counseling coordinator for the school and also as a youth organizer for a local church in the village. According to Ms. Angela, her salary as a teacher is not sufficient but she has found creative ways to support and give back to these girls. Every school term Ms. Angela buys shoes and other school supplies for some of the girls in the school and asks their parents to pay back by installment without any interest.

In an interview Ms. Angela narrated an inspiring story about a girl in her school she has adopted to live with her. She observed Margaret was walking a long distance to school and was consistently staying in class during lunch time. Ms. Angela started given her money and other school supplies to help Margaret stay on. Ms. Angela stated,

I have unofficially adopted Margaret and she is like my daughter now; I pay her fees, buy her shoes, school uniforms and also feed her. Margaret is so brilliant that if I don’t take this responsibility up, she might drop out of school, like her sister who became pregnant in junior high. Since she came to live with me I have seen
tremendous improvement in her performance and self-confidence. There are so many children in this community with similar stories that I wish I had enough to support all of them.

**Profile of an Urban School Teacher**

Ms. Janet is a teacher at a church-affiliated public school at Nsawam, the district capital of the Eastern Region. She is a native of the district and has spent most of her life there. She had been teaching for almost eight years in a nearby village but transferred to the district capital three years ago. When Ms. Janet was asked why she transferred, she said family ties were the key reason behind her decision. She stated “I cannot move my family to the village where I was teaching because of the low quality of the school and the lack of social amenities. Also, commuting everyday was inconvenient, expensive and time-consuming”. Ms. Janet also reported that she was getting frustrated with the lack of support in helping the children in her village school. She stated, “When children come to school without books, school supplies, without adequate furniture in a dilapidated structure, then, the problem becomes too big to deal with as a teacher”. Ms. Janet noted that in the village the challenges are more for girls because of the additional gender responsibilities that put girls at a disadvantage.

In her current school, Ms. Janet serves as the girls’ education coordinator for her school and also as a leader in the local church that supports the school. She noted that parents, teachers, and the children in her school seem to be more committed than her previous school. According to Ms. Janet, parents pay for extra classes, printing fees, children are punctual, serious with their academics, and teachers give their best. She attributed the performance of the school to the support and extra supervision from the
church as well as the standard set by the school. Ms. Janet stated, “the priest stops by the school everyday and if you are a teacher here, you cannot be late or not give your best”. She added that with the help of the school PTA and the church, the school has more resources than her previous school. Ms. Janet compared the performance of their school to some of the best private schools in the district.

Findings

My findings on girls and other participants’ perspectives on girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District are organized under the four main research questions. Also, the Ecology of Human Development Framework and the Feminist perspective provided the framework in the analysis of the findings.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What is different or even radical about girls’ perception of their experiences in contrast to the messages given by government officials, community leaders, parents, and other stakeholders?

In social research and official documents the voices and perspectives of children are relatively silent, powerless or subordinated (Stewart & Cole, 2007). Recent studies are beginning to understand the importance of paying attention to children in policy making and program planning. As discussed in chapter one, the goal of this study was to give girls the opportunity to speak since their voices are often marginalized and silenced. By privileging the voices of girls, power and privilege are shifted to girls. It is this ordering of power and voice that I describe as radical, fundamental, and critical to change. Rather than supporting dominant views about girls’ education, girls participating in the study had different perspectives. This study supports feminists’ perspectives, by
emphasizing women’s voices and perspectives that have often been silenced or ignored. An increased interest in active listening for gaps, absences in women’s talk, and considering underlining meanings to explicit speech are critical to feminist researchers (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007).

**Government Officials and Girls’ Education**

Government reports I reviewed suggested that Ghana is making progress with girls’ education, particularly in the area of enrollment. The Girls’ Education Unit (2006) reported that a grant program introduced by the government has yielded positive enrollment results. With the grant, every child enrolled in school receives 30,000 cedis (approximately $3) every year. The purpose of the grant is to compensate for the financial barrier created by extra levies required by schools. Table 9 shows that both girls’ and boys’ enrollment increased considerably after the introduction of the Capitation Grant. There was 16.6% increase in total enrollment, with girls increasing by 18.31% between 2004/5 and 2005/6. Boys’ enrollment also increased by 15.18%. While this is not a causal argument between increase in enrollment and the introduction of the Capitation Grant, there is a potential relationship.
Table 9

*Enrollment Figures after Capitation Grant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>2004/5</th>
<th>2005/6</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>1,754,539</td>
<td>2,075,864</td>
<td>321,325</td>
<td>18.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>1,943,909</td>
<td>2,239,023</td>
<td>295,114</td>
<td>15.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,698,448</td>
<td>4,314,887</td>
<td>616,439</td>
<td>16.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GEU (2006)

The use of enrollment figures to draw conclusions about girls’ education is misleading. Enrollment figures are devoid of other dimensions that are equally important to education: children’s daily lived experiences. While they quantitatively tell us about the progress made in improving girls’ enrollment in school, they do not tell us about the daily experiences of these girls, which significantly affect their performance, attendance, promotion, motivation, and retention.

Primary education is free in Ghana through the government free, compulsory basic education program (fCUBE). fCUBE covers tuition and is based on the principle that communities will also find ways to support their schools. The fCUBE program only covers public schools at the basic level, primary and junior high schools. Besides free tuition, which comes with the fCUBE program, there are other costs expected of school children, such as printing fees, extra classes, and building projects. As I learned, under Ghana Education Service’s policies and guidelines, school authorities are not suppose to send children home for not paying these indirect costs.
Girls participating in the study had their own perspective about the cost of their education which showed the limitations of the government’s perspective based on enrollment statistics. Girls reported that they had to absent themselves from school to themselves. They had to miss school regularly to pay school costs. Ama reported:

Mondays and Thursdays are market days in this town; if I have no money then I better skip school to sell to support myself. I know missing some classes will affect my performance but at least this way I will finish Junior high. Government says education is free but we have to pay for extra classes, printing fees and others.

Ama challenges the government’s policy of free education and the data on girls at school. Absenteeism of children, particularly girls on market days, was also confirmed by the District Director of Education in a one-on-one interview. Thus overall enrollment figures may be encouraging, but attendance rate are low on market days and export seasons.

Ama’s statement suggests that education is actually not free as purported by the government.

Fifteen year- old Comfort, in junior high school, stated:

My parents do not always have money for me to come to school. I have to walk long distances to school, stay in school on an empty stomach, until evening before I eat. Friends buy food and share with me. It will be difficult for me to continue going to school if I am not adequately supported by my parents…. When you come to school without money for food it is difficult to study and concentrate in class; sometimes you are better of staying at home because at least you will have some food to eat.

Similarly, 15 year-old Margaret expressed her frustration about not being able to pay her extra school bills on time:

When we have to pay monies like printing fees and I don’t have it I cannot go to school. I live with my Aunt and my mother sends me money at the end of every month. If I have to pay any money I have to inform my mother, wait for a month
or so before the money is sent to me. How can I sit in school and study if I always owe in school?

Absenteeism of children, particularly girls on market days, was also confirmed by the District Director of Education in a one-on-one interview. Thus overall enrollment figures may be encouraging in the schools, but attendance rates are low on market days and export seasons.

I was curious about the extent to which financial problems affect girls’ education. Teachers and education officers confirmed the financial challenges. According to the District Girls’ Education Officer,

Financial reasons are the main cause and all the other factors follow. Parents want better life for their children but if they cannot afford they are forced to withdraw them from school to engage in commercial activities to support their families.

It is important to mention that the incidence of poverty in the district is not because people are not hard working; rather, it is the lack of jobs, opportunities, and overall state of Ghana’s economy. A teacher reiterated how the economy of the district affects girls’ education:

There are no jobs in this community; we have lost most of the industries here. So a child may get a good grade but if he/she does not get any help, then she is forced to go and sell.

I learned that there used to be factories in the district but they have all collapsed. The factories used to be a source of jobs for many people in the district. With this collapse many have turned to farming, selling or left the community to go to the city in search of greener pastures. The lack of jobs in the district has affected parents’ inability to
adequately support their children. Therefore, girls’ performance, attendance and overall education are affected.

Also, girls complained about how they are treated by teachers when they owe in the extra levies. In a focus group, Gifty, a junior high school girl, explained how she feels embarrassed to owe money:

Financial obligations make my coming to school difficult if I owe. When I ask my mother for money, she says the government has said there is free education so I should go to school. We have extra classes in the school my brother attends but I am not given money to attend the same class because I am a girl. Most of the time I am embarrassed if I come to school and my name is mentioned in the public that I owe. Some of the teachers come to the class and publicly call out our names as well as how much we owe. Since we do not work, how do teachers expect us to pay our bills, this is a responsibility of our parents and not us as children. I do not do the extra classes after school if I owe because I do not want to be embarrassed. Sometimes we are even punished by the teachers because we owe, so to avoid all that, you stay home.

In an appeal to teachers Janet expressed:

Teachers should not embarrass us before our peers when we owe. Where do they expect me to get money to pay for extra classes if my parents fail to give me the money? I become scared if I come to school owing, therefore, I might choose to stay at home. They should find a better way to work it out with parents, directly, instead of sending children home during instructional hours.

While this does not only affect girls it appeared girls were more emotionally affected by this attitude from teachers than boys. Ghana Education Service by policy disapproves of teachers demanding money from school children. However in practice, teachers tend to directly ask school children to pay their bills instead of their parents. This is because some parents never visit the school, and the only contact school authorities readily have is the school children.
Furthermore, the girls participating in the study were concerned about the issue of poor facilities in their schools. According to them free education without adequate facilities is no education. They revealed how poor facilities are affecting the quality of their educational experience. I learned that infrastructure development is not supposed to be the responsibility of the government. Schools and the communities are expected to maintain and renovate their own schools. New public schools are built by the government but educational facilities are the responsibility of other partners. In all the schools I visited, the lack of adequate facilities for effective teaching and learning process was evident, but there were differences in the level of need. The lack of adequate facilities provides a significant challenge to girls’ education. When a junior high school teacher was asked about the adequacy of facilities in the school for girls, she responded: “As for urinals we have some in the school but for toilet facilities we don’t have enough and they are also of poor standard. The girls don’t have enough privacy.”

The head teacher of the school further explained: “We have toilet facilities in our school, two for boys and two for girls. Unfortunately, two are off-line so we have only one for girls and one for boys. Also, there is a public toilet that the children pay to visit.” This particular school has a student population of over 800 students. I became curious about how the girls survive under such conditions. A junior high school girl responded, “We have basic facilities, but our toilet is closed so we have to go to the public toilet and pay five pesewas (5 cents) for every visit.” She added “We need money for food, school supplies, extra classes, and to go to the place of convenience, you can’t believe it.”
Finally, with all the schools I visited, only one school had a library, which had been built by a philanthropist from the United States. The girls were grateful and proud to have a school library. However, during the library tour I observed most of the library books had little relevance to the context of Ghana. They were books that have been donated by an organization in the United States. The girls reported that they have library times but some time the books are difficult to read and understand. For the library to serve its intended purpose, it should be stocked periodically with books that are age appropriate and relevant to the Ghanaian context. Unfortunately, there was no plan in place at the national or district level to maintain and expand this school’s library.

This study has revealed that getting girls to school is not the end of the story. We need to be concerned about the quality of the facilities. Girls’ negative experiences in the school environment, coupled with home challenges, affect their attendance and performance. The problem with enrollment figures is that they do not provide a comprehensive picture of other important dimensions of enrollment such as attendance and performance. According to Saihjee (2004),

In order for enrollment to be an effective indicator of the universalization of education, it needs to be accompanied by regular attendance. Discontinuous and erratic education may not be equivalent to dropping out, but in the long run may have similar results---poor intellectual abilities and skills, possibility of retention in the same class and maybe dropping out of school. (p. 202)
This means that enrollment statistics although important, they are not enough in understanding the overall educational experience of girls. For states to celebrate progress made with girls’ education require a holistic review of the state of girls’ education.

**Teachers Attitudes Toward Girls**

Teachers consistently referred to the attitude of girls as a significant factor influencing girls’ education. The teachers thought that the desire of many girls to acquire quick money affects their attitude toward their education. Teachers argued that girls’ desire to make quick money drives them into selling which becomes their first priority.

A local school manager claimed:

> The girls themselves want quick money which is caused by peer influence. They compare themselves with their peers so selling becomes an easy way to get money to buy whatever they want. When they go in to sell bread and find it more lucrative then the attention for their education decreases.

Another teacher participant had a similar perception about girls and remarked:

> The mind-set of many adolescents is that they can work hard to get money and travel abroad. Such thinking makes it difficult for education to become a priority for these children. They don’t know that education has a long-term effect, more than the temporary material gains.

