

# Achieving Universal Primary Education: A Case Study of Drop Out in Ghana

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# Abstract

Drop out among school children especially at the basic school level has over the years gained the attention of many ministries of education, international organizations and scholars in the academia. It is said to inhabit threat to achieving universal primary education (UPE) everywhere, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. To some recent studies, the phenomenon of drop out is said to be somewhat responsible for increased crime in some parts of Africa. It is the goal of this study to understand why students drop out of school in Ghana and also what strategies there are to mitigate it. The study does so by comparing rural drop out to that of the urban as it carried out field work in four schools in five different communities.

The study used the qualitative research approach to address what factors there were in causing children to drop out of school and what strategies are laid down by the government, better still the Ghana Education service in reducing drop out. The study employed semi-structured interviews to gather data from the various stake holders- directors of education, circuit supervisors , head teachers, teachers, parents and most importantly the drop outs themselves. Such data was collected from the four schools in the five communities in both the rural and urban areas chosen for this study. The study investigated six factors as influencing drop out among school children in the selected areas. It also identified both macro and micro- level strategies for mitigating drop out in the rural and urban schools.

The study shows how the contextual differences of children, among others can influence their decision to drop out of school. The study indicates that drop out among school children in both rural and urban areas is predominantly caused by poverty, child labour, academic performance, pregnancy, corporal punishment (CP) and school context. The study makes clearer that such factors that cause children to drop out of school are not adequately independent but there are cases where one factor may coincide with the other to bring about drop out decision. It makes explicit that that the individual and institutional related factors of drop out sometimes work in connection with one another culminating in drop out.

Like it has been said earlier, macro and micro level strategies are found for mitigating drop out in rural and urban schools in Ghana. The macro strategies identified include, school feeding programme, free school uniform distribution and free education. The micro strategies include effective teaching, child safety, child friendly school environment, scholarship,

guidance and counseling, introduction of kindergarten, role of NGOs, role of the family, communal by laws, among others.

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# List of Abbreviations

BSL	Basic School Level
CP	Corporal Punishment
EFA	Education For All
GES	Ghana Education Service
GSFP	Ghana School Feeding Programme
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
NGOs	Non Governmental Organizations
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SMC	School Management Committee
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WAEC	West Africa Examinations Council

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1. Background

The 2013/2014 edition of EFA global monitoring report makes it explicit that there is a strong likelihood of not meeting the goal of universal primary education (UPE) by 2015 (UNESCO, 2013/14) and the 2015 edition of the report makes such confirmation in explicit terms that UPE is unmet for now. As per the statistics provided by the immediate past report, 58 million children by 2014 were still out of school globally. As for the case of Africa and specifically Sub-Saharan Africa, the report described it as lagging behind and 'since 2007 no progress has been made'. This therefore makes it not wrong to state that for UPE to be reached in the future much focus should be placed on Africa. As per the projection of the report, 68 out of 122 countries will achieve universal primary enrolment. The report makes explicit without putting primary school completion in question. There is an expectation that only 13 out of 90 countries will achieve universal primary completion. The implication being that not all children who enroll in primary schools get to the last grade and for that matter complete school.

Ghana received the message of EFA in good fate and has since the early 1990s been working tooth and nail to achieve UPE for all school-going-age children. As part of its effort, many interventions and strategies have been devised and implemented at all levels yet the story has not turned the way it has generally expected. Not only is enrolment difficult to come by but also there are substantial evidences which shows that not all children enrolled in schools graduate (Ministry of Education, 2013). Statistically, about 8.2% to 19% of these children for various reasons drop out of primary school (MoE, 2013). This therefore triggers the question of whether attainment of UPE should be limited to enrolment only (UNESCO, 2013/14).

## 1.2. Purpose and justification of the study

For the past five years drop out is on the high side for both primary and lower secondary school in Ghana (MoE, 2013). As at 2007/08 the retention rate of pupils enrolled in primary schools was 91.8% and this has fallen to 81%. This is not different at the Junior High School (JHS) level where the number of pupils in the third year of the Junior high school as at 2010/11 account for only 78.5% of pupils enrolled in 2008/09 (MoE, 2013). A careful examination of



the figures creates the impression that some students who enroll in schools hardly complete before leaving school. In view of this, various stakeholders in charge of the education of the child have expressed interest in this phenomenon as education in recent times is given high recognition and importance in every country. Against this background, the Ghana Education Sector monitoring report makes recommendation for the exploration of the factors that are resulting in school drop out in the country (MoE, 2013). Perhaps by bringing such factors to light, the MoE and the other stakeholders of education may take it from there as it traces recommendations made in research and for that matter find a lasting solution to getting rid of the phenomenon in question so as to make it possible for children to complete at least their basic cycle of education once they enroll.

It is actually in recognition to this call coupled with others that the present study finds grounds and thus the inspiration to investigate into the phenomenon of drop out. Again, some researchers in the field (Rumberger, 2001; Sottie, 2011; Ananga, 2011) have expressed concern that the phenomenon of drop out though important is deficient in empirical studies. As for the choice of rural and urban dimensions, the current study attempts to somewhat introduce something new on the existing body of knowledge produced on drop out and much specifically as in the study context. So far though reviewed works have looked at rural and urban circumstances on drop out there is no such clear work seen that makes attempt to do in a single study such rural and urban comparison. This I find interesting as the literature makes explicit how certain socio economic characteristics of the context of study may influence drop out decisions among children and how such decisions do happen. My interest is thus to find out how such contextual differences coupled with others may make the case of drop out in rural and urban schools similar or different and how such similarities or differences may provide grounds for strategies to deal with drop out in Ghana.

### **1.3. Research questions**

Based on the purpose and motivation for which this study was carried out, the main question identified for the study is: *why do pupils drop out of schools in Ghana?* The study also raises the question of: *‘what strategies are in place to reduce drop out cases in Ghanaian primary schools?’*

In relation to the first research question, the study found it useful to explore from the research site and for that matter the children who have dropped out of school the available factors that

led to their various decisions to drop out of school. Apart from the fact that such findings may be relevant and thus contribute to the stock of literature on the topic which some previous studies have characterized as inadequate, this thesis will equally bring to light the associated prevailing factors resulting in drop out and thus satisfy my curiosity as a researcher on the topic. Notwithstanding this, the MoE in Ghana, UNESCO and other stakeholders of education may have an updated knowledge on the situation and for that matter give it a consideration so far as their policy formulation are concerned.

As for the second research question, the study sought to find out from teachers, head of schools, circuit supervisors and directors of education on the measures put in place to deal with the phenomenon in question. Much of the focus here was with the Ghana Education Service (GES) as it is charged with the core responsibility of seeing to basic education in Ghana. Just as was said in relation to the first research question, findings in relation to this may also have implications for future studies in order to comprehensively address the phenomenon and also to improve our general understanding of it.

#### **1.4. Scope of the study**

In investigating the phenomenon of drop out which is still a key and relevant issue in education, it was important that such a study was conducted in a region where such an issue occurs predominantly and as it was, Africa and for specific reasons such as proximity, resources and familiarity necessitated the need for such a study to be conducted in Ghana which is one of the leading countries in the continent as it happened in the early days when the first University to be established in Africa was put up in this country. As the focus of the study is on exploring what factors do produce drop out among students in basic schools, the study's concern was directed to investigating and so collecting data from children by touching on which major issues or events were at play and so resulting in the occurrence of drop out. Additionally and so in making the topic somewhat comprehensively studied, the study sought to focus also on collecting data from teachers, head of schools, directors and supervisors of education in order to come out with the strategies that are in place at the national, municipal and the school levels that are working to reduce the phenomenon of drop out in the country. By way of search, availability and preference, the study made exploits on some literature predominantly on Africa and specifically, Ghana where areas such as the causes and prevention

of drop out specifically were of interest and so chosen for review. In addressing the international dimension of the study, some reference literature on the topic in America and elsewhere were also chosen and so became useful in this study.

### **1.5. The study context**

This section highlights the context for which this study was carried out. It provides general information about education in Ghana. It also highlights the economy, governance and education management in the Country. These issues are talked about here as it opens the eyes of the reader to having some knowledge about how the economy and politics of Ghana are organized. It also gives some information to understanding the organization of education in the country touching on its governance and management especially at the basic level. It is generally believed here that knowledge of the context within which this study was carried out will help shape and enhance our understanding of the various factors that were found as being responsible for the occurrence of drop out in the country.

### **1.6. Economy of Ghana<sup>1</sup>**

As a country which has since March 1957 gained independence from British colonial rule and so being ushered since then into the hands of domestic political rule, Ghana has since then experienced various political leadership who in addition to managing the affairs of the State have also sought to improve the country's economical structures at all levels. In terms of its economy in relation to others, Ghana is named as the 5<sup>th</sup> out of the 46 countries found in the sub-Saharan African region and in comparison to the world, its overall score remains above the world's average.

Naturally, it is one of the countries in the world which does well when it comes to the production and commercial distribution of some useful natural resources and so it is generally said to be rich in natural resources, such as that of gold, manganese ore, bauxite and oil. In Africa just as the prevailing score stands, Ghana is named second to South Africa when it comes to the production and distribution of gold.

As a country with 20 commercial banks, it has high interest rates on loans which is said to generally limit the financial opportunities for new firms and their operations in the country. With 8.6% average tariff rate, Ghana's procurement procedure is said to predominantly favour domestic firms but in relation to foreign investors, the report is that they are treated equally with domestic investors under the law.

As a country with ten regions, its agricultural contribution to GDP is about 40% and more than half of the nation's population is said to be found in the agricultural sector. Those mostly found in the rural areas of the country are predominantly into farming, fishing, among others. In the urban centers however where as part of the many reasons cited in addition to rural- urban drift which is one of the issues in most countries in the developing world, Ghana's urban centers especially in the capital centers are choked with people overpopulating the average work force and so majority of them are forced into working in the informal sector where they are mostly engaged in trading activities. Those who have had some levels of education in various institutions are found mostly working in the formal sectors such as government offices, private and non- governmental organizations in the country. In addition and so quite significant in reporting the economic standing of the country is also the evidence of quarrying and sand winning which are mostly found in high and low lying areas in some parts of the country. Though such activities are carried out by large construction firms, the situation is that the sector provides varying employment to people especially those who have little or no education and who by occupational reasons are located closer to such firms in various parts of the country (Adoko, 2009).

## **1.7. Governance in Ghana<sup>2</sup>**

As a country endowed and so rich in various natural resources, Ghana, formerly known as the Gold Coast was taken up by some British who had come to the Coast of the country with such intentions to propagate the word of God and also to trade with the people at that time. With time and so as various developments did happen in the country, such European agenda seemed to have focused also on slave trade where men and women deemed strong in the country and other African societies were bought and so shipped to the foreign world mainly to help with the economy of their societies. With time as education and political civilization began to spread and so became important everywhere, Ghana which was formerly under British colonial rule in

the early part of 1957, became empowered as it had some of its able men enlightened and so capable enough of taking up the political structure of the country from the hands of foreign rule. So in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah became the first president of Ghana and after his government was overthrown by another Party, it became the case that the country has since been engaged in self rule under various political leaders who were mostly in the military.

However in 1992, constitutional rule was introduced to Ghana and so since then the country has been under the rule of democratic leaders who are elected into political office every four years and are sometimes allowed to serve for two terms depending on a party's performance during its first term of rule and also the choice of the people.

Since the 1990s, the 1992 constitution of Ghana offers a stable environment for cooperation and has witnessed a series of peaceful elections with close results being accepted (2008 presidential election) or challenged before the supreme court according to the constitution (2012 Presidential election)<sup>3</sup>. For the past two decades and so after democratic rule in Ghana, education in the country has remained sustained disregarding the various changes in government as almost every political party that comes to power shows some commitment to the nation's education (Adoko, 2009).

## **1.8. Education in Ghana<sup>3</sup>**

As a country formerly under British colonial governance, Ghana's education took its root from the then British system of education and so being the first country to have a university in Africa, the country has seen remarkable progress in its education as it has with time developed its education mainly to suit its local needs as it became the topic of discussion in the early days and even in present day society as there are more talks to make education fit and so address a nation's local needs. The nation in consequence has experienced various educational reforms especially at the basic level and so has seen the introduction and replacement of subjects in the curricula also at various levels.

As a country whose education has been undergoing various reviews, the Nation has a number of schools at various levels in both the public and private sector. The public sector has 12,225 primary schools with 6,418 Junior High Schools. The basic level of education is now 11 years, composed of 2 years of kindergarten, 6 years of primary and 3 years of Junior High school

(JHS). After graduating from the 11 years of basic education, one deemed to have passed the required basic education examinations qualifies to enroll with a 3 year senior high school where he or she may take up a course in the science, business, arts, technical or vocational depending on ones interest. The country is blessed with 526 public secondary schools, 23 technical institutes, including vocational institutions.

After writing the West Africa Certificate Examinations which is the required examinations for students in the senior high schools, qualified students do prepare to enter into the tertiary institution which is mostly four years for the university and three years for the polytechnics. As it is given, the country has 8 public universities and 10 polytechnics serving a population of about 25 million.

As a nation who is interested in education and so has given itself to international policies on education, Ghana for the past decade spends as much as 28% of its GDP on education and also 40% of its annual budget goes into the sector. By way of comparison to old figures recorded in the 70s and 80s, there appears to be remarkable improvement in government spending on education as in 1976, GDP contribution to education stood at 6.4% and this declined to 1.0% in 1983 and in 1985, the figure stood at 1.7% (World Bank, 1996 as cited Acheampong, 2004). Generally such spending do go into the construction of school buildings, provision of text books, teachers remuneration and other teaching and learning materials to aid in effective delivery of education at all levels as now every nation seeks to address human related rights in education and also the interest in providing educated and skilled human resources capable to drive the wheel of running the affairs of the nation at all levels.

It is no news therefore that after the Jomtien Conference on EFA, Ghana has committed itself to various educational reforms and other forms of international partnership with the interest of not only making funds available to support education but also to make education relatively better as quality is now a key issue being talked about at both the local and international levels.

## **1.9. Education management in ghana<sup>4</sup>**

Education as it is is given various interpretation by scholars and in whichever way one may want to define or look at it, it is an inevitably useful institution as it is actually the very

institution which gives room for teaching and learning to take place. Some scholars prefer to liken education to being ‘the route to economic prosperity; it is also the key to scientific and technological advancement, the means to combat unemployment, the foundation of social equity, the spread of political socialization and cultural validity, among others’ (Agyemang & Opoku, 2012).

Ghana’s education system has three distinct levels which include basic, senior high and tertiary institutions. The basic education level is the foundation for higher level institutions in Ghana like it is the case with other countries. As it is it enrolls children as young as months old and by going through various classes assigned to them they eventually complete their immediate cycles and so make progress to the very next one. Being the basic level of education, it is by implication the very level that requires the most attention as it is actually at this level that the child is given its fundamental knowledge which also tends to become the basis for obtaining added knowledge through further education as one transits from one level to the other. In recognition of this therefore the government has over the years remained much committed to this level (MoE, 2013) and so as seen in most of its programmes and campaigns there have been the introduction of policies geared toward the improvement of education with major focus on access and retention which are key issues in recent times when education at this level is talked about. For effective management of the sector therefore there has been the introduction of the capitation grant (fee –free policy), the school feeding programme, the metro mass transit , the BaahWiredu one laptop per child, free text books, teaching and learning materials to improve education at the basic level, the upgrading of 38 public teacher training colleges into diploma awarding institutions, the distance education programme for teachers, the introduction of information and communication technology in 19 out of 38 colleges of education and the single spine salary structure (MoE, 2013).

Not only is the sector doing this good, there are still evidences that show that the sector is also lacking in various ways especially at the classroom level where actual teaching and learning takes place. For example in an article published on one of Ghana’s famous websites brought out evidences that 64% of pupils at the basic school level (BSL) cannot read and write; GES also reports of 60,000 teacher deficit at the BSL with over 80,000 as pupil teachers filling the classrooms. Class sizes are still large with an average of 50 pupils per class which is attributable to inadequate classrooms and teachers (Agyemang & Opkoku, 2012). Also the sector is marked by some demonstrations and strike actions as in addition to its general poor

conditions of service, teachers are sometimes caught up with complaints in relation to their salaries. In terms of curriculum, the basic school level is overloaded with a number of subjects and teaching and learning especially at the public school level is teacher centered as the focus is predominantly on getting much taught within a short period of time to a large number of children. The central focus is thus on examination while the child is normally looked at with minimal attention.

In addition to the ills of the sector, there is little attention given to science, vocational and technical subjects as those teachers deemed specialized in these subjects are not adequate (Agyemang & Opoku, 212). Importantly and for the purposes of managing education at basic level, the SMCs and PTAs though they are generally purported to collaborate or partner with the schools in order to ensure that the school and its running is made effective and efficient, there are media reports that the PTA and SMC have also become agents for revenue collection which is generally perceived by some commentators as exploitation.

Generally therefore and with such brief understanding of the basic level of education, it is much important to state here that though much is being done to both manage and sustain it, the challenges that do run side by side with it also make it inevitable that associated issues such as drop out among school children is experienced.

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1<http://www.modernghana.com/news/54414/1/school-drop-out-rate-is-80-in-northern-region.html>

2<http://www.heritage.org/index/country/ghana>

3<http://www.ambafrance-gh.org/article2336>

4 <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Managing-the-Current-Educational-Crisis-at-the-Basic-Level-240790>



# 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The chapter presents a theoretical framework and literature review that are of interest to the study. They articulate the research questions in relation to the findings. It presents and discusses empirical literature on the subject of why children drop out of school and also the strategies to mitigate drop out in schools. It also discusses the individual and institutional frameworks as they help answer the research questions. The literature review is presented first because the theoretical framework is derived from it. The literature review generally helped in collecting data for this study and also in analyzing the data.

## 2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1.1. Why students drop out of schools in Ghana?

In this section, I briefly discuss the empirical findings identified in the literature as causing drop out. I do so in the light of the two theoretical frameworks that would be subsequently presented. None of the studies done in the Ghanaian context used these conceptual frameworks for understanding the phenomenon of drop out in spite of their presumed usefulness in understanding drop out (Rumberger, 2001). Based on a careful understanding of the *individual* and *institutional perspectives* for understanding why students drop out from school, I attempt to situate the Ghanaian case in these perspectives and thus to contribute to the studies done on drop out that use these theories. Through a careful analysis and discussion, a platform will be laid for understanding why the Government of Ghana (GoG) strategy for healing drop out which will be highlighted subsequently in the study have not proved to fully deal with the high incidence of drop out in Ghana, leaving the country still on the question of whether she can achieve UPE by 2015, the response of which is obvious now.

#### 2.1.1.1. Individual perspective

I present as well as discuss the factors that are considered under the individual perspective for understanding why students drop out of school. I do so by highlighting where available the differences in such factors as in rural and urban areas in Ghana. Where they are similar too the study looks at that also. I present these ones namely; academic performance and economic engagement/ child labour.

#### **2.1.1.1.1. Academic performance and drop out**

Academic performance is identified in some studies as one of the major causes of drop out in basic schools in Ghana (Ananga, 2011; Imoro, 2009; Braimah et al., 2005). Students who are not good academically therefore are more likely to drop out from schools in both rural and urban areas. In his study in a rural district in Ghana, Imoro (2009) found that poor examination results of students resulted in parents withdrawing their wards from schools. The study found that, parents interviewed attributed the goal of education to aiding in job acquisition. Parents thus questioned the relevance of education to their wards if they were not performing well. Investment in education and for that matter the need to retain children in school was seen as an unwise decision and waste of limited family resources (Barima et al., 2005).

Still on academic performance, some authors have found that schools on the other hand were least willing to promote low academic achievers leading to drop out (Ananga, 2011; Imoro, 2009). Poor academic result therefore carries another problem- repetition which in itself is identified as dissatisfactory to students and thus subsequently causes them to drop out from school. One of such close link to repetition before drop out decision is finally made is sometimes *absenteeism*. It was found that for some students who repeated their classes owing to poor academic performance had a change in their attitude towards schooling; such students became listed as absentees or truants (Ananga, 2011) who eventually dropped out of school. As for what caused students to perform poorly in schools, (Braimah et.al, 2005, Sottie et al., 2011) found inadequate teachers, teaching and learning materials as the main factors. These finding are consistent with problems facing both rural and urban schools in Ghana, though it is much prevalent in the rural areas. Such issues identified as causing students to drop out from schools are treated subsequently in this thesis under the discussions on the school as an institution which contributes to drop out decision. What is important to state here is that

schools whether rural or urban that are faced with such challenges of teacher shortage, lack of teaching and learning materials and students not mostly performing well.

Sottie et al., (2011) found that students who hardly performed well in class were subjected to teasing by sometimes both teachers and other students. Such children by implication developed negative attitude for schooling and eventually quit school. This is consistent with the academic and social engagement concepts espoused under the individual framework for understanding drop out. That is when students are academically disengaged, they also become socially disengaged and this may influence their decision to drop out of school. In other words, children who failed their tests are subjected to all kinds of teasing, shaming (Ananga, 2011; Sotie et al., 2011) etc which make them not get on with both teachers and friends and this had implications for their drop out decisions.

Based on these studies I argue that though academic performance is identified as an individual factor and for that matter may result in changing the attitude of the student to drop out of school in both rural and urban areas, it can be said that the context of the school and the family also influenced to some extent the individual factor for drop out decision to happen. That is students attitude themselves are shaped by certain distant and proximal factors prevalent in both the home and the school (Rumberger, 2001; Ananga, 2011). Any strategy therefore to deal with students who drop out of school based on low academic performance should not overlook the other factors that affect students in both the home and school. The line of argument in this case and as will be seen subsequently in this study is that though we have such categorization of individual and institutional factors of drop out treated separately, there is no such independent factor that in itself or as a single unit result in a child's decision to quit school and as per (Rumberger, 2001), drop out is a complex process.

#### **2.1.1.1.2. Child labour and drop out**

This is what the study calls *economic engagement*. Almost all studies done in both rural and urban schools suggest that most children who dropped out of school were engaged in a kind of economic activity (eg.Imoro, 2009; Sottie et al., 2011; Barimah et al., 2005, Ananga, 2011; Ananga, 2011b). It was found that the informal economic activity prevalent in most rural and urban areas made it possible for school children to gain employment (Ananga, 2011). In

consequence, children who had negative attitude towards school but a positive attitude towards working owing to certain factors at the school, community or even the school may eventually drop out of school. In some cases however, like in a study on child labour in Ghana, it was found that as high as 34.58% of children aged 6-11 and 44.26% of those aged 12-15 left school to engage in child labour because they found school uninteresting and useless (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003 as cited Ashong, 2013). One study found in urban areas that some children work and school at the same time but with time as they develop much interest for the job they may drop out of school (Sottie et al., 2011). As predominantly found in the studies, poverty in the family influenced a child's attitude to work instead of schooling (Ananga, 2011; Sottie et al., 2011; Braimah et al., 2005).

Research that compared gender also found in rural areas that boys normally engaged in farming and fishing and because such activities do begin in the morning when school is in session, boys in rural areas had high risk of dropping out of school than girls (Ananga, 2011). As for girls, the author found in rural areas that they mostly engaged in selling immediately after school and so in their case had a relatively lower record of drop out.

It has been found that students' opportunity cost for schooling increases as they advance in years (MoE, 2013; Ananga, 2011). In support to such claims (Imoro, 2009), found that in most mining communities, students most of whom are in JHS dropped out of school to engage in illegal mining activities so as to get so called 'quick money'. So while in some cases students who dropped out to work use that as survival strategy (Ananga, 2011b) in order to return to school, others simply leave school to work and never came back (Sottie et al., 2011). A student's economic engagement interacted with other factors to determine whether he or she should continue to be in school or drop out.

### **2.1.2.1. Institutional perspective**

Within this framework and as has already been hinted, I present and discuss those factors prevalent in existing studies which may be consistent with the institutional perspective. Again and for brevity, only important ones are highlighted.