A head teacher also believed that girls’ desire for quick money to travel abroad significantly shapes their attitude toward their education:

> I will also add that in this particular town, I mean Adoagyiri and Nsawam, the children like selling and they also like quick money that pushes them into selling. Some of the mothers start selling with their children at an early age, so that is all that the children are used to. Therefore, when the child goes to sell and is exposed to money then their interest in education falls. There is a popular saying in the community that “we don’t go to school but we travel abroad.
Contrary to the views held by adult participants, my interactions with the girls revealed their resilience, love, and passion for school. I learned that the factors pushing girls to sell on the road side were overlooked by some of the adult participants. Many of the girls talked about their desire to come to school every day and continue to the highest level. A 12-year old primary school girl in a focus-group stated:

I want to learn to have a better life in the future, I don’t want to carry and sell bread everyday. I come to school to learn to have a better life than my parents who did not go to school. I will get a good job after my education and will be able to take care of myself and my family.

In Ghana, demands for household chores heavily fall on the shoulders of girls. Some girls participate in both economic activities as well as serve as caregivers for family members depending on who they live with. A senior high school girl, 16 year-old Akosua, narrated why she sometime misses school:

I live with my grandmother and I have to make sure she is comfortable at home before I come to school. Sometimes, if we wake up in the morning and she is not feeling well, I have to skip school and take her to the hospital. Even, sometimes I have to rush home from school to make sure my grandmother is doing well.

Ama, a primary 6 girl, shared her experience in relation to school attendance:

I have a little brother at home and I take care of him most of the time. If he is hungry in the morning I have to go to the farm and find some food for him before I go to school. If I am late I will not come to school.

In my interaction with the girls, they shared with me their aspirations of becoming nurses, doctors, caterers, teachers, police officers, etc. Unfortunately, they were aware of their daily challenges. A 15-year-old Gifty in junior high school sadly noted:

For instance, I have the goal of becoming a woman activist but when my father said he may not have enough money for my secondary education, my studies have been affected. Some of my teachers even say that my academic performance has fallen but I couldn’t tell my teachers about what my father said. Now, if I come
across a man who would want to support my education, I might give in because of my goal to become an activist.

The difference between the teachers and the girls perspectives are that the teachers look at girls’ attitudes without understanding their daily challenges. While the girls have goals to achieve, they realize that it may be impossible for them to stay in school if they do not engage in some commercial activities. Financial challenges often become the push factor that forces girls to adopt attitudes that may be misunderstood as lack of seriousness about their education.

Teachers accused girls of a lack of commitment to their education. According to them, girls who engage in sexual activity sometime become pregnant and this may potentially end their academic career. While participants indicated teenage pregnancy was more common in the junior and senior high schools, participants mentioned instances where girls in primary school in the district became pregnant. In the schools I visited, both teachers and girls repeatedly told me stories about girls who became pregnant. The participants had mixed explanations for why girls become pregnant in the district and in the schools I visited. While some blamed the girls and parents, others blamed men or the lack of opportunities for girls in the community. Women teachers sometimes blamed men, rather than the girls for the pregnancies. A teacher, in one of the schools, narrated her experience with teenage pregnancy in her school:

Before I came here, I heard there was not a single year without a girl becoming pregnant in this school and not being able to continue to the JSS. We have not had such an experience for some time now. Many of them have not had any sex education so they don’t know the risk involved in unprotected sex…. Most of the men who impregnated the girls are older men and relatives who live in the same community.
Another female teacher, with anger in her voice, shared an experience of teenage pregnancy at her school:

Last year our girl’s prefect was impregnated by one of the boys in our school. The boy is now in one of the secondary schools but I don’t know where the girl is now. The girl was already registered and we encouraged her to come and write the exams but she didn’t. The boy was suspended but later came in to write his BECE exams. The boy should have been fired so they will all come back later after the delivery to continue their education. These boys who impregnate the girls will go to the secondary school and may not even come back to marry these girls.

A local school manager provided a broader perspective about teenage pregnancy:

At the JSS level the girls are at their adolescent age with all its challenges. Some of them become pregnant and drop out. I will blame parents because they don’t provide their girls with their basic needs so most of them had to force themselves to continue their education. In my own situation if it was not my personal determination I wouldn’t have made it. Part of girls’ educational problems is cultural; when we have low aspirations for girls’ education it affects their performance.

A Reverend Minister adding his view insightfully articulated why girls become pregnant in the district:

Financially the parents who provide for these children are most of the times handicapped. This greatly impacts girls’ education and many girls drop out along the way. Poor finances force some girls into immoral activities even at the JSS level which negatively affect their aspiration and life goals. A girl caught in the web of fending for herself and schooling at the same time will definitely have a divided attention which affects her academic performance. Some of these girls receive tips from men and ignorantly they become vulnerable to their deceit, becoming pregnant in the process.

Another teacher explained how the pressure on girls to meet their basic needs pushes them into relationships that make them susceptible to teenage pregnancy:

Also, it is becoming common and fashionable for young girls to use cell phones. They will need to buy units for the phone in addition to their other basic needs. To
be able to do all this, they seek external support which mostly comes with strings attached. This is a challenge for many girls and affects their academic performance and probably terminates their academic aspirations.

Surprisingly, many of the girls blamed girls for allowing themselves to become pregnant. According to them, girls’ desire for quick money pushes them to enter into relationships which may result in pregnancy. A junior high school girl claimed, “Some of the girls themselves are stubborn and do not care about their future, they follow men, become pregnant and drop out of school.”

Several girls agreed that some girls display a poor attitude toward their education; however, they were concerned about the attitude of some teachers toward female students. Thus, to the girls, teachers were also part of the problems girls face. There were statements that suggested that some teachers participate in the harassment of girls. A junior high school girl bluntly stated: “Sir…some of the teachers have bad sexual feelings toward the girls. They befriend some of the girls and hide the relationship from the public. Unless the girls come out to say it, nobody will know it.” In a follow up interview, the District Girls’ Education Officer cited a case in which a girl was sexually abused by a teacher in the district:

There was a case of a teacher defiling a girl in one of the schools in this district. When I heard and went to the school to inquire about the case, the teacher was already jailed. This teacher brought the girl from her parents to support her through her education; however, the teacher defiled her. When I followed up on the girl, she had already gone back to the parents and it was difficult to contact her.

A resource person in a program on the “Time with FAWE” broadcasts (discussed at greater length later) summarized the seriousness of sexual harassment in schools:
The issue of sexual harassment is even more serious among children, especially young girls. We often don’t listen to them or fail to create the relationship that could make reporting less difficult for them. Children are already disadvantaged by virtue of being children. Those who take advantage of them are their caregivers, family members, teachers, and people they know. For instance, if a teacher is making sexual advances towards a girl, it is difficult for a child to report it to make parents to take it seriously. We wait until the abuse occurs, which may be too late to repair the damage the incident might cause. There is a conspiracy of silence around sexual abuse that needs to be stopped.

I found these statements to be disturbing because teachers are expected to protect girls from harassment. These reports suggest that the issue of teachers’ involvement in sexual relationship with young female students is not an isolated occurrence. Unfortunately, the lack of attention to the voices and experiences of children has led to such stories going unheard; therefore, perpetrators go unpunished. We cannot tell the number of children who are seeking opportunities to speak and become agents of change. This is what makes the voices of children critical to change.

Girls interviewed also had problems with teachers’ attitude toward them in the classroom. There were contradictions between what the teachers and girls reported. The nature of classroom interactions between students and teachers is crucial to the teaching-learning process. In Voices of a Generation: Teenage girls' report about their lives today, Haag & AAUW (2000) write that the action of teachers, administrators, and counselors, in a school setting reinforces or challenges girls’ roles as students. Since girls spend a lot of time in the classroom during school hours, we need to be concerned about the kind of interactions that go on in classrooms. Several studies have indicated that teachers tend to interact differently with boys and girls in the classroom (Anderson-Levitt, et al., 1998;
Haag & AAUW, 2000). In most instances, attention is given to boys more than girls and girls find it difficult to speak out or get involved in class discussions.

The teachers interviewed said they treat both boys and girls equally in their classrooms. According to them, they give both boys and girls equal opportunities but it is the girls who do not take advantage of such opportunities. A junior high school teacher remarked:

There is no difference between the way I treat the girls and boys in my classes. However, the girls are always timid and lack self-confidence so it’s the boys who show enthusiasm about classes. If only the girls will be confidence and speak in class they will do better. Some of the girls ask question in class but most of them are scared to make mistakes.

While teachers said they treat both boys and girls equally, the girls participating in the study thought otherwise. According to the girls, as much as they agree that most of the teachers care for them, they give more attention to brilliant students than average students. Janet, a 13-year-old girl had this to say about teachers’ attitudes toward the average students:

The teachers should not give up on those of us who are average students. Some of our teachers pay too much attention to the brilliant students and leave us out. We need more help so we also will become good students. If teachers give up on us then we will continue to perform poorly and that will mean dropping out.

This statement suggests that teachers give more attention to certain students without being aware of it. Surprisingly, Janet’s statement was shared by several girls, particularly, girls in junior high schools.

The girls reported that they were reluctant to speak in class for fear of ridicule from male students. According to the girls, most of their teachers fail to address inappropriate behavior of boys toward girls and this makes it difficult for them to
participate in class activities. A girl described an incident in class when she fumbled the answer to a question and the boys used that to ridicule her. Studies have found that girls behave differently from boys in classrooms and it is important that teachers are aware of these differences (Haag & AAUW, 2000). Generally, boys speak out more in class than girls. Boys are more likely to tease girls in a classroom situation (Anderson-Levitt, et al. 1998). Therefore, voices of girls are often missing in class discussion. The findings of this study are consistent with what the literature says about girls’ experiences in the classroom.

One teacher recalls his experience with girls in classrooms. He noted:

Girls do not come out with their problems in class. They find it difficult to voice their opinion or ask questions in class compared to the boys. When you teach a subject and they don’t understand, they will not come out to ask. I don’t know if they experience an inferiority complex or if they are just shy to speak out.

This statement reveals the lack of gender consciousness teachers bring to the classroom situation. Anderson-Levitt, et al. (1998) argue that girls’ reluctance to participate in class activities is not because they are timid by nature; rather, they react to the classroom environment, including the attitude of their male peers. According to the researchers, “consciously or not, male students also [behave] in ways that [tend] to keep girls in their place” (p. 119). For teachers to overlook the different challenges faced by boys and girls in the classroom contributes to the many problems confronting girls in the school. Girls face specific problems because of their gender; therefore, teachers need to be aware of these challenges to able to provide girls the needed support. When teachers overlook the problems confronting girls and treat boys and girls equally in the school environment, then teachers would be ignoring their role in promoting girls’ education.
A handful of girls indicated that their teachers treat them differently compared with boys, especially in terms of teachers’ expectation of boys and girls. According to them, the teachers tend to set a higher standard for the boys than the girls. They also stated that some teachers punish the boys more than the girls when they make mistakes with their assignments. This was insightful in the sense that if punishment is intended to motivate students, then punishing girls less could mean less motivation or less expectation for them. The girls acknowledge that their teachers do not verbally talk about their different standards, but it is expressed in their attitude toward boys and girls. Interestingly, when I probed about whether they see differences between their male and female teachers, the responses were mixed. While some of the girls said female teachers give them more assistance and attention, others said there was no difference between male and female teachers’ attitude toward girls.

Studies conducted by FAWE-Ghana on sexual maturation found that management of menstruation also impacts girls’ education considerably. In the focus groups, girls reported different ways menstruation affected their attendance: inability to walk long distances to school, inability to pay attention in class, fear of embarrassment, and teasing from classmates, and the cost of pads. For instance, a primary school girl indicated that “I always come to school scared when I am in my menses. Although only my mother and I may know it, I often don’t know what to expect when I come to school. I don’t want to be embarrassed in case anything happens.” Fatima, a senior high school student claimed:

The first day of our menstruation, the abdominal pain is very severe and you don’t feel comfortable in class. When you are resting during break time in the classroom the boys will come and ask you what is wrong with you. When you say
your head they will say you are kidding and make fun of you saying, “aba..aba” (meaning it has come).

In a focus group with senior high school students, one girl, in senior high school, explicitly stated: “When we have our period sometime we have so much pain. However, when you come to school and you put your head on the table the boys will be laughing at you and be talking about you. To avoid that, you absent yourself from school.”

During my interviews with the female teachers it was evident that almost all of them have dealt with a situation where a girl soiled her uniform in school. A female teacher related:

Last term during our final exams there was a girl who soiled herself. At the end of the exams I had asked all the children to bring their papers but this girl was still sitting there so I walked to her and realized what was going on. I had to cover her to avoid any embarrassment. The primary school children do not know much about the menstrual experience girls go through.

Most of the female teachers intervene to protect the girls from being embarrassed in front of their peers, especially the boys. A junior high school teacher noted:

What I have observed is that with the onset of sexual maturation/menstrual cycle, the girls go through a lot of pain. They become shy in class and find it difficult to pay attention. It affects them psychologically and emotionally so when they even make it to the school they are not able to actively participate in class activities. They fear they might soil themselves.