#### **2.1.2.1.1. Family factors and drop out**

The family as has already been noted is one such big agency that contributes to drop out. In a study, the authors found that the weakening role of the extended family accounted for some drop out cases (Sottie et al., 2011). In Accra for instance which is an urban area in Ghana, the authors found in their research that 8 out of 10 had come from either divorced or separated marriages; 7 out of 10 had lost one or both parents, and 4 out of 10 are abandoned by both parents. In throwing light on this, Imoro (2009) unearthed that in some rural areas parents traveled to urban areas to seek greener pastures which is not met by remittances. The implication here is that children left with single or no parent because of death, travel or divorce may have to drop out of school. Ananga (2011) found that such children with single or no parent have to work to take care of their other siblings even if they were not working at first. Such situations in the words of the author may gradually lead such students to quit school. As for some authors their findings brought to light the educational background of parents of students who dropped out of school (Barimah et al., 2005). Based on this study 27.3% and 54.6% of students who dropped out of school in the district had formal and no formal education respectively.

All studies reviewed also identified poverty as a common characteristics of most families which have the most implication for drop out (e.g. Imoro, 2009; Barimah et al, 2005; Sottie et al, 2011, Ananga, 2011; Consortium for Research on Education Access Transition and Equity(Create, 2009). As per the social justice theory to the understanding of quality education, when institutions provide such characteristics that limit a child's participation in the education system, inequality is said to be created. A child therefore who comes from a relatively economic stable family may experience full participation in schools than their colleagues from a deprived home. According to (Acheampong, 2006) most rural areas have families living below the extreme poverty line. This implying that children in such areas may have high records of drop out.

By way of example, some children drop out of schools simply because their parents could not afford school uniforms for them (Ananga, 2011). This raises the question of whether the abolishing of fees (capitation grant) is in itself sufficient to both enroll and retain children in schools? Theoretically, children may have all the passion and positive attitude to be in school and so to engage in learning but once school uniforms are lacking, such children may either be denied the right to enroll or complete basic schools. Such incidences coupled with others

especially in rural areas where poverty is high makes attaining UPE in Ghana a tricky one. In this regard, the author drew awareness to the difficulty most rural areas face in making 'adjustment and sacrifice' to meet formal school requirement (Acheampong, 2004 as cited in Acheampong, 2006).

As for the question of whether drop out will cease when both parents live together and there is no poverty, the author found child neglect to be prevalent (Ananga, 2011). The author found evidence of parents who owned two fishing canoes and had sixteen workers -which are signs of good living. However, the author found that such parents have neglected their son and thus the child had been kept out of school to engage in working. This meaning that family issues that pull a child out of school cannot be attributed to only poverty and single parenting. Drop out here is therefore a process difficult to trace to a single factor.

#### **2.1.2.1.2. School factors and drop out**

The school being the most important setting where actual teaching and learning occurs is identified as one such factor that influences drop out of students. This is supported by a number of such studies (e.g. Ananga, 2011; Imoro, 2009; Barimah et al, 2005; Sottie et al, 2011). As for which factors of the school that were considered as causing drop out, Imoro(2009) uncovered school infrastructure as one of such causes. As for (Acheampong, 2006 ) he has noted that not using as language of instruction the local community's language may affect teaching and learning and eventually have implications for children drop out

Some studies like those of (Ananga, 2011; Sottie et al., 2011) saw teacher quality as one such factors. Most teachers were found to be absent from schools especially in rural areas where such teachers stay long distances from the school. Children who may be willing to be in school may in this case be cut off owing to happenings at the school setting that did not encourage such children for participating in school. Ananga (2011) found that a child had dropped out because her teacher had been absent from school for a week. In consequence to this, other authors reminds us that many children who are registered in schools failed to attend and those who participated fail to learn (Sabates, et al.,2010). They argued that because of certain school factors together with other family and individual related factors, most children are enrolled in schools for a number of years but failed to progress and eventually were pushed out of school.

As for such authors, they expressed much worry about how children in such circumstances drop out of school without securing the basic skills they may need in future. Still about the

future, the World Bank is unhappy about this situation as it tries to look at the amount of money spent in educating children only to end up in drop out.

From the World Bank educational indicators, Malawi which is also a country in Africa spends 4.2% GDP on education out of which 55% goes into primary education; the observation is that with a drop out rate of 65%, the Nation spent about 1.3% of GDP educating children who dropped out of school (Sabates et al, 2010). This as per the World Bank report limits the future benefit of a Nation. That is given that there is a link between primary education and national economic growth, it can be argued that further investment into such education without a corresponding sustained retention and reduced drop out may be waste of resources to a country.

### **2.1.2.1.3. Community and peer factor**

Some studies have identified the community and peer influence as also significant when looking at the issue of drop out. The economic activity prevalent at the community level is said to serve as a pull factor that draws students from school. Fishing, farming, mining, loading and offloading vehicles are seen as some jobs available in rural and urban communities that pull students from schools. In a study, Imoro (2009) has recorded that fathers prefer their sons fishing at an early age rather than waste a whole cycle of years and resources being educated. Such a study makes it clear that education should result in employment and since basic school graduates do not get paid jobs, parents see no sense in keeping their wards in school.

This appears consistent with one of such criticism to the human capital approach to education quality. The authors (Palmer et al., 2007 as cited in Tikly et al., 2013) disagree with (Habushek and WoBmann, 2007 as cited in Tikly et al., 2013) on their view that education quality should be measured based on education's contribution to economic growth. They have critique that in developing countries the existence of unemployment makes it difficult to accept such conclusions. In Ghana, some parents in certain rural and urban areas did not allow their children in schools because they have no such confidence in education providing such kids with jobs after completion (Sottie et al., 2011). Therefore those who view education from the human capital perspective and not from the human right or social justice are likely to disallow their children to either enroll or to complete school. This therefore creates institutional challenge (Tikly et al., 2013) that seems to limit such children from their participation in schools. The value that the community and the family attached to education had implications

on who got educated. This has led to some children not having either access or full completion of primary school.

### **2.1.2. Strategies/interventions in place to reduce drop out in schools**

As has been highlighted in the EFA GMR (2013/14), enrolment is just a partial measure of whether or not UPE has been achieved or not. It goes on to state that the success story of UPE is best told if children have both 'access to and complete primary school'. Drop out among students may therefore pose a significant threat to achieving UPE everywhere if not properly identified and practical strategies laid down to control it.

The Ghanaian government and for that matter the MoE has not been insensitive to the issues regarding drop out in schools in both urban and rural areas. Major interventions targeted to ensuring enrolment in schools are equally targeted to reducing the drop out situation prevalent in schools. The capitation grant and the school feeding programmes are government's major interventions in improving access and quality of education in Basic schools in Ghana (Adamu-Isaah, Forson & Schrofer, 2007).

There are evidences of how such interventions have been useful in ensuring enrolment and retention in basic schools in Ghana (Sabates et al., 2010). The capitation grant has several impacts on enrolment. Primary school gross and net enrolment rose by 92.4% and 69%. Every region in Ghana had a rise in enrolment. In general terms there was a 16.7% increase in the 2005/06 academic year as compared to the 2004/2005 year.

The school feeding is an intervention that reinforces the government's strategy to achieve UPE. Like the capitation grant, it also started on pilot basis under the NEPAD Home Grown school feeding program concept. It has as its goal not only limited to improving education but also boosting agriculture as well as reducing malnutrition among school children.

The MoE reported in 2007 that drop out in Ghana has seen a consistent decline from 1998 to 2006 (MOESS 2007 cited in Sabates et al., 2010). Sabates et al., (2010) have found in their studies that about a fifth of drop out returned to school with the introduction of capitation grant. They have pointed that schools with the feeding programme have also witnessed substantial increase in enrollment and retention. However, the most recent publication of Education



Strategic Plan of the MoE reported that there has been an increase in drop out in the country (MoE, 2013). By implication though the feeding and the capitation are helping in ensuring access as well as retention in schools, there are reasons to believe that they are not adequate. Some authors have argued that strategies designed to deal with drop out are limited, besides such national policies assume that once a child is enrolled in school, progression will be automatic (Sabates et al., 2010).

Some studies done have been somewhat pragmatic and specific in suggesting strategies that may/ have proved useful in dealing with drop out. This is not to suggest that these studies are themselves without limitations. The present study recognizes that and for that matter pays attention to that. What this study finds useful is the sense in which such strategies can be easily linked or associated with a stakeholder in education. That is to say understanding so far that drop out occurs at both the individual and the institutional levels, this study recognizes that dealing with drop out should equally occur at such levels as well if effective results is be attained. Thus though this study is not opposed to government strategies as earlier on highlighted, it pays attention to the fact that drop out strategies should be done to cover all levels.

The Consortium for Research on Education Access, Transition and Equity (CREATE, 2008) in a study reported that a good practice around drop out should pay a close attention to catching children both before and after drop out has occurred. Good practice in this case has to do with ensuring some kind of sustained education for these children.

Some studies have thus looked at programmes and interventions that exist around drop out (CREATE, 2008; Imoro, 2009; Barimah et al., 2005). CREATE, 2008 argues that such strategies may be direct or indirect. The direct ones are those that may be closely related to dealing with drop out. I briefly look at some of such direct interventions. Though it has been argued that some indirect strategies like teacher training may be as well effective (CREATE, 2008) this study pays little or no attention to that. For brevity sake, I look at the most important ones. Though this study is supposed to touch on drop out and its strategies in Ghana, I effort to present where available and relevant, examples of such strategies from elsewhere outside Ghana where there are evidences that such strategies have strength in curbing drop out.

#### **2.1.2.1. Flexible school hours/ systems**

In the study it has been noted that both rural and urban school children are one way or the other engaged in a form of economic activity. It has been discussed that such children had pressure on their school hours as they have to spend almost of the time working or be in class. CREATE (2008) has found that during the harvest season, it is the rural children who suffer the most pressure on their time as they have to always be on the farm. In such circumstances, which are seen as a threat to both enrolment and retention of school children in schools, (CREATE, 2008) has noted that flexible time table may prove useful.

Unlike schools in most urban areas which operated on shift basis, Sottie and her colleagues found in Accra schools that some children worked in the morning when they have to be in school in the afternoon, and vice versa (Sottie et al., 2011). In this case and drawing from the individual perspective to drop out studies, the child may develop a positive attitude to remain in school even in the face of other challenges in the home or school. As an empirical evidence, children in urban schools who have such flexible hours of schooling developed resilience that made them 'prevail against the odds' (Sottie et al., 2011). Focusing on girls, the author found that flexible interventions such as school hours and schedules have boosted girls enrolment and reduced drop outs (Kane, 2004 as cited in CREATE, 2008).

### **2.1.2.2. Automatic promotion rather than repetition**

Per the policy of most educational institutions and especially at the basic level, students are required to fulfill certain scores or marks in order to qualify for promotion to the next class. Impliedly, those who fail are required to repeat their classes. A large body of researchers have identified links between repetition and drop out (eg. CREATE, 2008; Ananga, 2011). Evident therefore that repetition is an impediment to retention, some researchers such as (Calcough& Lewin, 2003 as cited in CREATE, 2008) have given indication that in some contexts, automatic promotion might reduce drop out. However, (Sottie et al., 2011) has drawn attention in their research that most schools who may want to gain the recognition of the community as a good school were reluctant to embark on this so called 'wholesale promotion'. From the individual perspective, this study argues that mass promotion may inspire the attitude of students who (Sottie et al., 2011) found to fear shame and disgrace of being repeated to remain in school. The study is however not unaware of the other side where most parents

withdraw their children when there are records of poor academic performance in final examinations. Okyerefor et al, (2011) provides evidence of a district recording 0% pass in the nationwide Basic Education Certificate Examinations.

### **2.1.2.3. Improving the quality of teaching and learning**

From the institutional perspective and as has been highlighted, the school in itself comes with certain challenges that push children out of school. Research gives an indication that there is a relationship between language of instruction at the early years of schooling and drop out (CREATE, 2008). In consequence, the world bank reported that schools that offer both first language/local language as languages of instructions in early years of a child's education have lower records of repetition and so drop out is consequently low (World Bank 2002c as cited in CREATE, 2008). This per (CREATE, 2008) leads to higher achievement among students. In consequence, it can be argued that the language of instructions may have some implications for children who drop out of schools on grounds of poor academic performance. Elsewhere across Africa the two researchers have found that bilingual education had some positive effect on promotion, repetition and drop out rates (Enge&Chesterfield, 1996 as cited in CREATE, 2008).

### **2.1.2.4. Post primary education**

Some research have it that the demand for primary education may be determined by the availability of secondary education (Birdsall et al., 2005 cited in CREATE, 2008). This strategy according to the report of CREATE (2008), may work in households where primary education is perceived as having limited benefits. Of course some research have found students drop out of school because their parents did not see the relevance of having just basic education which to such parents did not merit the acquisition of jobs (Sottie et al., 2011; Ananga, 2011). To this team of researchers, enrolment and retention is perceived to increase when parents are aware of possibility of furthering their children education. In Ghana, not all primary schools have secondary schools attached (Center for Policy Analysis, 2000) and in cases where there is one, a study suggests that parents with lower incomes who could not help their children to further their education either did not enroll or withdrew their children from schools (Sottie et al., 2011). The Consortium for Research on Education Access, Transition and Equity (2008)

have however noted in general that when communities, rural and urban are given opportunities to secondary education, it will have a positive effect on both enrolment and retention.

### **2.1.2.5. Community involvement**

The community being also one of such institutional factors that affects drop out has its share of strategy for controlling drop out cases. Some researchers have indicated that when communities do involve with schools, there will be some improvement in education (Birdshall et al., 2005 cited in CREATE, 2008). Birdshall and his colleagues made it explicit that community involvement in schools may reduce drop out. As for some research done elsewhere, the author has provided specific examples of ‘mother education committees’ in India and the El Salvador. These programmes according to the research did not only prevent drop out among girls but has also reintroduced more girls into schools.

In Ghana, the PTA is predicted to reduce drop out as researchers believe that when they are strengthened to function may provide good platform for discussing issues affecting children (Imoro, 2009; Barimah et al.,2005). The School Management Committee (SMC) is equally seen to be useful in this matter (Imoro, 2009). Ananga (2011) has hinted that when the PTA and SMC are both made strong and active in schools drop out issues such as those identified in this study may be dealt with at the micro level. (Banerjee &Duflo, 2006; Birsdall et al., 2005 as cited in CREATE, 2008) have found involvement of parents in the process of monitoring, accountability and incentive mechanisms as useful strategies for dealing with drop out.

## **2.2. Theoretical framework**

In Africa, some of the research on education have concerned themselves with schooling and how certain individual and household conditions may influence it, yet researchers (eg. Ananga, 2011; Rumberger, 2001) are open that empirical studies into drop out are few, though per the Global Monitoring Report(GMR) on EFA, this phenomenon of drop out is a key barrier to achieving Universal Primary Education everywhere (UNESCO, 2013/14). The GMR on reaching the marginalized also highlighted how serious drop out is as it noted that for some sub-Saharan African countries almost one child out of three drops out of school (UNESCO, 2010).

In consequence some researchers such as (Rumberger, 2001; Ananga, 2011) who have taken interest on the phenomenon are of the position that a better understanding of drop out should commence with an in-depth understanding of why students drop out of school. Based on this, research done on drop out have been studied from varied perspectives in reaching a better understanding of the phenomenon.

In looking at why children drop out of school, some researchers suggest that a range of interrelated demand and supply factors may be at play for drop out decision to happen (Hunt, 2008; Ananga 2011).

The individual and the institutional perspectives have also been used to study drop out in schools (Rumberger, 2001). While the individual perspective focuses on the individual factors related to the child who takes a decision to drop out, the institutional perspective focuses on the contextual characteristics such as school, community and the child's family as useful factors contributing to the drop out decision of the child.

Drop out is further seen as caused by certain push and pull factors (Ananga, 2011; Bradley &Renzulli, 2011; Cardoso &Verner, 2006). To these researchers the push factors are the characteristics present at the school such as corporal punishment, tuition fees, etc which may discourage a child from continuing his or her schooling. As for the 'pull out' factors, such researchers have made it understood that certain factors or conditions such as availability of jobs, poverty, broken home, among others prevalent in a child's home or community may affect his or her decision to either drop out or complete school.

Based on the somewhat general understanding of such perspectives used in studying drop out and also drawing on the point made by scholars such as (Rumberger, 2001;Ananga, 2011; Hunt, 2008) that drop out is a complex process, the individual and the institutional perspectives for understanding drop out is chosen as the *main* frameworks for this study. This study holds the view that the chosen theories can be likened to the outer cover of a seed. That is to say, such individual and institutional theories harbor within them the demand and the supply factors as well as the push and pull factors of drop out. This implying that such theories harbor within them the factors that are present in both the schools and outside the schools that are said to cause children to drop out of school thereby giving a much more better picture of drop out and its happening.

In relating the push and pull factors to the institutional and the individual frameworks, it is understood that factors such as absenteeism, child labour, poverty , corporal punishment , among others which push and pull out children from schools can also be understood within the framework of the individual and institutional perspectives. While the push factors refer to the conditions within the school which may cause a child to terminate his or her education, the pull factors may refer to conditions outside the school which may cause a child to terminate his or her education (Ananga, 2011). That is to say, such pull and push out factors may be caused by the student as an individual or the school, family and the community as an institution. In this study, these push and pull factors help to understand which of the factors that cause a child to drop out of school are caused by conditions within or outside the school context.

Again such theories have been chosen because the institutional perspective especially helps to better situate this work within the ongoing debate on education quality and equity. In their recent work on educational quality, (Tickly et.al., 2013) noted in their discussion of social justice theories that there are certain *institutional challenges* that limit some people from equal participation in social interactions. The social justice emphasis on the presence of institutional challenges limiting full participation to education is of use to this study. It uses this to highlight some discussions of findings on the institutional perspective to understanding drop out in Ghana where certain children in both rural and urban areas due to certain institutional and individual factors, do not participate fully in basic education.

This study argues along the line that due to certain factors prevalent in both rural and urban public schools, provision of quality education is put in question. Such factors coupled with other factors in the family and the community raises the question of *equity*. That is the school, the family and community in which the child lives are seen as institutions which tend to have within them certain challenges which pose threat to a child's enrollment as well as completion of basic education.

In the next section, I present briefly the individual and institutional perspectives of dropout. I then discuss based on empirical research how such frameworks can be used to understand why students drop out in basic schools in Ghana.

### 2.2.1. Individual perspective

This framework is concerned with those characteristics of students which contribute among others to inform their decision to drop out of school. The framework puts focus on students attributes such as values, attitudes, and behaviour and how such attributes influence students' decision to drop out (Rumberger, 2001). Attitudes and behaviour are viewed in this framework through the concept of engagement (Rumberger, 2001). Various theories have been advanced on this concept (Rumberger, 2001) with carefully observed differences. Notwithstanding such differences, all the theories suggest that there may be two dimensions of engagement, namely: *academic engagement* and *social engagement*. These two dimensions reflect both the formal and informal aspect of the school and they can cause a student to either remain or quit school (Rumberger, 2001). This means that when a child is not academically or/ and socially engaged, he or she may drop out of school. The formal aspect of school may reflect what attitude and behaviour students may have in classroom or school activities while the informal aspects look at the attitude and behaviour students hold in their relationship with their peers and adults (Rumberger, 2001). Such attitudes and behaviour whether positive or negative may have implications for why a student should continue to be in school or withdraw. In this case a student may drop out of school if he or she is not doing well in class or not getting along with peers (Rumberger, 2001) and sometimes teachers.

These two concepts of engagement are consistent to some extent on findings of empirical studies done in the Ghanaian basic school settings. However, the present study observes closely through review of selected literature that the academic and social engagement may not be independent in themselves. There are evidences that a student who does not have good academic performance in class may be teased by both friends and teachers (Braimah & Oduro-Ofori, 2005; Sottie & Awasu, 2011) and so may not get on well with peers. In his literature review (Rumberger, 2001) comments that a number of studies make it clear that the decision for a child to drop out of school is influenced by both academic and social experiences. In my analysis therefore, I integrate in the social engagement in the discussion on academic engagement and do not separate them as such.

In addition to dimensions defined by the theory in question, the present study finds from empirical research in Ghanaian rural and urban schools where students are engaged one way or

the other in economic activities. I argue that depending on how a child may be engaged in an economic activity, he or she may likely drop out of school. This is captured in most literature as ‘child labour’ (eg. Imoro, 2009; Sottie et al., 2011; Barimah et al., 2005, Ananga, 2011).

Depending on whether or not one is coming from a farming, fishing, mining or urban community a child enrolled in school may one way or the other be engaged in the prevailing economic activities. A number of empirical studies found students engagement in economic activities to result in drop out (e.g. Sortie et.al, 2011, Barima et.,al 2005, Imoro, 2009) I find it useful and relevant to include ‘*economic engagement*’ as part of the dimensions for understanding the individual perspectives on why students drop out of school much especially in the chosen study context. And though it is placed here as an individual factor, it is not absolutely free from certain conditions in the family and community, which are discussed under the institutional frameworks.

### **2.2.2. Institutional Perspective**

As has already been acknowledged, the first framework-individual perspective provides an understanding on how individual attitudes and behaviors cause students to drop out from school. In this section, the institutional perspective is also looked at in relation to why students drop out from school. The theory emerged over the years from development Psychology (Jessor, 1993 as cited Rumberger, 2001) and it recognizes that various settings in which students live may be influential in shaping their behaviour (Rumberger, 2001). The author noted that the students’ family, school, and community may shape their behaviour.

Drawing from this it is clear that the various contextual circumstances surrounding the student may affect his/her attitude towards school work, peers and teachers which may have implications for decision to remain or quit school. This institutional perspective is argued to have emerged to support the so much emphasis researchers have over the years placed on individual student rather than the risk related settings in which students live and go to school (National Research Council, Panel on High-Risk Youth, 1993 as cited in Rumberger, 2001). This perspective thus presents a reflective framework on context and not simply the individual (Rumberger, 2001) though the two complement each other in giving a better picture of the student drop out. The family is thus seen as possessing certain characteristics such as poverty,



single parenting, large family size, poor parenting style, among others which put pressure on the poor child's education and so eventually may cause his or her drop out of school.

The school as an institution is also seen as having some traits which like the family also militate against the education of children. Some of such school characteristics are listed among others, corporal punishment, teacher attitude, absence of teaching and learning materials and the use of children as labour at school (Ananga, 2011). The community is also described by the work of an American scholar as also a potential institution for the occurrence of school drop out among students (Rumberger, 2001). The community by virtue of its location and availability or absence of certain infrastructure may act as an agency that pulls children out of school.

While there is such distinction between the individual and institutional theories, it is important to note that such distinctions are in practice not very clear. That is to mean that the individual factor sometimes coincide with some institutional factors thereby forming part of the child's drop out decision. That is to say that there is no such clarity where an individual child's drop out of school is caused by a single individual or institutional factor but there are cases where the two do play together in the decision making of the child to drop out of school.

In this study therefore, the individual and institutional frameworks were used to derive the analytical themes or units for analyzing the data. As it can be seen in chapter four of this study, the study did not group its findings under the headings of the individual and institutional frameworks, but it capitalizes on the fact that such theories do affect each other for drop out to happen to arrive at some themes for analyzing the data found.

It is of equal importance to state here that the individual and institutional frameworks were both helpful in answering the first research question as they give insight into the reasons why children drop out of school, which is the major concern of this thesis. The frameworks also helped to some extent in answering the second research question on the strategies available to mitigate drop out as it is true that, it is only when the cause of a phenomenon is known that a strategy could be devised to heal it. So such frameworks provided some insights which together with the literature reviewed on the strategies for mitigating drop out, helped answered the second research question also.

# 3 Methodology

## 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I present the various ways which were instrumental in getting this study done. As an opening, I highlight the qualitative research strategy and provide some reasons for why it was chosen over the quantitative method. I then present subsequently a brief description of the research design chosen for this study. Sampling, data collection and fieldwork experience are also briefly discussed. The chapter also touches on how issues related to validity and reliability were handled in this research. The research ethics and also the levels and units of analysis are also highlighted in this chapter.

## 3.2. Qualitative research

Like the quantitative research, qualitative research lays much emphasis on the participants of study. It has as its purpose, exploring a phenomenon from the perspectives of the subjects being studied. It gives the most attention to the subjects of study and thus through the use of multiple data collection tools, data is collected for use from the participants being dealt with. Because of the extent of focus it gives to its participants it has as its unique advantage, avoiding the imposition of 'structure and predetermined notions upon its subjects' (Bryman, 1988 as cited in Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2007:43).

In investigating the phenomenon of drop out among school children and other stake holders therefore, it became a preferred if not a necessary choice using the qualitative method. This was due to the fact that the study involved different participants whose situations differed and that to study such diverse cases, it became important to employ a research strategy that is flexible and open to accommodate the varying cases such participants may have. On the contrary, because of the somewhat closed nature of quantitative research, it may somehow fall short in serving as a useful strategy for achieving the goal of this research.