In another interview, a program coordinator with FAWE-Ghana indicated that the cost of pads is a major factor influencing girls’ education. He claimed:

Menstruation has been found to relate to the dropout of girls. If girls had to travel long distances to school in their menses then they are more likely to skip school if they are in pain. I call it the economics of pads: pads are 11,000 ($1.20) and most parents cannot afford them for their girls. Sometimes we don’t know what they use which could also make them vulnerable to other infections.
In one of my focus groups, a 13-year-old primary school girl shared what she does to buy pads every month:

We need to learn to keep ourselves clean so that we don’t embarrass ourselves. My mother buys pads for me, but sometime I save some of my money meant for food everyday so I could buy it myself during my menses. Not that I have enough money but I have to plan and manage.

Other challenges girls reported they face during menstruation was the insensitive attitude of their male peers:

The boys tease the girls a lot about unnecessary things. Girls may be going through some changes in the month and may not feel like being active. However, the boys will just go in and disturb them. If care is not taken, such a girl will not come to school the next day.

A teacher noted that many of the boys, especially the upper primary boys are always curious about what is happening to the girls. According to the teacher, this happens particularly when teachers in a class give girls preferential treatment because of their physical condition. For instance, when girls are excused from participating in certain activities, the boys become curious. The teacher remarked:

The boys are always curious about what is happening to the girls. For instance, I asked my students to come out of the class and some of the girls came to me to inform me that a girl cannot come out because of her menstrual situation. The boys came to ask me why the girl was still in the class is. I had to lie to the boys that I was sending the girl to do something for me.

Girls perception about the way teachers handle the problems associated with menstruation was missed. While many of the girls appreciated the support they receive from female teachers, other girls thought teachers were not doing enough to stop the way boys treat them. Personally, I though many of the teachers, particularly male teachers, lack the experience in confronting such issues without embarrassing the girls. The study
found female teachers to be conscious of the challenges adolescent girls face, therefore, are more likely to provide girls with the appropriate support. The role of female teachers in promoting girls’ education justifies the need for policy makers to increase the supply of female teachers and the incentives to keep them, especially in rural schools.

Girls’ education is not solely explained by attitude of teachers; it is a combination of factors which contribute to their overall experience. Anderson-Levitt, et al. (1998) in a study in Guinea argue that teachers, girls and other stakeholders do not act alone in shaping girls’ experiences of and attitudes about school. Gendered expectations and stereotypes are socially constructed and reinforced by teachers, boys, and girls themselves. While teachers’ behavior alone will not make all the difference, teachers’ attitudes, behavior, and support for girls cannot be underestimated (Anderson-Levitt, et al., 1998). A teacher without the knowledge and awareness of girls’ experiences will not create the environment for girls to thrive.

**Parents and Girls’ Education**

Another category of people I interviewed were parents. While teachers and parents shared similar sentiments about girls’ education, there were also differences in their perspectives. Parents participating in the study indicated their determination to support their girls through school. Most of them stated that education of their children is their future insurance or the legacy they could bequeath to their children. I personally observed the different commercial activities parents were engaged in to help their children in school. To most of the parents, being able to financially support their children was their first priority.
In my interactions with the girls, they appreciated the effort by their parents to give them a better life by supporting their education. However, the girls’ definition of parental support is broader than their parents. The primary goal of most parents was to financially support their children. The girls, in addition to financial support expected their parents to be directly and more involved in their educational experience. Thus, while girls want parents and guardians to adequately support them financially, they also wanted to see more parental involvement and a positive attitude toward their school needs.

Fifteen-year-old Susan expressed how she feels about her parents’ attitude toward giving her money for school. According to Susan, the attitude of her parents suggests they do not care about her education. She remarked:

Sometime when you are ready for school you go to your mother to ask for money and your mother will ask you to go to your father. Your father will also tell you to go to your mother. I become discouraged and embarrassed because sometime I think they really don’t care about my education. By the time they give you the money you are already late for school so you skip school because you will be punished for being late.

Susan’s statement is clear evidence of how the actions of parents affect children, especially girls. Unfortunately, children lack the power, the voice, and space to articulate their feelings. In the absence of opportunities for children to be heard, they struggle in silence which may have a negative consequence on their educational experience.

In addition to parents’ attitudes, the girls reported that parents asking them to skip school to help them at home are an indication of parents’ lack of commitment to their education. Susan added, “If parents do not allow us to come to school during school hours and ask us to accompany them to their farms, then it means they don’t care about
our education. We want to help them but not during school hours.” Susan’s statement reveals that parents contribute to girls skipping school. The contradiction here is that parents care about the education of their girls, but at the same time, they need the assistance of their girls, even if it means skipping school. Ama, who lives with a family friend, reported that the house chores assigned to her are too much, that she hardly has time to do her homework. According to Ama,

> Sometimes the house chores are too much, and you don’t have time to do your homework. I stay home the next day instead of going to school to be punished because I did not do my homework. I live with a family friend so it is difficult for me to complain about the house chores.

All the girls agreed that they need to support their parents but there has to be some consideration, especially if the chores conflict with their academics. It was insightful to hear the relationship between house chores and attendance. When children are punished by teachers for failure to do their homework without understanding the experiences of these children at home, then teachers and parents are unintentionally putting a difficult expectation on girls. Girls are expected to be responsible for their own academic work but at the same time they have no power to determine when to do their homework.

Additionally, girls expected more parental involvement in their education beyond financial support. Girls reported that parents not coming to school meetings and PTA/PTOs meetings are evidence of lack of support of parents. Parents volunteering and paying visits to schools means a lot to children and studies have found this to be important to educational success (Epstein, 1987). A senior high school girl had something to say to parents, who do not visit their children’s schools:
Our parents should not leave us in hostels and forget about us. I don’t think my father knows the location of my school. We expect our parents to come to the school, talk to the teachers, and also check our performance. When I was coming to this school as a new student, no one in my family bothered to come with me. No one in my family comes to PTA meetings and that really hurts me emotionally.

Similarly, girls expect to see parents in the school and to attend PTA meetings as well:

We really want to see our parents more involved in our schooling. They should attend PTA meetings that will help them to understand the importance of girls’ education. I live with somebody and she never comes to my school for PTA meetings.

As a researcher, contrasting the views of girls and government officials, teachers and parents provided me alternative ways to understand girls’ educational experiences. While some of the views of the girls are consistent with the views of these adults, they are many ways I found the views of the girls to contradict the adult views. Excavating the voices of the girls has brought to light issues and dimensions that would have been impossible to understand. It is the voices of girls and the perspectives they bring to the discussion on girls’ education that I find to be radical and fundamental.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What are the major challenges affecting girls’ education identified by:**

1. **Rural girls vs. urban girls**
2. **Rural teacher vs. urban teachers**
3. **Public schools vs. church-affiliated public schools**

Studies of girls’ education in developing countries have consistently found multiple factors contribute to the state of girls’ education. While the challenges may be common or similar across many developing countries, their impact varies. In this study
the challenges affecting girls’ education were different from community to community and from individual girl to girl. While the girls interviewed identified multiple factors challenging their education, there was a considerable difference between rural and urban girls and due to the type of school a girl attended. There was also a difference between rural and urban teachers’ experiences of girls’ education.

**Rural girls vs. urban girls**

As I visited rural and urban communities, it was not long before I observed significant differences. Rural communities were less commercial and more agricultural. They had smaller population size compared to the urban areas. Availability of social infrastructure such as hospitals, good roads, district government offices, easy access to water were more of an urban phenomenon. The socioeconomic difference between the rural and urban areas influenced girls’ education in diverse ways.

Both rural and urban girls identified household poverty as the key barrier to their education. However, there were differences in the ways that poverty affected their education. While urban girls were more concerned about the extra charges and teachers attitude toward those who owe, rural girls were more concerned about day to day needs like food, school uniforms, and school supplies. There were also differences between what activities rural and urban girls were involved in. The rural girls were more involved in farming activities both on family properties and commercial plantations. Some children reported they go to the farm in the morning before going to school. Many girls stated that they carry pineapples and pawpaw from the plantations to make money to buy their basic needs. Ama, a Primary Six girl reported that she has to work at the family
farm every morning before she goes to school and during the export seasons she skips school to make money at the plantations. Ama said, “I carry pineapples to get money for school and sometimes I don’t get back home early to prepare for school.” Her story was widely shared by many rural girls rather than an isolated incident. The money girls receive for such services are used to support themselves and their families. A school management chair I interviewed explained:

> In the villages here the children don’t go to school every day because of the farm work they do. Some miss school for a whole week to carry pineapples in the farms in order to get money for school. This is because parents cannot provide for them. I remember there is one community here where children miss school during pineapple export season. We advised them but the root of the problem is poverty which is difficult to deal with.

> The poor economic condition of rural areas poses a great challenge for girls’ education. Agriculture is the main economic activity in rural areas and in Ghana, the income of farmers is one of the lowest. A teacher expressed how this affects girls’ education:

> With girls in the village, their experiences are different from girls in the city. Many of the parents in the village are uneducated and need more education about the importance of girls’ education. I talk to a girl who has to go to the farm every morning before coming to school. If school starts at 7:30 am when will this girl get to school and what could she do if she is already tired? Learning is such that if the body is already tired the mind cannot work. Some of the children also go to the farm after school. On the farm, anything could happen. Due to poor supervision a child may be hurt in the farm and the situation may be complicated for lack of adequate healthcare in rural communities.

> In addition, the differences in the availabilities of social amenities between the rural and urban areas affected girls’ education. The lack of immediate sources of water and electricity sometimes meant more work for rural girls, who because of gender roles tend
to do most of the house chores. Rural girls I talked to seem to spend more time to fetch water compared to urban girls. Janet, a girl in primary 6 reported:

I don’t only fetch water for my parents and family, I have to bring a bucket of water to school. We have water reservoirs in our school but we don’t have any source of water. Therefore, all the girls have to bring water to school from where they live. Depending on where you live, you may carry the water for a long distance.

Also, the lack of electrical power in some rural homes means girls are not able to do extra studies at home and this may negatively affect their academic performance.

Girls in the urban area, on the other hand, were engaged commercial activities, particularly selling food items. I observed urban girls selling either alone or assisting parents on market days in the market or on road side. While some of them were only working on weekends, market days or after school, some girls skipped school to help their parents in the market. Gladys, a senior high school girl, recounted why she skips school, “Your mother may ask you to help her sell before you can get money to go to school, so sometimes skipping school is a way of getting money to continue going to school. Absenting yourself is not good for students but sometimes that becomes the only option you have.”

Comparing and contrasting the experiences of girls in rural and urban areas it was evident that workload at home affected the attendance and the education of both. However, not all the girls in the urban areas worked to support their families. For the girls in the rural areas, it was almost like a norm for them to help their parents in the farm. Also, girls in the urban areas made more money that helped their education; rural girls did not always make enough money from helping with farm work.
During the focus groups I observed the urban girls were more confident and articulate than the rural girls. Ms. Angela who has taught in the rural area for three years believes the lack of confidence of these girls is the result of lack of family support and interest in their education. Ms. Angela added that the lack of exposure of rural girls affects their confidence. Urban girls have more access to resources and exposure to things that contribute to their confidence. In the rural communities I observed that most of the rural girls’ uniforms were worn out or they had fewer school supplies compared to girls in the urban areas. Mr. Jacobs, a head teacher of an urban school, noted that they inspect school uniforms and footwear of students two times every week. To him this builds some level of discipline and confidence in the children. In all the rural areas I visited this was not an expectation for the school children.

**Rural Teachers vs. Urban Teachers**

Ms. Angela and Ms. Janet teach in rural and urban public schools in the Akuapim South district, respectively. According to Ms. Angela some of the challenges facing girls’ education in the rural areas include inadequate resources, lack of teachers, the high rate of teacher turnover, and the lack of parental involvement. According to Ms. Janet challenges facing urban girls included lack of infrastructure and lack of parental involvement. Most of the teachers I interviewed shared similar views about their experiences as teachers in relation to girls’ education.

One teacher, commenting on the disparity between academic performance of rural and the urban areas stated, “In terms of academic performance between the city and
rural areas, there is a huge difference. Girls in the city do better than girls in the village because of the unequal distribution of resources.”

In the area of primary education, there is disparity between the rural and urban areas in Ghana, in terms of distance from school, school facilities, job opportunities, and teachers’ turnover rate. Children in many villages in Ghana walk long distances to school every day and this affects girls’ safety and motivation to go to school. During the “Time with FAWE” broadcast, one of the resource persons summarized the problems rural girls face:

The distance between home and school may significantly affect girls’ education especially at the JSS level. In most cases, there is no JSS in every village; therefore, girls have to walk long distances to school. They become discouraged and drop out because of the long distances they have to travel every day to school. If children had to work at home and, in addition walk long distances, then by the time they get to school they are already exhausted. In addition, when they have their menses and they have to travel long distances they will skip school or drop out.

Long distances from school are more of a rural phenomenon because of the lack of schools in smaller communities and a poor transportation system that means school children in rural areas have to walk long distances to school. While urban girls’ may have to walk long distances or take a transport to school, they choose to do that because of their parents’ preferences for specific schools. For rural girls walking long distances may be their only option to get formal education. Urban girls choose to attend schools that are not close to their homes, but rural girls do not always have the choice.