As a research strategy, qualitative research is one that does not generalize its findings to cover other populations, rather as it employs the ideographic and not the nomothetic approach, findings are thus reported to cover specific times and places (Bryman, 1988 as cited in Bray et. al., 2007). It has therefore as its goal to provide an interpretation to the meanings that research participants attribute to their own life situations (Bray et.al.,2007). Children who drop out of school for various reasons and so to understand the complexities why this occurs, one ought to as a matter of importance solicit for the views of the dropouts themselves and so to aid in a better understanding of their individual cases and the meanings they themselves attach to their various situations. With this Bryman (2012) noted that the social world should be studied and interpreted from the perspectives of those being studied. Also as this research involved investigating what strategies there are to reduce drop out, a better understanding of drop out itself from the eyes of the students involved and the immediate stakeholders were useful in providing a good guideline to follow up on those education stakeholders whose responsibility it is to make sure that children remain in the classroom and not otherwise.

Unlike the quantitative research approach which primarily examines and explains the relationship between/among statistical data, the qualitative research strategy appears more open and flexible. In consequence therefore, the qualitative researcher has as its keen interest the provision of description and explanations for data collected and also analyzing and interpreting such data as is given by the research participants. So as it is stated in (Bray et.al., 2007), the qualitative researcher seeks to provide rich insight into 'complex situations or phenomenon'.

As the main focus of this study is to come out with a better understanding of the causes of drop out as well as the strategies that are in place to mitigate them, I sought to do so by putting the views of my participants first and thus by employing the qualitative research strategy, the intention was to open up as much as possible to the views expressed by the research participants. In doing so therefore multiple data collection tools were useful for soliciting participants' views.

As it is the goal of a good qualitative research to interpret the meanings that research participants attribute to their own life situations, it is always fair to be at the receiving point as a researcher while your participants are given the most attention. This therefore

in the words of (Bryman, 1988 as cited in Bray et.al., 2007) avoids imposing a preconceived view upon participants. In this study therefore a ‘one –on –one’ interview was conducted as participants expressed their views their own ways, though as common with most qualitative studies, they were guided by some sets of questions which the present study considered useful and thus relevant to reach its purpose. As is a general characteristic of a good qualitative research, it is more of exploratory than confirmatory and so in studying drop out in selected schools in some communities in Ghana for the first time, my intention was to go out there to the communities and schools in question and then unearth the situation as it is from the research participants themselves and so making the qualitative strategy a preferred option than the quantitative research strategy. As will be seen in the subsequent paragraphs is an outline of the research design used in this study.

### **3.3. Research Design**

Having highlighted the research strategy employed in this study, it is important to consider one other decision which is equally important in every research. In this section therefore I describe the research design chosen for this study. In research several designs are identified and thus are used by researchers in their studies. Researchers such as (Bryman, 2012 & Yin, 2009) provide a list of designs that are employed therefore in research. However, Yin in particular reminds researchers that such designs do overlap in a way as they are not marked by clear boundaries.

It is stated quite clearly in one of the works of Yin (2009), that the choice of a particular research design is dependent on three conditions. Such conditions are ‘the type of research questions asked, the control an investigator has over actual behavior and the focus on contemporary event rather than historical phenomenon’. In studying the drop out situation in primary schools in Ghana, my primary concern was to understand the situation from the point of view of my respondents. With this in mind the choice of a strategy and a design that will aid realize this purpose was very useful.

In choosing the qualitative strategy therefore, I chose the case study design. According to the author, the choice of case study design is the preferred option when ‘why or how questions are raised, the focus is on a contemporary issue within a real life context and

when the researcher has little control over the phenomenon' (Yin, 2009). The author makes it explicit that it is actually the focus on these three conditions that a case study appears different from other research designs.

As a well known design in qualitative research, the case study design is described as very challenging in most social science research (Yin, 2009). The author however makes it clear that such a design is helpful in collecting, presenting and analyzing data. What is unique of a case study is what the author describes as aiding to understand a complex social phenomenon. In this regard individuals, groups, organizations, among others can be understood when case study design is used.

Since the present study sought to investigate why students drop out of schools within selected areas in Ghana, it was important to acknowledge the diversity of responses that be and how suitable the chosen design was intended to help take care of it. As common with experiments and quasi experiments, details in data collection and analysis are mostly hidden while in case study design because of use of multiple sources of data collection, it is noted to bring out details from the point of view of the research participants (Stake as cited in Tellis, 1997 accessed online 13.01.15). In his work on case study, Yin (2009) distinguishes three types of case studies. These are the descriptive, exploratory and explanatory case studies. In them may also be single or multiple case studies. This study lies within the explanatory and exploratory as it is intended not only to explain what causes children to drop out of school, but also to explore what strategies are in place to help mitigate drop out in the context of study.

As has already been said above, case study can be single or multiple case applications. As the present study is about two groups, namely, rural and urban, which are independent but comparable cases, it takes individual groups as unit of analysis and this makes it a comparative two case study design. In this design, research participants such as teachers, students, parents, head teachers, directors and circuit supervisors were added to provide a holistic image of how the phenomenon of drop out occurs among children in the selected areas of study. The underlying social fabrics of the two social groups identified for this study provide a suitable basis for comparison but because of the fact that such groups are under the same administrative structure, there appears to be some similarity.

### **3.4. Sampling**

In research different sampling techniques may apply though depending on the types of research questions asked, there may be an overlap. As stated in Bryman (2012), discussions in most qualitative research revolves around purposive sampling. According to the author purposive sampling gives the researcher insight into what units or group of units should be sampled for undertaking a given study. In this case therefore, the type of research questions raised in the study is also immediately helpful to the researcher as it leads to selecting those units who are by way of purpose needed for the research. As the study in question has to do with qualitative research and also as it raises two research questions, it was very necessary to identify the significant units to aid meet the purpose of the study. As has been clearly stated earlier, I sought to investigate the reasons why students drop out of schools in some communities in Ghana and also what strategies are in place to reduce this situation. It was for this reason that I sought to have a face to face interview with drop out themselves and also the immediate stakeholders who were equally helpful when it came to providing in depth information on the phenomenon as far as the research purpose was concerned. In doing so therefore the definition given by Bryman (2012) was very instrumental as it provided a comprehensive understanding of all that sampling entails. As the author rightly puts it, sampling has to do with selecting units for a study which may include organizations, people, departments, documents, among others. As this study is a comparative one, I sought to first of all select two regions in Ghana and also two municipal Assemblies reported in the literature as experiencing the problem of drop out among school children.

Within each municipality, two schools were selected. The schools were located in both rural and urban areas to make room for such comparisons. Selecting the number of student participants for this study was in the beginning difficult as I could not predict in advance the number of drop out cases that were. However, the schools I selected and some of the teachers were very helpful in helping me identify school drop outs in the various communities involved as I was in most cases led by a teacher or student to the homes of such drop outs. In all the study interviewed 15 dropouts, 8 of which were females and the remaining 7 were males who were between the ages of six and 18 years and they in most cases were drop outs from the primary department of the basic school system. Out of the fifteen dropouts, 8 were from the rural areas and 7 were from the urban areas. The selection of only 15 children was because of time constraints. That is

the need to meet completing this study within a stipulated period of time and the cost involved made provides adequate reasons for why only 15 children were sampled and thus studied. Again and to better understand drop outs, five parents were interviewed as they also added value to answering especially my first research question.

As I was led by my second research question, which has to do with investigating the strategies that help to mitigate drop out, I interviewed the head teachers of each school and also as I requested, the most experienced teachers who were thought to have had experience with drop outs were also interviewed. And in cases where such experienced ones were not on the staff the head teachers assigned other teachers to me or I found one myself. In all four teachers and four head of schools were interviewed. Also as is considered a useful part of this study, I interviewed at the micro level, the Deputy Director -General of education who is also the Director General of Ghana Education service. Again, I interviewed at the municipal level the then deputy director of education at the Gomoa East district and also as I was assigned by the Director of education at the Ga central municipality, I had an interview with the two circuit supervisors within the municipality. All these were done to gain an in-depth insight into the phenomenon of drop out and also to help answer my second research questions on the strategies that are to mitigate drop out.

As it is mostly the case, a good justification is given for why a particular sample unit was chosen for a study. So in the case of the present study and as far as the context is concerned, Ghana was chosen purposively because of the presence of drop out cases in the country which was being reported in the MoE Report (2013). In selecting the two regions for this study, I was interested in revisiting a rural school school where I had taught as a teacher during my national service and so was aware of the prevalence of the phenomenon. Some researchers have also reported prevalence of drop out in the region, eg: (Ananga 2011, Consortium for Research on Education, Access, Transition and Equity, 2011 ).

In addition, the Gomoa East municipality upon reading my request to undertake research in the district assigned to another basic school. Also the Greater Accra region which is the capital city of Ghana was chosen for this study because of proximity as I

live within the communities where the two schools are situated- both of which belong to the Ga Central municipality.

My familiarity with the two municipalities as a researcher was very important to the study as I was aware to some extent the social, cultural and economic background of the people which are key factors in investigating a phenomenon like drop out. This helped me in my analysis of drop out within the chosen municipalities.

Also in relation to the schools, there were more than one student who had dropped out - making them good sites for conducting a research like this one.

Also to achieve the purpose of this study, the students selected and so interviewed for this study were drop outs who left school for various reasons. The dropouts themselves were the main source of information as they actually were the victims of the situation and so were by purpose those who were in a better position to tell their situations as they experienced them. Additionally parents of some drop outs, teachers, and head teachers were also selected as they are important education stake holders who are immediately involved with the education of such children. They were thus helpful in adding and/or confirming that which was explored from the drop outs themselves and in most cases provided information on what strategies there are in reducing drop out. The data collection process as it was experienced on the field is also briefly described below.

### **3.5. Data collection**

In a qualitative research, the researcher involved in a study is in most cases made to believe that the subjects of study are the owners of their situation and so are capable of expressing their world views when it comes to the phenomenon or issues being investigated. So as I sought to do a qualitative study and for that matter collect data for the purpose of meeting my research goals, I took inspiration from this and thus collected data using multiple tools as they allowed much flexibility to my research participants to express their world views as they experienced them. This is not to say that the research participants handled it all- I went to the field with some set of questions which mostly provided guidelines for the participants' responses.

To aid achieve the purpose of this research, semi structured interviews, observations and informal conversation were useful tools employed for collecting data for this study.



All these tools give room for the researcher to interact with both the research subjects and the environments involved. As it was the case with the present study, the data collection tool that was predominantly used was the semi-structured interview as this made it possible to have a face to face interaction with the research participants. In addition, observations were made as there were cases where the researcher was to look around giving room for fishing additional information which were equally relevant to the study. Subsidiary to the interviews and observation was that of informal conversation which was also used to solicit for some information where they mattered most.

With the semi structured interviews, the researcher goes to the field with a list of questions or topics where the interviewees are asked questions where they are free to answer (Bryman, 2012). I went to the field therefore with some questions in mind which served as a guide to the interviews conducted on the field. The various participants in this study were all interviewed and depending on which category of participants was being interviewed different sets of questions were asked. In this study, I had multiple set of participants who were students, teachers, head teachers, parents, Directors of education and circuit supervisors.

As has already been said, observations were made in areas that mattered most which I considered useful to achieving the research purpose. In consequence therefore, certain features related to the school and the communities where the study took place were observed. In addition, the family settings of drop outs and their homes were also observed. Such observations were relevant as they helped me understand the context in which different drop outs lived. At the school level facilities such as libraries, computer laboratories, classrooms, among others were observed. At the community level, the kinds of economic activities that the people are engaged in were looked at as the literature and my findings suggest that such activities and their availability in the communities contribute to the occurrence of drop out. The kinds of homes people live in and sometimes the number of people that share the same compound or room were equally observed as they give a hint for understanding the socio- economic background of the drop outs identified for this study.

As no research takes place in a vacuum, the paragraphs below are devoted to telling the various experiences I had with my research subjects while on the field back home in Ghana for the data collection.