There were differences in the responses of rural and urban teachers about their long-term plans to stay in their present school, particularly female teachers. I learned that
while most of the teachers in the urban areas have taught for a long period of time in their schools or were recently transferred, most of the rural teachers were new teachers. Also, with the exception of the head teachers, many of the rural teachers were new, young or natives of the area. Urban teachers were partly young and partly old. They were also diverse in terms of their gender composition. Ms. Angela noted that as much as she loves to help the girls in her school she does not intend to live in the village for a long period of time because of the lack of social amenities for her family. Ms. Janet also indicated that she transferred to the urban school because of the difficulties she faced teaching in her rural school. One common trend I observed among rural teachers was that most of them lived in the district capital and commuted to school every morning. Sometimes they were late to school or left early to catch transport back home. This was unlike urban teachers, who lived in the same community where they taught, and because of this advantage urban teachers got to school early and were willing to stay a little longer in school. I also observed that urban teachers organized extra classes before and after the normal school hours, but this was not common in the rural schools. If extra classes are for the purposes of helping children with extra instruction, then children in rural schools may be at a disadvantage.

In “Gendered teaching experiences in Ghana,” Casely-Hayford (2008) found that female teachers posted to rural areas indicated that they would not live in the remote areas over extended periods of time because of the poor quality of education available to their children. The inability to keep female teachers in rural areas affects girls’ education disproportionately. The role of female teachers cannot be underestimated when it comes
to making schools and classrooms more girl-friendly. According to Casely-Hayford (2008), “girls’ low educational performance and underachievement has been associated with the lack of female teachers in their schools” (p. 156). She explains that female teachers serve as role models and use more gender-sensitive approaches in their classrooms (Casely-Hayford, 2008). Unfortunately, in all the rural schools I visited and in some urban junior high schools, I observed that the number of female teachers was less than male teachers. Therefore, the few who were there played multiple roles as teachers, school counselors, girls’ education coordinators, and as girls’ clubs coordinators.

Alluding to this, one teacher from a rural community, explained:

When I was first posted to this school I was the only female teacher on the staff so I became the girl-child coordinator. I organize the girls to have Christmas plays and others. The majority of the children in the school are not from this village but I visit their homes in their villages.

A head teacher agreed that due to the lack of social amenities and the poor accessibility to major cities, teachers are reluctant to teach in these areas. Those who accept the posting to the village leave after three years, especially young female teachers. According to a head teacher:

The rate at which teachers are transferred becomes a problem. For instance, almost all the teachers in this school are new so you start something with a teacher and she transfers. You have to start everything all over again. This does not help us to develop long-term programs.

Another teacher noted that the poor infrastructure in rural areas serves as a disincentive for teachers to teach.

The schools in the village need more attention and assistance. There are some schools children cannot study in when it rains because of poor infrastructure.
Some of the problems in the rural areas never happen in the city. A teacher will not sit in structures that are not conducive for learning. It seems the government has not given the rural schools the attention they deserve.

While new teachers are posted to rural areas, old and experienced teachers are transferred to urban areas. A teacher, stated: “In terms of academic performance between the city and rural areas, there is a huge difference. Girls in the city do better than the girls in the village because of the unequal distribution of resources.” The District Director of Education confirmed this assessment:

In fact, about three years ago five schools in the district scored 0% in the BECE exams and all these schools were rural schools. This made prominent people in the district take the initiative by organizing a series of Akuapim Forums. I understand last year the number was reduced to only one school with a 0%. This year we had additional two schools scoring 0% making it three. However, the overall performance in the district was better.

For a school to score 0% means that no one in the school qualified to continue to a senior high school. When this happens the children involved end their education, find a vocation or take remedial classes. Unfortunately, remedial classes are more likely to be available in urban communities than rural communities. These challenges affect the motivation of rural teachers. This does not mean teachers in urban areas do not face challenges. However, urban teachers I interacted with were more motivated, had a higher expectation of the children, and were more satisfied as teachers.

Not only are rural schools losing teachers, they are also losing their students, particularly girls, to the big cities. Ms. Angela explained to me “how girls are “lost” to big cities.” According to Ms. Angela, because of household poverty, children, especially girls and village children are sent to big cities to live with family friends, relatives, and
random people as maids. They have to terminate their education in order to assist the household of their so-called masters. A local manager articulated the process of losing young girls to big cities:

Unfortunately, many of such children who are sent to big cities to go and serve as maids are from the rural and deprived areas where many people are vulnerable and cannot take care of their children. These children leave; go to the big cities to live with guardians and mistresses and masters. Most children, due to the experiences they receive, after a short while, leave these homes to live on their own, and they do not return to the village. They stay in the cities and start petty trading under harsh conditions. Especially girls’ become too vulnerable on the streets in big cities.

The Program Coordinator of FAWE, who travels widely in Ghana to improve girls’ education, passionately noted:

These are realities on the ground and we should not let statistics deceive us. Go to the North and most of the classrooms are empty because most of the girls travel to the South to look for a better life. In certain situations the community even encourages them to come down, work, get money and go back to marry. When they go with the few things they have acquired, then other parents will encourage their girls to also come to the South.

The differences between rural and urban girls and between rural and urban teachers call for differences in approaches for rural and urban areas. Unfortunately, I observed that there are often no differences in the approaches in addressing the issues confronting rural and urban schools.

**Public schools vs. church-affiliated public schools**

Basic schools in Ghana are broadly divided into two kings: private schools and public schools. While private schools are privately owned and public schools are state-owned, certain public schools are also affiliated with religious organizations. This collaboration between the state and religious groups in the provision of education goes
back to the period of colonization, although the nature of the relationship has changed over the years. The state provides teachers and other resources for church-affiliated schools and the churches provide extra supervision and leadership for the school. Religious schools are open to all children, however to some extent; the religious groups promote their beliefs in their schools.

This research was conducted both in purely public schools and church-affiliated public schools. There was a recognizable difference between public and church-affiliated schools. The church-affiliated schools benefited from the government programs as well as church support. This additional support from churches gives these schools some edge over only state-owned schools.

In terms of the content and curriculum, there was no major difference between public schools and church-affiliated public schools. However, the overall better quality of church-affiliated schools seems to have positively affected girls in these schools. Thus, girls tend to benefit from well managed schools even if the main focus is not only on girls. Also, in examining the difference between public schools and church-affiliated schools, it is important that the locations of the schools and churches involved are not overlooked. I observed that church-affiliated public schools in rural areas tend to lack resources compared to similar schools in urban areas. The possible reason is that rural churches also lack adequate resources to invest in their schools compared to urban schools.

In this study I did not examine the experiences of girls in private schools. Children in private schools tend to perform better and are more likely to continue their
education than children in public schools. However, public schools, overall, tend to have more trained teachers than private schools. This contradiction may be attributed to the effective supervision and the morale of teachers in private schools. Because parents pay for everything, private schools tend to have more resources than public schools. For future studies I recommend a comparative study between girls in private schools and public schools.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 3: How do parents make the decision whether to keep their girls in school or take them out of school?**

The decision to keep girls in school or remove them does not happen in a vacuum, this decision is shaped by factors including beliefs, philosophies, values, and attitudes of parents. Type of family and their financial situation also influences parents’ decision to keep their girls in school. Over the years the concept of a family or household which involved husband, wife, and children has changed in Ghana. Girls indicated living with both parents, only one parent, a close relative or a family friend. Parent informants’ responses about their decision to keep their daughters in school were varied and mixed. According to the parents interviewed, their decisions were motivated by their financial situation, personal experience, and perceptions about girls’ education. Some parents cited economic reasons to be the major reason to withdraw their girls from school; others cited the performance of their girls, plans for the future,

To understand the decisions of the parents to keep their daughters in school, I provide a brief family profile of some of the girls involved in the study. Abigail lives in the district capital with both her parents. However, she has to sell on the road side to
supplement the family income. Janet lives with her mother in a rural community, her parents divorced when she was 8 years. Ama is also 11 years-old and she lives with a family friend at the district capital. Ama’s mother lives in a village in a district and is not making enough from her farm proceeds. When Ama’s mother was asked by a friend to let Ama come and live with her it was a relief. Meanwhile, Ama reported that her mother’s friend has not shown commitment to her education. This family type and background from my observation was not necessarily a determining factor in keeping girls in school or not. Rather, it is the implication of the family type on families’ financial situation. According to a mother I interviewed, many women in the district have become the head of their household with insufficient income. This makes it practically impossible to give their children higher education. She expressed:

Caring for our children is increasingly becoming our responsibility as women; we work more than our husbands and sometimes having enough to support our children’s education becomes a problem. I would love to see my daughter go to the university but it is practically impossible.

I observed that parents’ decision to take girls out of school was not at the basic level; rather it was beyond the basic level, because of the cost involved. It was not surprising for me to see more girls enrolled at the lower primary, but most of them do not make it beyond junior high school.

Also, parents’ ideas about the usefulness of girls’ education in the future influenced their decision to keep their girls in school. Ms. Owusu, a parent, in an interview claimed:

The education of my children is like my life investment. When I become old and could not work any more, it is my children who will be taking care of me. So now that I am strong, I really take my daughter’s education seriously. I encourage her
and do my best to support her. I don’t mind if I had to sell my personal belongings to keep my girl in school.

Ms. Owusu’s statement is an example of parents’ determination to keep their girls in school. Traditionally, it is expected for children to take care of their parents when they grow up. This idea of future insurance serves as a motivation for many parents to support their children’s education. Ms. Owusu further added:

Like Kwegyir Aggrey said, “if you educate a woman you educate a nation”. The wealth and experience of a woman often extend to her family and other people. The whole well-being of the nuclear family depends on the woman, the education of the girl often times depend on the woman. Women always find ways to take care of their family even if they had to borrow but most men will not.

Similarly, a school management committee (SMC) chair, who is also a parent noted:

I have six children but when we married, my wife and I agreed to invest in our children’s education. All our children went to the tertiary level. My last born is now in the Polytechnic. We have joy not because of the money they give us but because of what they have become. Whatever, we have in our living room we didn’t buy anything ourselves. They just come in and change things in my living room. My wife had to go through a surgery, I told one of my sons in the US, and he immediately sent money for the surgery. It goes back to the investment and the sacrifice we made some years ago.

The SMC chair and the wife were retired teachers who understood the value of education. Also, financially they were in the position to support all their children’s secondary and tertiary education.

Contrary to the views shared by Ms. Owusu, some parents had other views about deciding to keep their girls in school. To them if there is not enough to support the whole family, it does not make sense to waste money, especially if the girl is not doing well.

Mr. Kwakye, a parent with two daughters, was of the view that girls’ education is
important but if a child is not doing well it is not necessary to waste the limited resources.

Mr. Kwakye noted:

I support education completely, but if a girl is not doing well, why should I send her to secondary school where it is more expensive? If a girl’s performance is poor, then I am not the one who is taking her out of school but herself. School is not for everybody; therefore, parents should look for other vocations for their children if girls are not doing well in school.

Comparing Ms. Owusu’s and Mr. Kwakye’s comment reveal what may influence parents’ decision to keep their girls’ in school. While Ms. Owusu was motivated by her perceived benefits from her daughter’s education, Mr. Kwakye was motivated by economic constraints and his daughter’s performance.

In addition, some parents reported that their personal experience shaped their decision to support and keep their girls in school. Ms. Ansah, a bread seller, only completed basic education. According to her, her life would have been different if she had at least a secondary education. Her decision to support her daughter is her personal goal to give her daughter a different and better experience than hers. Ms. Ansah during an interview stated:

My financial and social life would have been different if I had continued my education. Since I never had a secondary education, I want to support my daughter go to secondary school and possibly the university. For me it does not even matter if it’s my daughter or son, they are my children and achieving this goal will be one of my measures as a successful parent.

Ms. Yeboah responding tearfully to why she keeps her daughter in school tearfully and emotionally remarked:

You have seen how parents suffer in this town, selling, chasing cars, and risking their lives. Education is the only way that we can break the cycle. You go to some rich homes and their children live better life and get good education. This helps
them and their families to continue to live a better life. My family also deserves a better life which may come through my daughter and probably not my sons.

Ms. Yoboah’s statement supports Ms. Ansah’s experience that has shaped her motivation to keep her daughter in school. During my field visit, I personally observed the experiences of young girls and their struggles to make a living. Many of them had no education, which hinders their job options, thereby, making them more vulnerable to poverty.

Similarly, some parents were motivated to keep their girls in school because they saw education as a life long inheritance. Ms. Owusu narrated her story and how that relates to her daughter’s education:

I have 4 children and my main sources of income are a plot of land I have and a small bakery. If I was to share these among my 4 children they would not be enough for each. Besides, farming is not always lucrative or dependable source of income. Education is the only thing I could bequeath to my children which has a life long value. It is more valuable than a plot of land.

Parents’ perception about girls’ education was also found to influence parent’s decision to keep girls in school. While there was evidence that there was a general positive view about girls’ education, some parents prefer boys to girls education. The District Girl’s Education Officer (D GEO) recalled:

The perception of parents about girls makes a big difference in the parents support and attitude of the girls’ education. My father thought, educating me was a waste of his resources, according to him I will be married to a man and leave home and he will not benefit from it. Had it not been the support of my mother and my teachers who supported me, my life would have been different.