### **3.6. Field work**

The field work took place in the months of September and October, 2014 spanning a period of four weeks. Before arriving in Accra, the capital city of Ghana where part of the study was conducted, I had already made arrangement with a friend who happens to be a teacher in one of the schools selected for the study. As part of the arrangement, he was to dispatch copies of my letter of consent to the two municipal Assemblies involved in the study. This happened in order to offset any uncertainties and delays which I might have experienced on the field since it is mostly difficult to get officials to work on this especially within the time frame that one might need it. The Gomoa East and the Ga central municipalities were selected for the studies and as was the case, the directors of the education unit of these municipalities were very instrumental as they actually helped me with letters requesting permission from the head teachers of the schools selected for the studies.

Before I had anything to do with the schools and the communities involved in this study, it was necessary to first of all have interviews at the municipal level as the study in itself concerns them. It was actually during my interview that I was given confirmation of the existence of drop out cases in the selected schools though such confirmations were not backed by documents. While in the case of the Gomoa East Municipality in the central region of Ghana, it was quite easy with the interviews, it was not the case with the Ga central municipality in the Greater Accra Region. In the latter, though I requested that I interviewed the Director of Education, after I had issued my consent letter to her, she handed me over to her two circuit supervisors who became instrumental so far as collecting data from the municipal education office was concerned.

As has been the purpose of this study- the reasons why students drop out of school and how such cases can be dealt with became the major concern of the interviews I had with the various participants in the municipal education office. My major concern here was

first to find out the municipalities' awareness of the phenomenon in question and so proceed with exploring its causes and also what the municipalities themselves were doing to curb it. As a matter of fact I had a lengthy time of interviewing at the offices as the participants were themselves interested in the topic being investigated. As it is mostly the case with most research and how they are carried out in terms of ethics, I took some time to explain the purpose of the study to them as I did with other participants in subsequent interviews in the schools and homes involved in the study. This thus was useful as participants could actively participate with interest as they had the freedom to express themselves and so provide responses as to questions asked during the interviews. This is not however to express absolute freedom on the part of participants because there were cases where through probing they were guided to either provide clarity to their responses or provide additional information in relation to questions asked.

As it were, my next obligation was to submit by hand the permission letters given me by the municipal education offices. Though I did not have such letters on the same day due to some challenge I had which led to changing one of the municipalities to another, it did not affect the entire process. What I did actually was to deliver a copy of the letter given me to one of the village schools through a teacher as I could not personally make the visit that day. Subsequent to this was the interview process. The head teacher had by then as I was told informed the teachers about my coming to the school for a research. On my arrival at the school, I had my first interview with the head teacher who later gave me permission to interview the teachers who were involved. In all I interviewed two teachers – a male and a female and they were very happy to share their experiences with me as questions were asked. Though the interview I had with the head teacher was audio recorded and relevant notes were in addition taken, it was much of a challenge to think of tape recording the interviews I had with the teachers involved. This was due to the fact that school was in session making it difficult for recording their voices. As a matter of fact therefore, I took as much notes as would a stenographer.

As part of the research process, I made a personal visit to the other village school also in the Gomoa East Municipality and as I did in the first school of visit, after I had issue my letter of consent to the head mistress and had a brief informal discussion with her, I had an interview with her for some time. She used the corridor in front of her office for

her administrative duties and at the time of visit she was very busy working as school had resumed not long ago. The interview I had with her took place on the corridor which was somehow noisy and so the interview I had with her could not be tape recorded. I therefore as a matter of fact took in writing what transpired during the interview process. During my interview with her, she could provide some records on drop out for the previous academic year. Such records were however lacking in schools studied in Accra. As was demanded she granted that I interviewed some of her teachers. The initial plan was for me to interview the most experienced teacher but the challenge was that anytime I went to the school she was busily teaching. This however was not too much of a big deal as I had other teachers-male and female whom I interviewed. As busy as the teachers were both when class was in session and even during break time, I had to take part of their teaching time for the interviews which took place in their respective classrooms. They were very helpful as they consented to be interviewed and open up with information on questions asked them during the interview. As part of their help, they could give me the names of some drop outs who were later followed on to be interviewed. My only challenge with the teachers involved was that the class six teacher was just about a year old in the school and so as he openly confessed most of the experiences and views he shared were in relation to his previous place of work rather than the current site chosen for the study. Before leaving the school on the first day, I made an arrangement with one of the teachers who had personally volunteered to assist in locating some of the drop outs and their homes.

As the study took place in two regions, the Central and the Greater Accra Region, I turned attention to the schools in Accra. The first school chosen was visited here as I did for the rural schools; I issued a letter to the head teachers asking for permission to conduct a research in the school. The Junior High and the Primary schools head teachers were all interviewed. In all, I interviewed two head teachers and all interviews were tape recorded and notes were taken where necessary.

I made afterwards my last visit to the very last school which runs the shift system and is located in the Ga Central municipality, also in Accra. In this school, I had my first interview with the head mistress on one of the shifts and the other interview with the male head of the other shift. I therefore, interviewed two head teachers who helped me with a brief background and the general running of the school.

Two teachers were also interviewed after introducing the subject matter of my research to them. After having understood the purpose of the study, they shared their views with me as I asked questions.

After having had all those interviews with teachers, head teachers, directors of education and the two circuit supervisors, what was actually left was how to locate the drop outs themselves and their parents. The initial plan for so doing was to be given a report that has the names of the school drop outs. However since this was lacking in almost all the schools the study was conducted, another approach became useful. This approach involved me, teachers and pupils. I went to the classrooms and with the help of some teachers, found out from the pupils themselves the names and home locations of their colleague students who for some reasons have stopped attending school. In most of the classes that we visited, I discovered that the number of drop outs whose names were mentioned by the pupils outweighed the estimated numbers the interviews I had with the head of schools revealed. The implication here is that there were many cases of drop out which were unknown to the school authorities. What I observed in addition was that some of these children had stopped attending their present schools for other schools. Some too had traveled to other places and still others have stopped school and were in the house for various reasons, which were later confirmed during the interviews I had with the drop outs themselves and some of their parents who were involved in the study.

After having identified such drop outs with the help of teachers and students, the next thing which I call the most challenging part of the whole research process was making a follow up to their homes. This was made possible as some teachers and students volunteered to help me do so. While we were able to trace some of these drop outs and their parents in their homes, it was also somehow difficult to meet others too. There were however some cases where I met either parents or drop outs and not both at the same time of visit. As was sometimes the practice, drop outs were asked if they knew friends who had equally drop out of school. This was useful in locating other drop outs in the community for the study. As the study progressed, especially at Ablekuma in Accra, there was an occasion where some drop outs were identified accidentally. Interesting and as it did happen on one of the days while I was with some pupils who had been instructed to lead me to the homes of some drop outs, we came to a home where there were a number of drop outs and as we walk pass to the next house, we were

called by one of the dropouts who happened to be the elderly amongst them. When he got to know the reason why we were combing the community, he told me he wanted to go to back to school. He is about 17 years old and he told me he had been a drop out since he was in grade 2. He thus made himself available for the interview. His younger brother and a few other children were subsequently interviewed. Though in most of my interviews I interviewed the parents of drop outs, in the case of these ones I was told their father wasn't at home.

By interviewing both children and their parents as was the plan of the study, my intention was to confirm the findings given me by either participant and so to find if any additional information will as well emerge. There were cases where drop outs themselves did not understand in depth the situation that they were faced with and so giving the details of their situation was sometimes met with a challenge. Some of their parents however were helpful as they threw much light on such cases and even giving other information that were sometimes omitted or not told in full by the drop out themselves. As was the case which was not too common, there were times the information given me by drop outs and their parents differed but once they were detected probing was used to seek for clarity to such differing views.

As the field work involved accessing the homes of people which sometimes happen without their knowledge there were times I had to spend a good time to make my purpose known to them. While it was easy for some parents and drop outs to cooperate with me, it was quite difficult for others too. After spending time to convince her about the purpose of my research and how I was carrying it out, a mother did not still see the need for me to have an interview with his son. This coupled with a few others made the work somehow challenging though in actual sense it did not disrupt the entire process. As I observed while I was on the field, I realized a somewhat difference in the level of cooperation I received from teachers and even students in the rural and urban schools chosen for the study. While in the two rural schools both teachers and pupils were helpful particularly with locating drop outs, in the urban schools there was no single case where a teacher did that. Per my observation as a sociologist, I saw that this was due to how the social life of the various communities and schools involved were arranged. While in rural areas people live together and are known to one other, it was not the case in the urban areas. Teachers were thus known by almost every parent in the rural areas. So in most cases where I had to go with a teacher, they did the talking on

my behalf and introduced my study in the local dialect to the parents and their children. As for the interviews they mostly excused me while I had time with the respondents. This however was not the case in the urban schools as teachers mostly do not even know the communities that children live let alone their individual homes. This is perhaps was due to the fact that children live in different areas other than where their schools are situated. Students who live in the same neighborhood with drop outs and those who per chance knew their homes became useful therefore in tracking the drop outs in the urban areas.

### **3.7. Units and levels of comparisons**

The authors (Bray, Adamson & Mason, 2007) have observed the traditional focus given to geographical entities when a comparative education study is talked about. The authors however in their book have given a demonstration of how several other levels and units of comparison can be made in recent times. This study employed an approach where the major levels of comparison- rural and urban were presented separately in relation to the first research question. In this case, findings related to why students dropped out of school were presented separately in different sections but what is important here is that in situations where a particular case in one setting was comparable to the other , the study did that simultaneously in order to project a picture of what was 'going on' between the entities being compared.

As this study found out, the family, the school, community, the student as an individual, his or her peers were discovered as the various units that were analyzed as being responsible for why children drop out of school in both rural and urban settings. In this study the identified cases presented appear to have enough similarities which provide fertile grounds for their comparison. For instance, the schools in the urban areas and that of the rural settings are all under one governance and administration in Ghana, thereby making them comparable.

### **3.8. Validity and reliability**

It is common in research the importance that is attached to validity and reliability (Bryman, 2012; Bryman, 2008; Kum, 1999; Newman & Benz, 1998) and how such concepts help to tell the quality of a particular research. The concept of validity and reliability are popular and traditionally known in quantitative research. However the story seems to have improved and nowadays such concepts are also talked about and applied in some unique ways in qualitative studies. In applying such concepts in qualitative studies, researchers have devised concepts such as trustworthiness, dependability, authenticity (Bryman, 2008; Patton, 2002) as an attempt to look at the quality of a qualitative research.

In this study, the concept of trustworthiness is chosen to explain the validity of the research (Bryman, 2008) and in qualitative research validity is dependent on a number of factors (Patton, 2002) of which the strength of the qualitative researcher and how information rich the people being studied are what matter most. In meeting this criterion therefore I went to the field of study not as an alien but as one who is known to the people both geographically and even in terms of my familiarity with the language spoken by the people. This helped me gain the trust of the people since the people saw me as one of them and so were least willing to conceal any information from me. As if that was not enough, in most of the areas where this study was carried out, especially in the rural areas where in one of the communities, I have had the experience of working as a teacher, some teachers there were very helpful as they followed me to the homes of dropouts and even to the extent of introducing the study to parents and their children-who were identified as school drop outs. In most rural areas and even urban areas in Ghana , teachers are very well respected and so having their company particularly enhanced the quality of this research as participants at the sight of these teachers saw me as not there to harm them but as a friend. Because of this, they cooperated and were as much open and disclosed as much information needed as questions were asked them.

In addition to looking at validity in qualitative research is triangulation (Patton, 2002) which also helps to trace the quality of this qualitative study. As described by some authours such as (Tellis, 2007; Bryman, 2008), triangulation is important in qualitative research as it has to do with studying a phenomenon by using multiple sources of data to solicit the views of participants. In this study, just as the researcher employed multiple sources of data collection, namely interviews, observations and even document



analysis, triangulation is said to be dealt with and hence attempting to answer the question of validity in the study at hand. According to some scholars, interviews and observation complement each other. While interviews help give understanding into the experiences of the people being studied (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), observations also allowed the researcher to study the behavior of the people in real life situations such as the classroom and even the communities in which they live.

Patton (2002) has observed the weakness and limitations of studies that employ a single method as well as studies that use multiple data collection methods. In this case therefore, validity and its attainment is put into question in research work that uses one method or a single source of data collection. In this study, in order to overcome the challenge at hand, the study employed two methods of data collection, which were interviews and observations. The concept of triangulation in this study therefore enhanced the credibility, transferability and dependability (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) of this research work.