Similarly, Gifty, a 14 years-old high school girl described her father’s attitude about her education:
I am in the same class (Junior High School 3) with my younger brother but my father has told me that if my brother gets a better grade than me in the BECE, that will be my last time in school. He also said if we get the same grade, my brother will go first until he gets money to support the two of us. My brother and I are very good but I don’t know what will happen in the final exams.

In situations of limited resources parents may generally help their sons to continue their education instead of girls. The preference for boys to girls is because of the patriarchal nature of the communities where the research was conducted. Historically, boys’ education was given greater preference than girls’ education in Ghana. The findings of this research agree with other studies. Therefore, in situations of limited resources many parents choose to send their boys to school rather than girls. According to Smock (1981), “it may be that poverty, in combination with cultural dispositions to favor males, result in the very low representation of females in the education system”. A resource person during Time with FAWE was of the opinion that:

In some instances, the poverty coupled with lack of priority for girls’ education becomes a barrier to girls’ education. Parents may not have enough but if you understand the importance of girls’ education you will do all that is necessary to keep girls in school. People spend money on funeral and other unnecessary things instead of investing in their children’s education.

It is sometimes difficult to separate cultural factors and economic factors as the major determinant of girls’ education (Smock, 1981). To make a convincing argument in explaining the impact of cultural practices on girls’ education will require further studies. While decisions to keep girls in school are diverse, economic reasons were largely cited by parents to influence their decision. The economic reasons cited by parents were mixed because, while some parents were determined to support their girls with limited resources, others withdrew their girls from school in situations of limited resources.
While some single parents were struggling to provide for their children, others were determined to keep their girls in school. Almost all the parents interviewed had a positive perception about girls’ education and willingness to support girls. However, from my observation and responses gathered from the girls, there was a feeling of lack of adequate support among the girls.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 4: What kinds of interventions have been found to be effective based on the data from this research?**

The progress that has been made in girls’ education in the district is the result of various programs and interventions that have been implemented over the years. Dockrell and Messer (1999) define intervention as “any planned action designed to modify or prevent an unwanted outcome” (p. 134). The assumption is that when children receive interventions they acquire new skills or new opportunities and knowledge to do things differently from before the intervention. In this case, girls’ education interventions should improve the well-being of girls. Educational interventions targeting girls aim to increase enrollment, attendance, improve performance, and graduation rates.

**Churches Involvement in Schools**

Church participation in the provision of education in Ghana goes back to the period of colonization. There were several missionary groups such as the Wesleyan, the Basel, and the Catholics that were directly involved in education. These foreign missionary groups are no longer in Ghana but local churches continue the practice of being involved in education. The church involvement in education was evident in many ways, including infrastructure development support, motivation of teachers, and effective
monitoring and supervision. Although the church support does not focus on girls’ education, their involvement has improved girls’ education significantly compared to schools that lack this extra support.

Figure 2 is a picture of a computer lab, which is a support from the Presbyterian Church to their school. The computer lab has about ten computers, printers, and a photocopier. During my visit, the Presbyterian Church had started a library project in the school in collaboration with the school management committee. The church has also donated their old church building to the school which is being used as a pre-school for the community. In a Catholic school I visited, the church helped in building a classroom block for the school. Observing the church contribution to the schools, I attended a church service twice and realized the potential of the church as a force for raising money and other resources to support the district schools. My visit to the church coincided with the church fundraising activity. I was amazed how the church raised 300, 000, 000 cedis ($30,000) as their annual harvest [special offering organized once in a year by some churches]. This shows the ability of the church to become a key financier for community schools.
Another intervention by the church has to do with management and supervision. In addition to the management system in place for public schools, the church-affiliated public schools have local managers. The ministers and priests are appointed as local managers to oversee the unit schools. As a head teacher confirmed, “the priest is here every morning and if you are a teacher here, you always want to get to the school before the priest gets here to start going on his rounds.” A minister who also serves as the local manager noted:

The church-school relationship promotes school discipline both on the side of teachers and students. Secondly, the churches support the schools’ infrastructural development. So, comparatively, the public schools are behind the unit schools in many ways.
I observed that the teachers in church-affiliated schools were more motivated and proud to talk about their schools than teachers in the public schools. The education officers commended the churches for their support and oversight to supplement the efforts of the government.

In addition to direct involvement of the churches in education, some churches also provide small scholarships and emergency funds for families in need. The problem is that these funds from the church are often limited and church-based. This means that the funds are not open to the public but only to church members. A minister participating said, “We don’t have enough money but we are finding ways to revitalize the funds. I brought this up during my last congregational speech for us to find ways to support the needy but brilliant students.” It was evident that the role of churches was critical in the provision of education. However, because the provision of education is not the main mission of the church, there are often limited resources to be devoted to their school.

**NGOs Involvement in Girls’ Education**

Non-profit organizations, over the years, have contributed significantly to the provision of education in Ghana. FAWE-Ghana has been on the fore-front in support of girls’ education in Ghana. FAWE-Ghana’s national office happened to be in the Akuapim South District. Two key programs of FAWE that I found to be effective were their community radio and their community secondary school for girls. With support from the Rockefeller Foundation, FAWE-Ghana has established a community radio which serves most of the communities in the district. The main goal of the community radio was to promote girls’ education and women’s right in Ghana through research, awareness.
creation, advocacy, direct programs, and collaboration with other organizations. This is one of the most effective programs I saw. Almost, all participants of the study made reference to how the station is helping them understand women issues. I observed that the station was patronized by drivers, shop owners, offices and homes. There were programs that suited specific listeners, and many participants indicated benefiting from the FAWE-Ghana community radio programs.

Notwithstanding the effectiveness of the FAWE station to the district, there is restriction on coverage. Also, the not-for-profit status of the station hinders FAWE’s ability to employ the services of experienced resource persons. The program coordinator revealed that collaboration among stakeholders in the district has been weak. Many of the resource persons they invited to the station were from Accra, the national capital, but this tends to be too expensive for the station. He indicated their difficulty in recruiting resource persons to talk about issues during their broadcast:

We offer our radio station as an opportunity for people to come and talk about the issues facing children. Unfortunately, we don’t get resource persons from the community. Most of our resource persons are from Accra and elsewhere who are invited to come and talk.

Another practical and effective way that FAWE-Ghana has promoted girls’ education was the establishment of a local senior high school for girls about five years ago in the district. Nsaba Diaspora Senior High School is only open to girls, and the goal of FAWE-Ghana is to provide a model school that is less expensive, accessible, and girl-friendly. In an interview, the program coordinator for FAWE noted:

We believe that as an organization we need to model what we want to see in our schools. We put up the school to show that it is possible for girls to do better just
like the boys. So far, our first result has shown that if we become intentional about what we do for girls, we will get positive results.

Several girls during focus groups referred to the school as the dream school, particularly girls in the rural areas. Although FAWE’s girls’ school is not the only girls’ school in the district, the school has certain unique characteristics that make it more appealing to rural and less privileged girls. The school is locally-based, it is subsidized, it emphasizes empowering women; teachers are more gender-sensitive and enrollment is largely based on need.

Fig. 3: FAWE-Ghana Senior High School at Akuapim-South District.
Despite the significant role fulfilled by FAWE-Ghana in promoting girls’ education in the district, some participants thought that FAWE-Ghana could do more to help girls. The girls were interested in seeing FAWE-Ghana’s involvement in their school clubs. Only one school informed me that FAWE Girls’ Club was still functional in the school. A teacher in the same community where FAWE-Ghana is located claimed:

The children have problems and I was expecting the organization FAWE and their FM station to visit our school and have programs with the children. FAWE, which seeks to promote girls’ education, is right here but we don’t see them here. I have never seen any occasion that FAWE had come over here to teach the girls something.

In a follow-up interview, I asked the program coordinator about the criticism the teacher made about FAWE. His response was that since FAWE-Ghana is a nonprofit organization, it is donor driven. Therefore, FAWE-Ghana lacks the resources and personnel to cover all the schools in the district, region, and nation. He promised to include this school in the future.

**Government Feeding Program**

School feeding programs have been found to be an effective ways to promote girls’ education. Bellew and King (1993) contend that “nutritional deficiencies place children at risk. Malnourished children are less active, less attentive, less motivated, and less responsive than their better-nourished peers” (p. 309). Therefore, many governments and organizations have advocated free feeding programs in primary schools so as to reduce absenteeism and increase enrollment as well as attendance. The government of Ghana initiated a free lunch program for children in public primary schools. While there
are plans to extend the program to all public schools, only a few schools had benefited from the program during the study.

The feeding program has resulted in an increase in enrollment in the schools where the program has been implemented. According to a teacher, a district school saw an increase in enrollment when the feeding program was introduced. Part of the increase was because children in nearby schools transferred to the school with the program. Ms. Augustina described her experience:

When the feeding program was introduced in this school we saw a huge improvement in our enrollment but later we realized, most of the children came from a nearby village. So what happened was that enrollment fell in one school and another saw an increase because of the introduction of the program. We cannot just celebrate this as a huge success because the children came from another school.

I also learned that the program is only a pilot as it stands now. There were only three schools in the district that had initiated the feeding program in their schools. I was told by some teachers that the process of being involved in the program requires that a school kitchen be built by the school administration and inspected by a body before a program could begin in a school. Some communities found it hard, if not impossible, to build a decent kitchen for their local schools. The three schools involved in the pilot program were not the schools with the most need. When I talked to the Director of Education, I was told there were no major criteria used in selecting the schools. While participants unanimously saw the program as important to girls’ education, some were concerned about the effectiveness, the sustainability and the future of the program. A Program coordinator with FAWE, commented:
With the food program, when the girls are very young the parents allowed them to be in school because they cannot use them for any commercial activities and they will get free food. When they grow and they reach JHS level, then the parents begin to use them in the farms, shops, and market. At the higher level of education, there is even no free food to keep the girls still in school.

An urban school teacher noted that what his school needs is not food because the parents are up to the task:

We are not part of it because we don’t have a kitchen in our school. I have my own reservation about the school feeding program. The program is good for the places where children need the food most. There are some communities where children are not well fed so at least when they go to school they will have something to eat. But for some communities, food is not what the children need. For my school whether there is food or not, the children will still come to school everyday. The parents here give enough money to their children for food and most of them can afford it. What I have realized in this school is that the parents are very concerned about their children. The children are prepared to learn; they have textbooks which the parents buy. The SMC chair is always coming and the minister, who is the local manager, comes here almost every morning.

Because schools that are more endowed have the ability to build their own kitchen, they are more likely to benefit from the program though they do not necessarily need it.

Another obstacle to the effectiveness of the feeding program is the lack of effective monitoring mechanisms. Even at the pilot stage there were stories of corruption and misappropriation of funds designated for the program. Participants reported that while the idea is good, the lack of supervision prevents school children from benefiting from the program.

School-based Interventions

Children spend a significant number of hours in school; they are influenced by the interactions they have there and by the friends they make. Therefore, it is important we be concerned about what goes on in the school setting to support girls in achieving their
academic goals. As I learned from this research, girls love school and would always like to be there. A girl in junior high school stated: “My experience as a girl is that I am not living with my own parents and the only time I have to play and interact with friends is in the school. I love coming to school a lot because of all the friends I meet in the school.”

To better understand existing programs that are available to girls in schools that I visited, I asked participants about school-based programs that seek to promote girls’ education.

Each of the schools I visited had a teacher who was also the girls’ education coordinator. The school-based coordinator is the liaison between the District Girls’ Education Officer and the school or the girls. The coordinator implements programs, organizes girls’ clubs, and works with other teachers to create environments that are welcoming to girls. All the participants reported having girls’ clubs in their schools, such as SARA or the FAWE Junior Club.

SARA Club is a communication initiative introduced in 2002 by John Hopkins University and supported by UNICEF. The initiative focuses on self-efficacy and social norms, especially addressing adolescent girls and their special needs related to reproductive health, HIV prevention, and educational attainment (Girls’ Education Unit, 2006). The goal of the initiative is to urge adolescent girls to remain focused on the struggle to achieve their life goals in the face of prevailing social and public health challenges (Girls’ Education Unit, 2006). The main achievement of this initiative, as indicated by participants, included increased awareness about the importance of education and working to achieve a reduced rate of teenage pregnancy.
Nevertheless, I observed that SARA Club has not been effective in all schools. In most of the schools, club meetings were not consistent and resources for the clubs were missing or limited. The coordinators, who were also teachers, complained about the difficulty in combining all their class demands with demands as coordinators. The role of a coordinator is voluntary. A coordinator bluntly stated:

I think the Ghana Education Service should show commitment to girls’ education by assigning a full-time coordinator. Frankly speaking, being a classroom teacher and also being a coordinator is extremely tedious. For the role of the coordinator to be effective, the coordinator needs more time to plan programs and interact with the children. I cannot leave my class to attend to the problems girls bring to the school. I cannot use the instructional hours to attend to all the problems girls face every day.

In addition, lack of female teachers, especially in rural schools, presents another challenge for school-based girls’ programs. When there are few or no female teachers, several responsibilities fall on the shoulders of the few available teachers.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have presented the themes that emerged from focused-group discussions with girl-participants, interviews with adult participants, document analysis, and the observations I made during my field visits. The four research questions guided the discussion for this chapter. Privileging the voices of girls and their experiences, who are often powerless and silent, was the main focus of the study.

In the first section I explored the contradictions between girls’ own educational experiences and the perspective of selected adults about girls’ education. They included government officials, teachers, parents, and NGO staff. I learned from the data that girls clearly understand their own experiences and their perspective often times contrasts with
adult views. Girls expect to see more from the state, teachers, and parents. While the
government reports increases in girls’ enrollment, girls in the study noted the factors that
affect their attendance, performance, and retention. Also, teachers reported that they treat
girls and boys equally. Contrary to this view, girls reported teachers often give up on
average students and tend to give more attention to boys than girls. Furthermore, while
girls appreciated the effort of their parents to support them, they think support goes
beyond money to include parents’ involvement in school activities.

The second section examined the major factors affecting girls’ education. I found
that girls’ educational experiences are shaped by multiple factors, but the key factors
were financial constraints and lack of adequate resources. There were differences in the
experiences of and rural and urban girls, rural teachers and urban teachers. Girls growing
up in the urban area had better educational experiences and opportunities than girls
attending rural schools. This is a result of the disparity of resources between the urban
and rural areas.

In section three, I discussed what influences parents to keep girls in school.
Parents stated that they care about their girls and want to keep them in school. However,
due to financial reasons, sometimes it is practically impossible, especially at the
secondary level, which requires more money. A few parents indicated that if a girl is not
doing well in school then it is a waste of resources to spend money on her.

The last section looked at interventions that I found to be effective based on data
analysis. The study found several on-going programs to promote girls’ education but their
effectiveness appeared mixed. This calls for further studies in understanding efforts to
promote girls’ education in Ghana. In situations of limited resources understanding the effectiveness of government and non-governmental programs will be critical, prudent, and necessary.

Overall, the thoughtfulness and the insights of the girls was what I found to be most revealing in understanding girls’ educational experiences. While the views shared by the girls are consistent with several studies on girls’ education, they also contradict and somewhat challenge popular views as well as existing literature. It is the girls’ voices privileged in this study and their perspectives that I find to be radical, fundamental, and critical to the future of girls’ education in Ghana.
CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This final chapter is a summary and a general overview of the study as well as highlights of the major findings. Based on the findings of this study I propose points of leverage to promote girls’ education in Ghana.

Summary

The first chapter, the introduction, provided the background, purpose of the study, research questions guiding the study, delimitations, as well as the definition of terms. The overarching goal for this study was to understand girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District, Ghana. Gender inequality in education is not a new phenomenon. Since the introduction of formal education in Ghana, girls’ have been lagging behind boys in terms of access, performance, and the continuation of their education. Studies on women’s education have found several factors to explain gender inequality in education, including colonialism, patriarchy, political economy and poverty, parents’ attitude, lack of resources for schools, and lack of role models for girls (Hill & King, 1995; Smock, 1981; Stromquist, 2001; Sutherland-Addy, 2002).

Prior to Ghana’s independence in 1957, and after independence, there have been efforts by the government, and civil society organizations, and international organizations to promote girls’ education (Foster, 1965). Notwithstanding the progress that has been made in promoting education in Ghana, girls are consistently out of school and are also more likely to drop out than boys.
The rationale for this study stems from the ongoing disparity between girls’ and boys’ access to primary education and the difficulty in keeping girls in school. To understand girls’ educational experiences, it was critical for space to be created for girls to share their own experiences in their own voices. The significance of this study was to provide the baseline knowledge in understanding girls’ educational experiences. There are several studies on girls’ education in Ghana, but there are few that critically examine the phenomenon from the perspective of girls. Therefore, the baseline knowledge acquired through this study will be useful to policymakers, civil society organizations, schools and teachers, communities, and parents in promoting girls’ education in Ghana.

The central research question that guided this study was: In their own voices, what is critical in the views of girls and parents, teachers, education officers, community leaders and government officials about girls’ educational experience at the Akuapim South district? The central research question was also guided by four specific and related questions. The questions sought to understand girls’ educational experiences through the contradictions among variety of participants.

Chapter 2 reviewed the relevant literature as well as explored the theoretical framework and foundation for the study. The literature review section was categorized into five major themes:

- Gender in education
- Factors influencing girls’ education in Africa and Ghana
- Importance of education in Africa and Ghana
- Strategies to promote girls’ education
Challenges to promoting girls’ education in Africa and Ghana

Girls’ education is broadly situated in the context of gender. Francis (2006) asserts that there are two main perspectives about the concept of gender. The first perspective sees gender difference as innate and views males and females to be naturally different, and the second perspective views gender expressions as social constructions. While every country treats women differently, all societies maintain a sex differential between males and females. Unfortunately, this dichotomy has a powerful effect on everyday life, particularly for women. In the area of education, the issue of gender plays out in different ways that hinder the progress of women (Bellew & King, 1993; Herz & Sperling, 2004; Hyde, 1981; Smock, 1991; Unterhalter, 2008). In most developing countries, girls’ education is behind boys’ education in terms of enrollment, attendance, performance, and continuation. Several scholars believe that the disparity between boys and girls is the result of socioeconomic factors, which include cultural practices, lack of parental support, poverty, parents’ attitude toward girls, teachers’ attitude toward girls, poor infrastructure, and overall poor quality of education (Dunne et al., 2005; King & Hill, 1993).

The study was grounded in the Ecology of Human Development framework. The Ecology of Human Development, propounded by Urie Brofenbrenner (1979), provided the perspective in understanding the complexities involved in the phenomenon of girls’ education in Ghana. He defined the ecology of human development as:

The scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, *through the life course*, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected
by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Brofenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)

The statement in italics, *through the life course*, was added when the definition was revised later. Bronfenbrenner’s main argument is that human development is a product of interactions between the growing human organism and his/her environment (1979). The relationship of this framework to girls’ education is that gender is a social concept influenced by multiple factors; therefore, to promote girls’ education requires the adoption of a multifaceted strategy.

Chapter 3 provides a snapshot of the socioeconomic background of Ghana. To understand the status of girls’ education in Ghana, it is important to look at the history of education and the socioeconomic development of Ghana since independence. The Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS 4) provided important household data on socio-economic factors such as income, employment, quality of life, and social amenities.

Chapter 4, which is the methodology chapter, discusses the techniques, steps, and procedures used in data gathering and analysis. The phenomenological approach was the methodology used for the study. Additionally, the feminist perspective informed my methodological approach and my interest in privileging the voices of my participants, especially girls. The use of the phenomenological approach and a feminist perspective aimed for deeper understanding of the educational experiences of girls in the Akuapim South District. The main purpose of phenomenological studies is that they do not simply seek the facts or the causes of certain incidents; rather they are aimed at understanding the lived experiences of people through the various acts of consciousness.
Privileging voices is a concept borrowed from the feminist perspective. According to Pillow and Mayo (2007), “the attention to and concerns about relationships with subjects—including issues of reciprocity, representation and voice is uniquely feminist” (p. 163). The feminist perspective informed my methodology including my data collection process. Thus, while the voices of children are often overlooked in social research, their voices were central in this study.

The participants involved in the study included girls in primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools, whose ages were between 10 years and 18 years. Other adults participating in the study included teachers, school administrators, education officers, and community leaders. By involving different groups of participants, I was able to collect broad and varied perspectives, critical in validating my findings. The study was conducted in four communities in the Akuapim South District. Two of the communities may be considered as urban (population more than 5,000), the other two communities were rural (population less than 5,000). These communities were selected because of easy access and because of the initial contacts I made with community leaders.

Data for the study were collected through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, document analysis, and observation. For the purposes of validating the data collected from different sources triangulation was used. Both the interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital voice recorder. I sought the permission of participants to have interviews and focus groups recorded. The limitation with the use of voice recorder was that I could not capture important information that was observed. To address this limitation I kept four different diaries, one for each of the communities I visited, to take
field notes and for my personal reflections. In keeping four different diaries I avoided the possibility of confusing the different sites of data collection.

During the fieldwork, I started taking notes about the emerging themes and about insightful observations. However, I began transcription after I returned from the field. A five-step process outlined by Carol M. Roberts (2004) was adopted in analyzing my data.

**Step 1**: Transcription and Initial Reading of Transcription

**Step 2**: Coding and Categorization of Responses

**Step 3**: Organization of Patterns and Themes

**Step 4**: Final Review of All Transcripts to Validate Patterns and Themes

**Step 5**: Completion of Data Analysis and Report of Findings

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study based on the data collected during my fieldwork. The chapter was guided by the research questions and theoretical framework discussed in chapter 3. I examined the contradictions about girls’ education from different perspectives. The challenges confronting girls’ education and how parents make the decision to keep their girls in school were also examined. Lastly, I discussed the interventions I found to be effective based on the data collected for this study.

**Major Findings**

In this subsection, I present a summary of my major findings, the themes and sub themes that emerged from document analysis, interviews, focus groups, and observation of participants involved in the study. The 102 participants included girls, teachers, parents, community leaders, and education officers.
1. Girls reported that their education, performance, and school attendance are interrupted by family demands, lack of financial support, attitude of teachers, and poor school facilities. There were several contradictions between the views of the girls participating in the study and adults such as government officials, teachers, and parents. Listening to the stories and voices of girls was found to be critical in understanding girls’ education and promoting their interests.

2. Girls’ education in Ghana is shaped by multiple factors which intersect at different levels to hinder girls’ enrollment, performance, and retention. The evidence from this study revealed that there are major socioeconomic factors influencing girls’ education in the Akuapim South District. The key among them is financial constraints. There were considerable differences between urban girls and rural girls as well as between urban teachers and rural teachers. Many of the findings here are consistent with what the literature reveals about girls’ education. Hyde (1993) notes that factors affecting girls’ education in African countries are wide range including negative parental and community attitudes, the lack of opportunity of sending girls to school, wealth, and economic development, disparities between urban and rural areas; unfavorable labor market opportunities, and low-quality schools with limited curriculum choices.

3. Parents’ decisions to keep their girls in school were influenced by several factors. There was a general consensus that girls’ education was important to parents. There was a sense of positive belief, philosophy, and attitude of parents toward education. However, financial reasons and poor academic performance were cited
as the keys reason parents will consider to withdraw their girls to school. Several parents saw the education of their girls as a future insurance; therefore, they took the education of their girls seriously. However, this good intention and perception of parents about girls’ education did not always translate into action and support. The contradictions between what parents perceived to be the benefits of girls’ education and the lack of the necessary support for their daughters need further exploration. The possible explanation of this contradiction is poverty, misplaced priorities, and lack of commitment of guardians other than parents.

4. The study found some interventions to have been effective in promoting girls’ education in the district. Among them were the feeding program being piloted by the government, community radio to create awareness about women issues and the establishment of senior high school for girls by FAWE-Ghana. Also, several churches were found to be actively involved in the provision of primary education in the district.

**Suggestions**

Evidence from this study reveals that regardless of the progress that has been made in Ghana on gender parity and on education for all, girls continue to face many challenges in pursuit of their education. Based on the current rate of growth, it is feared that Ghana, as well as other Sub-Saharan African countries, may not be able to achieve the education for all target by 2015 (Semali, 2007). In addition, achieving the education-for-all goal is not the end of the daily challenges of girls who make it to school. It is important that we move the discussion on girls’ education from access to quality as well
as work to ensure that basic education builds the capabilities of girls. The call to look beyond access is reiterated by a UNESCO (2005) states, “It is clearly not enough to simply enroll children into school but to ensure that they complete primary schooling equipped with a comprehensive set of basic literacy and numeric skills” (p. 3). It is critical for all stakeholders to work together in developing new strategies to curtail the obstacle that work against girls’ education. Since the obstacles reside both outside education systems (in society) and inside education systems, there is the need for Ghana to adopt a comprehensive approach to address the issues facing girls’ education. Interestingly, the issues confronting girls’ education are problems with known solutions. What is needed is the commitment from all stakeholders, from the international community to the individual household.

In this subsection I am offering a set of suggestions to promote and improve the state of girls’ education in the Akuapim South District. My suggestions are based on the premise that to promote girls’ education requires the multifaceted and collaborative approach. Ideally, girls’ education requires a comprehensive approach that tackles the people from different fronts. However, to achieve this goal is difficult and far-fetched. To find points of leverage, a second group of suggestions are made that address practical issues at the micro-level.