### **3.9. Data analysis**

Analyzing data in qualitative research is proven to be very difficult as to some authors such as (Yin, 2003; Bryman, 2012), there are no clear rules when it comes to analyzing the data. Yin (2003:109) was specific in stating that '*...the strategies and techniques have not been well defined*'. The author however admonished the need for a case study to have an 'analytic strategy'.

Returning from the field as a young researcher who was anxious to get things done, all I needed to start with was to listen very carefully to all the taped interviews as well as reading the field notes made during the period of data collection. Even before the data had been fully collected, the available audio tapes were listened to as a way of giving importance to the data. Bryman (2012) has brought to light the significance of giving attention to the data as a way of making a 'true analysis'. Listening to the interview tapes during the data collection stage and even after data collection particularly adds value to the research as it helps a lot in analyzing the data and making sense of it (Maxwell, 2005).

Transcribing which is seen as one of the most difficult task in qualitative research became the next phase of the data analysis of this study. Audio tapes recorded from the

interviews I had with school children, teachers, parents, head teachers and government officials were carefully transcribed word for word which became useful in the next stage of analyzing the data.

The next and also more important stage was the coding stage where data transcribed were coded and categories were developed to answer the study's research questions. Such categories were arrived at through multiple re-reading of the text. Over here the written text was read over and over again and squeezed into some form of substantive categories and topics. Such substantive topics were then presented in a manner that answers the research questions of this study.

### **3.10. Research ethics**

Ethical issues are a very important aspect of every research and as this study involved the study of human beings in their real life settings, ethical considerations became a necessary part of it. The study thus even before it took place on the field had already made arrangements on how to both handle and go about ethical issues. Important to state therefore is the issue of informed consent which was sought from the MoE, teachers, children involved and their parents. In this regard, whenever I came by a participant the aim and objective of the study was succinctly explained and thus participants were not unaware of what I was doing with them. They saw me as 'one of them' and thus were more willing to disclose information that were demanded and asked of them in the course of the research.

In the course of explaining issues to the research participants, they were assured of anonymity as they were told their real names would be protected. Meanwhile, participants were informed of the freedom they had to participate or opt out if for some reasons they felt dissatisfied with the process. Interestingly, all participants agreed to participate in the interview at the time the field work was carried out. Additionally and so far as ethics in research is concerned, all participants were also assured of the confidentiality of the kind of information they gave and they were in relation to this made to know that, the information they were giving was strictly for academic research, leading to the awarding of a masters degree at my University.

# 4 Presentation of Findings

## Introduction

This chapter presents the data analyzed in the study. The analyzed data thus provides answers to the two research questions identified for the study. The data reveals various issues and events that inform a child's decision to discontinue his or her education. It is interesting to state in this chapter that for a single case or student, not a single factor is responsible for a child's decision to drop out of school. Rumberger (2001), has found that there are proximal and distal factors that affect a child's decision to drop out of school. This chapter thus takes care of the multiple situations that do play side by side with others to influence the drop out of school of a child. The measures that have been put in place to mitigate drop out which the second research question addresses is also looked at in this chapter. This chapter is thus divided into two parts. While the first addresses the question of why children drop out of schools in both rural and urban areas, the second part also reveals the strategies that are in place to reduce the incidence of drop out in school. For the purpose of clarity and orderly presentation, the reasons why students drop out of schools in urban and rural areas are presented simultaneously based on the units being analyzed and where there lies similarities or differences, the study takes care of that.

### 4.1. Factors responsible for why children drop out of school

Given the adequate usefulness of the individual and institutional frameworks in arriving at the various themes and categories (units) of analysis, it is important to state that presenting such findings are also categorized under two main headings, that is, conditions present in the school (push factors) and conditions outside of the school (pull factors) that led to the occurrence of drop out. That is though the individual and institutional frameworks helped in analyzing the data, the push and pull factors also enhanced the data by helping tell which of the factors that affected a drop out emanated from the school or not. This is important because it is believed that when the root cause of drop out is known (that is whether it is caused by conditions at the school or outside the school), it is believed that developing a strategy to heal it would be much easier. Based on such considerations six units are identified and thus presented for both the

urban and the rural situations. These units are: Poverty, Child labour, Academic performance, Teenage pregnancy, Corporal punishment and the school context.

#### **4.1.1. Household poverty**

When children were asked what really caused them to drop out of school, many factors were mentioned but almost without exceptions many drop outs mentioned among others poverty within their families as being the main drive that pulled them out of school. In most cases though such children do not directly mention poverty as the main factor that has driven them out of school, it was evident in the situations they provided and the observations I made that many of them could not afford to buy books, uniforms, food, shoes, pay extra classes fees, among other things which they needed for school, resulting in their drop out of school. In his 2011 publication, the author found that household poverty contributed significantly to drop out among children in the selected areas of his study (Ananga, 2011). Poverty in this work accounted for why children in both urban and rural areas do drop out of school. Found below is a presentation of the situation on the ground as it occurred among both urban and rural children.

#### **4.1.2. Household poverty and drop out in urban areas**

I do not have a school uniform and even the one that I have is spoilt. I have told my mother about it but she said she does not have money and so I do not want to worry her. Besides my father is also sick and so he cannot also help me....He once told me he has nothing to help me with and so when he told me that I had nothing to do than to give up on him.... I am not going back to school because I do not have the prescribed school uniform.

Out of the number of children interviewed in the urban area for the purpose of this study only one girl reported not to have a school uniform and that she was in the house awaiting the time her mother could afford to buy her a new uniform. Her words are captured in the above text. This was however not the case in the rural areas studied as many drop outs complained not having school uniforms as the main reason why they have given up their education. What is worth stating here is the fact that the government has in 2009 launched its free school uniform distribution but not all schools and pupils are beneficiaries. The two schools selected in the urban areas were by the time this study was conducted not benefited from the free school uniform distribution exercise. While I found that head teachers and

teachers in both rural and urban areas were strict when it came to putting on the prescribed school attire, one Ghanaian author had found elsewhere that some teachers did allow children without the prescribed school uniforms to come to school (Ananga, 2011). In his work what was really causing the drop out was the fact that children who did not have school uniforms did feel singled out and somehow isolated among their peers. And as it has been already talked about in previous sections of this work, when children are not well integrated (socially engaged), they turn to drop out of school.

A similar case was witnessed of a boy who dropped out of school while in primary three. He also complained of how he was willing to go to school but his father who is also separated from the mother did not have the means to buy his books coupled with others which he needed in order to become a student of the only public school in his community. Part of what he said are captured in the lines below:

My father could not afford my fees when I was in the private school and now I am in the house because I need to buy certain things such as books and uniforms in order to enroll with the public school here. I do not know when my father will get the means to enroll me back to school so I occupy myself by playing games while my father is away for work.

Ananga (2011) has found that, the absence of school supplies led some children to drop out of school. In the work at hand, I also found that though some children are serious and are having the willingness to go to school and have a successful education, when they lack school supplies such as books, pens, among others they do eventually drop out of school. Below is captured the words of a boy who met me and called me that I interview him because he saw me interviewing other children in his community. He actually expressed worry over his having to stop school but he made me aware that he was not getting the required support that was needed to keep him in school.

'I actually did not have anyone to support me while I was in school and this made me not serious with my education. There were times I went to school without books and while all my friends were writing I had to sit idle. I did not like this situation and with time I decided to quit schooling'.

Still on the point of poverty within the family, a boy had dropped out of school because his father and mother who were not living together could not provide his basic needs. In an interview, found below is what he had to say:

'I was attending school but my mother said she has no money to take care of my needs. When we went to my father who is separated from my mother, he told us not to come to him again and this made me stopped schooling'.

Another boy had also dropped out of school because he had no means to buy food and other things which he needed for school.

'My father does not have money to give me for school. Meanwhile I needed money for a lot of things including buying of food. Besides my mother too was not around to support us and so I did not go back to school'.

With this and as it relates to food and retention, an earlier research has found that when children are hungry and do not eat, they are more likely to drop out of school because according to the authors hungry children are not able to concentrate very well in the classroom (Avila &Gaperini, 2005)

### **4.1.3. Household poverty and drop out in rural areas**

As has become a major part of my observations, children who usually attend public schools in Ghana do normally come from poor socio-economic background and so do mostly exhibit similar characteristics when a study is conducted on them. Despite the somewhat geographic differences between communities in the urban areas and rural areas, it is important to note here on point that not much differences thrived when it comes to the income levels of parents from both the urban and rural areas chosen for this study. In consequence therefore, the problems that were suffered by the urban child such as the inability of parents to afford school supplies such as text books, exercise books, pens, school uniforms, pay for extra classes, among others counted themselves as being the reasons why some children do drop out of school. I must state as a matter of interest here that, children in the rural areas like some of their colleagues in the urban areas did expressed the willingness and passion to be in school but by virtue of what appears to be out of their control (poverty in the family), they seem to have nothing to do than to accept the termination of their education. The family has thus become an institution which limits the educational rights of children because of poverty. Tickly et al., (2013) have put on record that when an institution limits the educational rights of an individual in this way, inequality is said to be created. Education thus becomes a luxury where only those families who have the means do send their children to school (Ananga, 2011).

The interviews I had with children produced findings which confirmed how and to what extent they have been kicked out of the education ladder all in the name of poverty in the family:

'I did not get anyone to support me and when I had to go to school, I did so with my own money. The support was not coming forth and so when school vacated the first term, I did not go back when it resumed. I live with my grandmother and she gives me only 30 Ghana pesewas (USD 0.07) each time I went to school and this is a token which can buy nothing. When I also needed books I had to buy them on my own. I had to also buy my own school uniform because the one given me by the government is damaged and there is no one to support me. Not having anyone to take care of my schooling is what I am disturbed about and that had been the main reason why I am no more a school pupil'.

The above text was captured of a girl who had dropped out of school in the rural area while she was in class six. She told me how she had missed schooling as in her case she was very comfortable in confessing her excellent position in class. According to her she had a good academic performance when she was in school and she could not afford to let go her schooling as she predicted wanting to be a useful citizen in Ghana which she said could only be achieved through education:

'when I was in class five I took the first position in class and in class six I took the second position. This encourages me a lot as I know that by keeping it up I would become a useful citizen in Ghana. When I get someone who will take care of my needs, I will go back'.

By closely observing the trend at which children drop out of school, the scholar was tempted to make such conclusions that 'abolishing school fees is not enough to ensure retention' of pupils at school (Ananga, 2011:183). That is to say though all children in public schools in Ghana do not pay school fees, the need to acquire some school supplies and even buy food to feed oneself sometimes makes it challenging to realize a universal primary education.

As for why poverty appear prevalent in rural areas, the scholar found that rural parents were least willing to make sacrifices in order to meet the educational needs of their children (Acheampong, 2006). This study also found a somewhat contrast between urban parents and rural parents. Whereas I observed from the interview I had with urban parents that they were working hard to see their children go back to school, rural parents especially mothers appeared least concerned with their children's education and thus did not make any move to see their children back to school. Such observations were made based on what most drop outs told me about their parents. This is what a girl had to say: *'I live with my*

*grandmother and my mother seems to care little or nothing about me. She hardly visited me let alone to give me money to go back to school'.*

Still on why children dropped out of school in the rural areas, other children continued to cite poverty related issues as contributing to their absence from the education system:

I have no one to take me for admission. My mother is aware I need to be in school but she complains of not having money. I was once in school but because there is no money to buy food when I go to school I have stopped schooling. My elder brother has promised to help me but since he promised I have not heard anything from him.

The above are words taken from a class four pupil of 14 years old who had dropped out of school owing to the fact that there is no support for her to be in school. Her mother, a tomato farmer complained of not having money to take care of her child. She attended a rural school which did not benefit from the school feeding programme and so had to make sure she had money in her pocket before she could go to school.