**Comprehensive Girls’ Education Model to Promote Girls’ Education**

The comprehensive model to promote girls’ education in Ghana was developed after my experience doing this phenomenological study. The model is largely based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecology of Human Development. Bronfenbrenner’s main
argument is that human development is a product of interactions between the growing human organism and his/her environment (1979). He adds that human beings are affected by the immediate setting in which they grow as well as by larger settings (Brofenbrenner, 2005). Although Brofenbrenner’s framework acknowledges the issue of genetics, he places greater emphasis on the effect of multiple environmental factors. According to Brofenbrenner (1979), “the developing person is viewed not merely as a tabula rasa on which the environment makes its impact, but as a growing, dynamic entity that progressively moves into structures in the milieu in which it resides” (p. 21).

Similarly, the comprehensive model is based on the basic principle that girls’ education is influenced by multiple factors in the different settings in which girls find themselves. There are also remote settings where girls may not necessarily be present but are greatly impacted by what goes on there. For instance, girls may not be involved in the national politics of Ghana but they are affected by the decisions of the government. Like the Ecology of Human Development, this model also acknowledges the role of environmental factors in shaping girls’ educational outcomes. However, the characteristics of girls cannot be overlooked. Gender differences are primarily influenced by the combination of genetics and environment. According to Kauchak and Eggen (2008), “because little can be done about genetics, more attention has been given to the environment, particularly gender-role identity differences, expectations, and beliefs about appropriate roles and behaviors of the two sexes” (p. 88). Girls’ education is influenced by what happens at home, in the school, community, and the nation as well as on the international front. The outcome of girls’ education is as a result of the combination of
various factors in these different settings in which girls find themselves or are absent from. Therefore, any attempt to promote girls’ education that fails to closely look at the effects of the multiple settings is likely to fall short or fail. A UNICEF (n.d.) report, supporting this assertion, notes, “Developing, sustaining and participating in partnerships are required for effective advocacy, co-ordination and action for girls’ education” (p. 1). The dysfunction of any of the settings could significantly affect the outcome of girls’ education. For instance, girls’ educational performance may be affected by lack of parental support, despite the fact that the girls are enrolled in a good school. Teachers’ efforts may not yield the intended results if their efforts are not supplemented by parental support, positive attitudes, and motivations.

The comprehensive model to promote girls’ education identifies four main settings critical to girls’ education: the home, school, community, and the national/international settings. Besides these settings, the active role of the girls themselves, their determination and motivations, are important for successful educational outcomes. UNICEF (n. d.), assessing basic education and gender equality, convincingly suggests that for girls’ education programs to be successful, all partners need to be involved, from government to communities, from NGOs to multilateral and bilateral corporations, from parents to children. The different settings in the comprehensive model are similar to Brofenbrenner’s four systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Figure 4 illustrates the comprehensive model I propose to promote girls’ education in Ghana.
Figure 4: Comprehensive Girls’ Education Model.

The settings affecting girls’ education include the home, school, community, and the nation. While girls are directly involved in their immediate settings, such as the home and the school, they may not directly be involved at what happens at the international, national, and community levels. However, girls’ education is significantly influenced by national and district policies that govern girls’ education. In Ghana, the Girls’ Education Unit, is responsible for promoting girls’ education and many of the practices concerning girls’ education in school are as a result of policies put in place by the state, the district, and the Girls’ Education Unit.
The main principles underlining the comprehensive model are:

- Girls’ education is influenced largely by environmental factors; however, individual girls have a role to play.

- There are multiple factors that combine to explain the status of girls’ education in Ghana. These factors reside in four environmental settings, the home, the school, the community and the national, including the international setting.

- How these settings affect girls’ education may be complex, direct, or indirect.

- The influences of these settings on girls’ education may be context specific in their impact.

- To promote girls’ education will require the collaboration, coordination, involvement, and contribution from all the players in these four settings. When there is lack of responsiveness in any of the settings, then educational programs for girls fail to yield the expected outcome.

Because home, school, community, and nation shape girls’ education considerably, I will examine how each setting affects and contributes to girls’ education.

First, the home-setting is the immediate environment children encounter before they have any contact with the school. In addition, many children spend a significant amount of their time at home and with family members. Therefore, girls’ education requires parental involvement, collaboration, positive attitudes, and support. Teachers’ effort in the school will be meaningless if it is not supplemented by parents’ interest and support of their children’s education. The Michigan Department of Education (2001) reported that school age children spend 70% of their waking hours (including weekends and
holidays) outside of school. The home environment has such a powerful influence on
learning; therefore, parents, children, and teachers working together are critical to a

The decision to send a child to school is taken in the home. Traditions, poverty
and power-sharing in the family can seal a girls’ fate. In societies where women
are confined to the home and patrilineal principles of inheritance prevail…most
often cuts schooling short for many households. (p. 52)

For girls’ education programs to be successful requires a critical look at the home
situation. Parental involvement comes in different dimensions, such as helping and
monitoring children’s homework, visiting the school to inquire about the performance of
children, reducing house chores for girls and helping them to acquire time management
skills. Parental involvement also includes parents’ attitude toward girls’ education and
their expectations of their children, particularly girls. Epstein (1989), who has been
conducting research on parental involvement in school over a decade, identifies the
positive effect of parent involvement in school and on learning outcomes. According to
Epstein (1989), parental involvements “occur in different places, require different
materials and processes, and lead to different outcomes” (p. 25). She identified five types
of parental involvement in education; however, her study was conducted in a different
context and may not be applicable in the context of this study. Specific to this study
parent’s involvement in girls’ education as discussed by participants’ means parents
providing basic needs, visiting school regularly, showing interest in girls’ education, and
reducing girls’ workload at home.
Second, the school setting and environment is also important to girls’ educational success. Besides the home, the school setting is where children spend most of their time during the day. What happens in the school has far-reaching consequences for the learning outcome and interactions with children, particularly girls. Even in a situation where there is full parental support, in a school environment that is hostile to girls, inadequate teachers, and lacks facilities, certainly girls’ education would be negatively affected. For parental involvement to be effective, it must be matched with effective schools where girls are always welcome and adequately supported.

Third, the community setting in which children grow affects them in many ways including their education. The proximity of school to home, availability of teachers, community role models, and lack of resources, particularly, in rural areas all contribute to girls’ school performance, attendance, enrollment, and pursuit of secondary and higher education. Since children do not choose the community they are born into, it is the responsibility of the state, parents, and community leaders to ensure that children thrive irrespective of the communities where they live. The government has to put more resources into rural education, provision of infrastructure, and incentives to attract teachers to rural areas.

Fourth, the national and international setting has a major role in achieving the goal of quality education for all. The government sets the direction and the framework for girls’ education. This involves the curriculum, teacher training, budget and expenditure, and the commitment of the state. Government departments in charge of girls’ education need adequate resources and support to perform their roles effectively. The international
communities should back international conventions such as the MDG, Convention on the Rights of Children, and Education For All as they pertain to girls’ education in developing countries. This commitment and the support of these conventions should be evident through direct action and access to adequate resources from various stakeholders.

The comprehensive model could only be effective when all these players mentioned above fit in the piece of the puzzle. As the state becomes committed by providing the needed resources, are communities’ fights against all sociocultural practices that inhibit girls’ education, as teachers support girls in a caring relationship, and as parents become directly involved in their girls’ education, then the vision of education for all, particularly girls, become plausible. I acknowledge that bringing all stakeholders to the same table has always been difficult, if not impossible, therefore; the comprehensive model has the potential to promote girls’ education in the long-run. In the next section I provide interventions that are manageable, practical, and probably less expensive to promote girls’ education. I call these interventions points of leverage.

**Points of Leverage**

As we seek a comprehensive and long-term approach to promote girls’ education there are points of leverage that are critical to the overall goal of education for all. Points of leverage are micro-level efforts to promote girls’ education. As Gladwell (2002) in his book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things can Make a Big Difference* suggests “We need to prepare ourselves for the possibility that sometimes big changes follow from small events, and that sometimes these changes can happen very quickly” (p. 11). Thus, as we wait for a comprehensive big push we should take advantage of small efforts that
could improve girls’ educational experience. These small efforts include interventions that are immediate and address specific problems and needs. Most of these interventions are already being practice but needs expansion. It is just a wishful thinking for anyone to believe that the solution to girls solely will come from the corridors of international financial institutions or the government. Gladwell (2002) is of the view that little changes having big effects is fairly radical. Radical in the sense that social change may not always result from big initiatives but from small efforts. From my experience, I believe community initiatives tend to be more effective because they always address specific problems familiar to a community. Government programs often tend to be one size-fits-all and may not always address programs that are communities specific. Based on the findings of this study I suggest the following as points of leverage to address the issues confronting girls’ education.

**Civil Society Participation**

Throughout the study I observed there was little civil society participation in the provision of education in the district, with the exception of the churches and FAWE-Ghana. Civil society participation has been found to be a strong force in addressing social issues. It is impossible for government to resolve all the different issues confronting different communities single handedly. Nobody understands a community’s problem better than the community; therefore, grassroots participation is critical to promoting girls’ education. What civil society and individuals could do to promote girls’ education is limitless. Local government could set up a fund to receive donations from community members home and abroad to support education. In Ghana, the Otumfuo Education
Fund, and the Northern Education Trust Fund typify what civil society could do.

Otumfuo Osei Tutu is the king of the Ashantis and he set up an education trust fund.

Since its establishment the fund has expanded and supported several needy students in Ghana. During my visit I observed that the local leadership of the district was weak and had no trust fund in place to support community schools.

Individual contributions could go a long way to support girls, I observed that there were local artisans who could mobilize themselves to assist schools maintain their building. While individuals may not afford supporting a whole school, it is possible for individuals to financially support a child. If Ms. Angela profiled in this study could adopt a child and support many children, then there are several ways communities could take care of their own schools.

**Effective Supervision and Monitoring**

As a researcher I learned that problem with girls’ education was not the absence of programs; rather, it was the lack of effectiveness and coordination among programs that were already created. I observed that schools that had effective supervision and monitoring systems performed better than schools without one. For instance, the unit schools which extra supervision from local managers had appointed by churches seem to perform better. The role of girls’ education coordinators and District Girls’ education coordinators was not well coordinated among the various stakeholders. There was no standard system in place for reporting on the progress of girls in schools. A form has to be developed for a monthly report from girls’ coordinators to have to be submitted to the District Girls’ Education Coordinator. These reports will provide a database with
information about the state of girls’ education in the district. The report should cover issues such as attendance, enrollment, performance, retention, club meetings and others items. Regular visit of the District Girls’ Education Coordinator to the schools school be encouraged. They need to be trained to serve as a resource for the school coordinators.

In addition, government programs should be monitored and evaluated periodically to assess the outcomes of the program. For instance, the feeding program and the capitation grant have been found to have resulted in increase in enrollment. However, this conclusion does not give us enough information about attendance and performance. School programs should be set up in such a way that parents will also be part of and committed to the programs by allowing their children to attend school regularly.

Teacher training and Incentives for Rural teachers

The study also revealed that some teachers ‘attitudes toward girls serve as a hindrance to their progress in education. From my observation certain teachers are not sensitive to the experiences of girls; therefore, they lack the skills to provide them with the support they need. Gender in education should become an integral part of teacher education to help teachers provide the support girls need.

Furthermore, I found a difference between urban teachers and rural teachers in relation to girls’ education. There was lack of female teachers in rural areas and their rate of turnover was higher than urban teachers. The lack of social amenities and the challenges rural teachers face serve as a disincentive for teachers to stay in rural areas for a long time. Therefore, teachers in rural areas need some incentive to help keep them for a long period of time. For instance, in one of the schools I visited there were apartments
built by the District Assembly to house teachers. This was an incentive for new teachers
to at least spend the time in the community. Teachers in rural schools without this
incentive often live in the district capital and commute everyday. Other incentives I
recommend are an extra stipend for rural teachers, especially for female teachers who live
rural areas for an extended period of time. Girls’ education coordinators should also be
given a stipend for the extra work they do as coordinators. This will improve their role as
coordinators.

**Curriculum for Girls Clubs**

As a researcher, I found the girls clubs to be one potential that has been under-
utilized in promoting girls’ education. Girls clubs could be used in developing the
confidence and motivation girls. As I learned from most schools, there was no curriculum
or handbook available for coordinators in-charge of girls clubs to use. While the girls’
education unit in Ghana had a handbook on girls’ education, it was not readily available
for teachers neither were they familiar with the use of it. To be intentional about what
girls learn in these meetings it will be important for a curriculum to be developed. The
curriculum could cover topics such as personal motivation, learning strategies, public
speaking, self-confidence and personal responsibility.

Furthermore, this study revealed that creating the space for girls to share their
own experiences is critical in promoting girls’ education. Teachers have a role to play in
empowering girls to speak out as well as in creating the space for them to speak. Girls
should know that the teachers they work with genuinely care for them and have the
confidence of the teachers.
Limitations

In this study I set out to understand the educational experiences of girls, specifically in the Akuapim South District. The study was a phenomenological study guided by a feminist perspective. The study was restricted to only 1 district out of the 110 districts in Ghana and the 17 districts in the eastern region. The selected communities and schools where the study was conducted are not representative of the district. Based on these limitations of the study, the findings and conclusions drawn in this study cannot be generalized; neither are they wholly applicable in other contexts. However, this does not negate the findings of the study. Many communities in Africa and Ghana, in particular, share certain common features. As Wolff (1981) noted, “one may merely know that no one is alone and hope that a singular story, as every true story is singular, will in the magic way of some things apply, connect, resonate, touch a major chord” (p. 72).

Furthermore, the limited time and period in which the study was conducted prevented me from observing teacher-student interactions in the classroom and school dynamics. While this was a limitation, it does not, discredit the findings of the study; rather, it opens up opportunities for further study in understanding girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District.

The study is not exhaustive or explains all the issues involved in girls’ education in Ghana. Nevertheless, the goal to understand girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District has been met. This understanding provides a new opportunity and way of approaching studies involving children.
Conclusion

This study has revealed that the goal of providing education for all, particularly girls, by 2015 is far-fetched. Although progress has been made with girls’ education, in girls’ own words, it is clear that challenges still persist. The obstacles to girls’ education outlined in this study must be overcome and not postponed, because of the urgency of the issues. Girls continue to drop out of school and fail to pursue secondary and higher education.

Surprisingly, girls’ education is one of the world’s problems with a known solution (Sperling, 2005). Therefore, it is inexcusable for the international community, the government of Ghana, local communities, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to fail girls by not providing them with the key to a better future: quality education. The stakes are too high not to act and the benefits of acting and investing in girls’ education are immeasurable. As Nelson Mandela stated,

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that a son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.

The premise of this study was that involving and listening to the voices of children, in this case, girls, is a critical approach toward achieving quality education for all. Jonathan Kozol (1992), in Savage Inequalities: Children in America’s Schools, acknowledges that “we have not been listening much to children in the recent years of
summit conferences on education, of severe reports, and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, have been missing from the whole discussion” (p. 5). For this reason, many programs are not responsive, effective, appropriate, and comprehensive in promoting girls’ education in Ghana and in other developing countries.

In addition, girls’ education programs will not achieve their intended results if the multiple factors affecting girls are not considered at the same time. Different societies and communities are plagued with different challenges; therefore, girls’ education programs which fall short of context-specific analyses and initiatives are not likely to meet the goals of quality education for all. Chimombo (2005), in a study in Malawi, concluded that “the extent to which these strategies can be implemented in other countries will depend on the social, economic and cultural contexts” (pp. 141-142). Ghana’s inability to achieve education for all is partly not because of a lack of direction or programs; rather, it is because of the lack of commitment, resources, monitoring, and coordination among important stakeholders. Tony Blair’s Commission on Africa report, *Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa* (2005), described an approach to resolve Africa’s socioeconomic situation,

The problems they address are interlocking. They are vicious circles which reinforce one another. They must be tackled together. To do that Africa requires a comprehensive “big push” on many fronts at once. Partners must work together to implement this package with commitment, perseverance and speed, each focusing on how they can make the most effective contribution. (p. 13)
As a researcher it is my hope that the findings highlighted in this study will generate further discussion around involving voices of children in educational research, particularly girls’ education. Change will only come when we listen and act on the voices of children. I cannot forget the faces, the voices, and the questions the girls who participated in the study posed. One girl asked, “After these interviews what are you going to do to help change our present situation.” Another girl passionately appealed, “Please remember to let our parents, teachers, and the government hear about what we are experiencing here and what we think; we are struggling?” I could still hear the voices and the cry of these girls for help. They have aspirations to become doctors, lawyers, radio presenters, teachers, nurses, activists and many other things. They know well that unless there is an intervention to change their present condition, many of them will not be able to achieve their goals.

This study has addressed the need to privilege voices of children in policies and programs that affect them. This is only the starting point for what needs to be done to address the challenges girls face in their education in Ghana. I invite the international community, the government, communities, teachers, parents, and others to step up their approach to girls’ education in Ghana. The benefits of education to women will be a mirage, if nothing drastic is done to curtail the challenges girls face in their education in Ghana.
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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

The following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University for the period listed below. This review was conducted through an expedited review procedure as defined in the federal regulations as Category(ies):

7

Project Title: From Messages to Voices: Understanding Girls’ Educational Experience in some Selected Communities in the Akuapim South District, Ghana

Researcher(s): Collins Anin

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Francis Godwiyi

Department: Education

Rebecca Cale
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date 8/17/07
Expiration Date 8/16/08

This approval is valid until expiration date listed above. If you wish to continue beyond expiration date, you must submit a periodic review application and obtain approval prior to continuation.

Adverse events must be reported to the IRB promptly, within 5 working days of the occurrence.

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
Informed Consent to Participate in Research (adult subjects)

My name is Collins Annin and I am a doctoral student in the Cultural Studies Department, College of Education at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio. I am conducting this research on girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District. I am specifically interested in understanding the factors influencing girls’ education in the district. To that end I have selected your community/school/district to interview different people about girls’ education.

I will be seeking the help of parents, education officers, teachers and community leaders to volunteer to participate in a one-hour interview. At some point in the research process, I may be asking you if you would like me to follow up for the purposes of clarification. If you agree to participate, you do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable with and you may choose to withdraw or terminate the interview at any time.

Please know that the activities I observe or record during my meetings and your responses to interview questions are for my educational purposes. However, the outcome of this study may be used by stakeholders to improve girls’ education in the district. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University (740)593-0664. My personal e-mail and phone number are ca284703@ohio.edu and 740-597-7898. For those of you who might want it, I am happy to provide you with contact numbers for my academic advisor and/or department chair.

My signature below certifies that this consent statement was read to me on [DATE]. I personally grant Collins Annin consent to interview me for the purpose of collecting data for his doctoral dissertation.

Signature                                                                                               Date
Parental Permission/Informed Consent (parents of minor participants)

Your child is being asked to participate in a study about girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South district. The goal of this study is to understand the factors influencing girls’ education. Your child is being asked to take part in this study because most of the time we do not give children the opportunity to share their own experiences. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you agree to your child being involved in the study.

If you decide to let your child take part in this study she will be asked to tell me about her experiences as a girl in school. This will take the form of interviews or a focus group discussion during school hours in the school. This will take about 45 to 60 minutes. During the interviews and focus groups, I will audio tape the discussions and also take notes. This is only for the purposes of remembering what will be discussed during the interviews and focus groups.

Though there do not appear to be any risks or discomforts to your child, as a researcher I will let the child know that she may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties. Also, your decision to allow your child to take part in the study is voluntary. Your child is free to choose not to take part in the study or to stop taking part at any time without any penalty.

Any information obtained about your child from the research including observations and responses to interview questions, will be kept strictly confidential. I will also protect your child’s confidentiality by coding her information with different names so no one can trace the answers to her name. I will ensure notes-taken during interviews are properly disposed of and other research records stored in locked cabinets. Please note that the data derived from this study could be used in reports, presentations, and publications but your child will not be individually identified.

Please know that the activities I observe or record during my meetings and your responses to interview questions are for my educational purposes. However, the outcome of this study may be used by stakeholders to improve girls’ education in the district. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University (740)593-0664. My personal e-mail and phone number are ca284703@ohio.edu and 740-597-7898. For those of you who might want it, I am happy to provide you with contact numbers for my academic advisor and/or department chair.
Statement of Consent (To be returned to the researcher)

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to allow my child (CHILDS’ NAME) to participate in this study. I have been provided a copy of this form.

If appropriate:

Please check the box that applies:

☐ My child may be tape recorded
☐ My child may not be tape recorded

Print Parent/Guardian Name

Signature of Parent or Guardian & Date
**Assent to Participate in Research (Minor Participants)**

**Title of Research:** From Messages to Voices: Understanding Girls’ Educational Experiences in some Selected Communities in the Akuapim South District, Ghana

**Name of Researcher:** Collins Annin

**Institution:** Ohio University

**Department:** College of Education, Cultural Studies

My name is Collins Annin and I am a doctoral student in the Cultural Studies Department, College of Education at the Ohio University, Athens, Ohio. I am conducting this research on girls’ educational experiences in the Akuapim South District. I am specifically interested in understanding your educational experience as a girl. To that end I have selected your community/school/district to interview different girls at various grade levels.

I will be seeking the help of many girls in your school and other schools in the district to volunteer to participate in different focus groups for not more than two hours. At the focus group meetings I will be asking you to share your educational experience with me as a girl. If you agree to participate, you do not have to answer any question that you are not comfortable with and you may choose to withdraw from the focus group at any time.

Please know that the activities I observe or record during my meetings and your responses to interview questions are for my educational purposes. However, the outcome of this study may be used by stakeholders to improve girls’ education in the district. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University (740) 593-0664. My personal e-mail and phone number are ca284703@ohio.edu and 740-597-7898. For those of you who might want it, I am happy to provide you with contact numbers for my academic advisor and/or department chair.

I certify that I have read and understand this assent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. As a minor I certify that my parents have also consented to my participation. However, my personal participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I
may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this assent form to take with me.

Signature_________________________________________ Date______________

Print Name_________________________________________
APPENDIX C: GHANA MAP, THE REGIONS AND THE TOTAL POPULATION

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Parents

Background Component

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. Tell me about your family and your children?

3. What do you think about education in this community?

4. Tell me about the daily life of your daughter? What daily chores have you assigned to your daughter?

5. Some people feel that children should go to school, and others feel they should not. What do you think about children going to school?

6. In what ways do you think education is important for children?

7. Tell me about what you think about girls’ education? Why or why not should girls get an education?

8. What dream do you have for your daughters? What do you hope she becomes by the next years?

9. Are there any reasons that would take your daughter out of school? Is there an appropriate age to take girls out of school, and why?

10. What would encourage you to keep your daughter in school? Or to allow her to complete primary education and continue to secondary school?

11. Tell me about any ongoing program/campaigns/efforts you are aware of in this district/town that seek to promote girls’ education.

12. Are there other things you have not told me you would want to add?
Appendix D2: Interview Guide for Community Leaders

1. Tell me about yourself and your life growing up.

2. Tell me about your work as a community leader.

3. What can you tell me about schools in this community? What is the role of school in your community?

4. Tell me about girls’ education in this community?

5. Some people feel that children should go to school, and others feel they should not. What do you think about children going to school?

6. Tell me about what you think about girls’ education in the community?

7. What do you think are the benefits for sending girls’ to school? Are there any disadvantages of sending girls to school?

8. What do you think are the factors influencing girls’ education in this village/town?

9. Tell me about any ongoing program/campaigns/efforts you are aware of in this district/town that seek to promote girls’ education.

10. Are there other things you have not told me you would want to add?
Appendix D3: Interview Guide for Teachers

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. Tell me about your experience as a teacher in this school.

3. Tell me about your experience as a teacher teaching girls? What have been your experience teaching girls and boys? Explain.

4. What have you observed about girls performance, attitude, and experience in the classroom?

5. What do you think are the reasons for parents to pull their daughters out of school? Why do parents not encourage their daughters to continue after primary school?

6. Tell me about your experience with parents about decisions concerning their daughters’ education.

7. What can you tell me about schools in the village/town?

8. Tell me about what you think about girls’ education in the village/town.

9. What do you think are the benefits for sending girls’ to school? Are there any disadvantages of sending girls to school?

10. What do you think are the factors influencing girls’ education in this community?

11. Tell me about any on-going program/campaigns/ efforts you are aware of in this district/town that seek to promote girls’ education.

12. Are there other things you have not told me you would want to add?
Appendix D4: Interview Guide for District Education Officers

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. Tell me about primary education in the district.

3. Tell me about what you think about girls’ education in the village/town.

4. What do you think are the benefits for sending girls’ to school? Are there any disadvantages of sending girls to school?

5. What do you think are the factors influencing girls’ education in this village/town?

6. What do you think are the reasons for parents to pull their daughters out of school?

7. Tell me about any on-going program/campaigns/efforts you are aware of in this district/town that seeks to promote girls’ education?

8. What can be done to increase girls’ education in the district? What would encourage parents to send their daughters to school? Or to allow them continue after completing primary school?

9. Are there other things you have not told me you would want to add?
Appendix D5: Focus Group Guide for Girls

1. Could you please go around and introduce yourself? Name, age, grade level, school name, number of years living in the village, number of siblings, distance of home from school, etc?

2. Tell me about your school.

3. Tell me your experience as a girl in your classroom and in the school.

4. Tell me about your family.

5. Describe your typical day. Describe all the set of chores you are expected to do.
   Tell me about what you do to supplement your family’s income.

6. In your parents’ opinion, how important is it for a girl to go to school?

7. Are there any reasons that would make your parents take you out of school?

8. What would encourage your parents to send you to school or to let you continue to JSS/SSS?

9. Are there any benefits of educating girls? Are there any disadvantages for sending girls to school?

10. What are your teachers’ attitudes toward girls’ education?

11. Do you see any difference between how teachers treat girls and boys in your school?

12. What are some of the things that make your coming to school every day difficult?

13. What do you think are the factors influencing girls’ education in this community?

14. Tell me about any ongoing program/campaigns/efforts you are aware of in this district/town/school that seek to promote girls’ education.
15. What do you hope to become in the future? Where do you see yourself in the next 10 years?

16. Are there other things you have not told me you would want to add?