Some other children have stopped schooling in the selected rural areas because they had to pay extra classes fees which they did not have the means to do so. A teacher told me that: '*Extra classes is normally organized after school and it is compulsory for all students to take part and anyone who did not pay his fee was driven out of class...*'. A class one pupil who dropped out of school at the age of 12 years also told me this:

when I went to school I was told by my teacher to come back home for my extra classes fees and when I came home, my grandmother will not give it to me but will shout at me to return to school. She keeps giving me messages and promises to extend to my teacher but my teacher was least willing to accept them. I was sacked from class one day and since then I did not return to school

Like it was found for a pupil of 12 years old, she complained of hunger at school and also the fact that her foot wear was not in good condition to enable her go to school. Though she had managed over sometime to walk without shoes to school she at last had to give up her education. This is what the 12 year old primary one pupil told me in an interview that ensued between us:

*I used to get hungry at school and when my shoes got spoilt, I was walking barefooted to school. When this had continued for sometime I had no options than to stop schooling'.*



One of the works of Ananga(2011) revealed that while most children were not driven home for wearing the prescribed school uniforms, they were sent home by their teachers when they wore any unofficial shoes to school.

It appeared also that due to the prevalence of poverty in the home, some parents could not afford the purchase of school uniforms for their children. From the interview I had with teachers and school heads in the rural areas, I found that the two schools chosen had all previously benefitted from the school uniforms that were distributed by the Government of Ghana. What was a major issue for both children and their parents was the fact that children were given one uniform each and that had taken place long ago and though not all children benefited from it, those who benefited also had theirs worn out. This problem raised the issue of them having to acquire new ones in order to make it to school but because the means to purchase the school uniform was not there, they had to drop out of school.

*'My school uniform got damaged and my mother told me she had no money to buy a new one for me'.*

I do not have the school uniform prescribed for me to be in school. My mother is aware I do not have it but she is always complaining that she has no money to buy a new one for me. I want to be in school but I do not feel comfortable going to school without the prescribed attire on. I want to have a school uniform before I can go to school so that I will be recognized just like my friends at school who have school uniforms'.

Found above are some of the complains that relate to some children who did not have school uniforms because their mothers could not purchase one for them. During the field work I heard teachers and head teachers tell me that when harvest is low in the rural areas most children do not come to school because their parents could not afford to take care of their needs. Parents also complained of how sometimes it is difficult for them to make ends meet all because of poor harvest. The villagers normally depend heavily on nature for the cultivation of their farm produce so in situations where it fails to rain, they experience bad seasons. I observed by implication that when the season is bad, there is little or nothing to sell to generate income for their households. Most children who have dropped out of school owing to poverty is as a result of some of these development present in the rural areas.

#### **4.1.2. Child labour**

This is what the study calls *economic engagement*. Almost all studies done in both rural and urban schools that were reviewed suggested that most children who dropped out of school were engaged in somekind of economic activity (eg.Imoro, 2009; Sottie et al., 2011; Barimah et al., 2005, Ananga, 2011; Ananga, 2011b). It was found in this study that the informal economic activity prevalent in most rural and urban areas made it possible for school children to gain employment. It was also found that the presence of household poverty or the inability of families to meet the needs of their children drove such children out of school in order to engage in an economic activity. While children in urban areas dropped out of school to engage in economic activities such as carpentry, masonry, trading, among others, their colleagues in the rural areas did engage predominantly in farming activities.

#### **4.1.2.1. Child labour and drop out in the urban areas**

I did not actually like the school-besides I also have an interest in the job as well so I decided to stop school and work instead. My sister told me that in no time she will be on vacation and that I will get the chance to start the work. At the moment I sell sometimes by the road side as a way of keeping me occupied.

Out of the total number of children interviewed in the urban areas only one of them reported not having interest in schooling as being the reason why they dropped out of school. The above text was captured from a girl who had dropped out to work instead owing to the fact that she had no love for being in school and that working for money is what she takes delight in. This finding is somehow consistent with the findings of the Ghana statistical service which found that as high as 34.58% of children aged 6-11 and 44.26% of those aged 12-15 left school to engage in child labour because they found school uninteresting and useless (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003 as cited Ashong, 2013).In consequence, children who had negative attitude towards school but a positive attitude towards working owing to certain factors at the school, community or even the school may eventually drop out of school.

In related cases and just as it has already been said in a section above, poverty in the family also led some children to work prematurely in order to raise some level of income to fend for themselves or provide some of their basic needs. This point is particularly a characteristic of some children who had the desire to be in school but because they could not meet the school supplies, they initially think of working to make some money for themselves. I observed from a couple of drop outs that they do drop out with the intention of working to save some money and later return to school but eventually working becomes the opportunity cost of their

schooling and they become counted as school drop outs. Meanwhile some earlier works have found that poverty in the family influenced a child's attitude to work instead of schooling (Ananga, 2011; Sottie et al., 2011; Braimah et al., 2005). Below is an excerpt of what a boy told me in an interview which ensued between us:

I live with my father and my other siblings. We do not live with our mother and it is my father who takes care of us. When I was in school, there were days I had to absent myself in order to follow some masons and carpenters to work in order to make some money to buy some books and food for myself. My father is old and has not the means to take care of us. My younger brother is also not going to school because we have to work to support ourselves. I dropped out when I was fourteen years and in primary two and now I am working.

Still on why some children dropped out of school, a girl told me how she has to consistently help her mother with her work at the market and how this gradually influenced her to give up schooling

'When I was in the afternoon shift, I used to help my mother sell in the morning before going to school. I had to sell before I could get money to go to school and when I was in the morning shift too, I sold in the afternoon and there is no day that I did not sell.'

#### **4.1.2.2. Child labour and drop out in the rural areas**

Observations made from the study and the interviews I had with rural children and their parents revealed that all of them were engaged in some kind of economic activity. While some of them were engaged in selling food stuffs from the farm, majority of them told me they provided some kind of assistance to their parents on the farm. As it was observed children caught in labour in the rural areas were predominantly coming from poverty affected homes. Children were thus mostly caught helping their parents or guardians in their various economic activities or have dropped out to learn specific kinds of jobs. A boy told me how his father has told him to forgo his education in order to learn being an electrician. *'I was in class three when my father told the electrician in this village to train me as an apprentice and since then I did not go to school again'*. In the case presented here, the boy told me he was not doing well academically when he was in school and so when his father told him to quit schooling and learn the electricians' job, he had no option than to cooperate with him. I observed that this boy's father had no education background and so did not know the value of education that is why he preferred his son worked than to be in school.

Still on child labour, it was again evident that children who had dropped out of school to engage in some kind of economic activity did so at the dictate of their parents. A drop out told me this: *'I live with my grandmother and when I was in school, there were times she told me*

*not to go to school only to accompany her to the farm. She did this mostly during the beginning of the planting season'*

Another girl of 16 years at the time of visit to her home at the time of interview told me that she was in class one when she dropped out of school and in her case though child labour was not the immediate factor that led her to drop out of school, she said among other things that she was involved in selling food stuffs even during those days when she was in school. As one living with her grandparents in a family house in a village, she assisted her grandmother in selling her stock of food items which she brought from the market.

Other drop outs in the selected rural areas got involved in labor after they had dropped out of school and so child labour became a secondary factor to other factors that pulled them out of school. In the case of a ten year old drop out, he was also caught contributing to labor on his grandmother's farm after he had dropped out of school owing to the fact that he had issues with poverty when he was in school. This boy told me as part of his activities on the farm, he assisted his grandmother in weeding and irrigation.

### **4.1.3. Academic Performance**

Academic performance of students was seen as one of the most important factors that played side by side with other factors to influence the drop out of a child. Academic performance is identified by Rumberger (2001) as an individually related factor that resulted in students drop out. In the present study, this findings proved to be the case as there were some children who have willingly made up their mind not to return to school owing to the fact that they felt they were not performing well in class. Among the number of drop outs interviewed for both rural and urban areas, four of them had academic performance as a major problem that has made them no more a part of the education system. Found below is a presentation of what the situation is on the ground as it relates to those drop outs who were interviewed and sometimes the views of their parents.

#### **4.1.3.1. Academic performance and drop out in urban areas**

'she said she failed her examinations and she has been repeated so she won't go back to school again. I even encouraged her by telling her how some of us had also failed our exams when we were in school but that did not prevent us from going back to school. We remained in school till God opened a door for us to be promoted. I have kept talking to her but she does not take my advice. She is asking for books and I have promised to buy them for her and apart from her books she lacks

nothing. She does not get hungry and nothing disturbs her as a student. We have even fought this morning because she refused to listen to me and go back to school. I have even told her if she does not go back to school, I will throw her things outside the home and will no more take care of her. This is because I am already embarrassed as people keep asking me why she has not gone back to school'.

The above is an excerpt from what a mother who was worried over her daughter's decision to quit school owing to her abysmal performance in the previous term's examinations. At the time of the field work her daughter was still in the house unwilling to go back to her school. A similar incidence was also witnessed of a boy who also had dropped out of school owing to the fact that he does not understand what he studies. This is what he had to say:

When I study, I do not understand. I am also not able to speak good English. I did not even write the examinations the last time I was in school because I simply don't understand the notes our teacher has given us in class.

While to this boy, his academic performance is very critical to him his mother seems to share a different view altogether. His mother though a petty trader complains of having done all she could just like the first case but her son is reluctant to return to school. Below is an excerpt of what the mother said in an interview:

'He is okay with school uniforms and everything but he is not good academically. When he goes to school and he is given exercises he gets a lot of wrong answers. We have however not given up on him and we still believe that God can transform him. We do everything we can for him but he still does not listen to us so we have even decided that he learns a trade. When you go through his books, you will realize by comparison that his brother who he was in the same class with is far better than him and I think this is why he does not want to go back to school. I sell kenkey which is petty trading but I do my best to buy all his needs for him including giving him money but he says he won't go back again'

Most of the literature on drop out reviewed for this study unearthed the lack of financial support to school children as a significant cause of their drop out. While this is the case even in this study it is also clear from the shared stories of the two parents that though they try their best to meet the needs of their children, their children do not want to go back to school because they do not have a good story to tell when it comes to their performance in class. I observe that children as they are, they are very strong when it comes to the decision to be in school or not. Though my objective was not to find out why children performed poorly in class, one of the drop outs told me this:

'I did not copy the notes the teacher gave us for the term so I did not sit for the examinations. When I come home I don't even learn, unless at school when we have break time that I was able to learn something'

### 4.1.3.2. Academic performance and drop out in rural areas

In answering the question of why she has dropped out of school, captured below is an excerpt of what a drop out told me:

When I was in school I was not academically good. When my teacher taught me in class, I hardly understood the lesson and so my academic performance in class was not good at all. In my last class before I dropped out of school we were 21 pupils and I used to take the 19th position which means that my performance was not impressive. When I was repeated in class for not doing well, I decided not to go back to school again. I have been repeated twice in class and for the last time when it happened, I gave up schooling all together and I am now doing some small scale job.

The above lines tell what actually walked the class five pupil out of the classroom as from her point of view the fact that she was not performing well in class meant that she should no longer be in school. This is quite similar to a case already talked about in the urban section where the 15 year old boy had to drop out of school because he had difficulty understanding the lessons taught in class. This somewhat confirms the findings of Rumberger (2001) when he stated that when students are not academically engaged they may drop out of school. Another case was seen of a class one girl who had dropped out of school because according to her and what the grandfather told me she had not been doing well in class.

'she does not have interest in schooling and when it comes to even pronouncing two and three letter words, she simply cannot. For example she cannot pronounce common words such as YOU, ARE, WE, etc...when she goes to school, she sometimes comes home even before school closes and when she is questioned on why she kept doing so, she simply had no reason to give. She keeps telling us she will not go back to school again. What I observed was that the children tease her a lot at school because she cannot even do what a little child can do in class. She actually does not know anything when it comes to books'

From the drop out though 16 years of age she could not simply do the exercise that those who were even younger than her could do and because she sometimes got teased by her friends she could not stand the pressure and so had to bring her education to a halt. Though her drop out is not immediately caused by the fact that she gets mocked or teased by her peers, it is also important to state here that it contributed to her academic performance and that resulted in her decision to drop out of school. From this I observe that students academic engagement runs simultaneously with their social engagement in the rural areas understudy and thus when students are not well engaged academically, they become socially disengaged (peers laughing at them, making them feel disintegrated), thereby contributing to their drop out of school.

#### **4.1.4. Teenage Pregnancy**

Teenage pregnancy emerged as one of such factors that interrupted children's education and so contributed to causing drop out in both rural and urban areas chosen for this study. Teenage pregnancy especially in the rural areas was found to happen to girls whose parents were not taking care of them and so to these girls poverty in the family contributed to the reason why they became pregnant as they were forced to enter in relationships in order to gain some sort of financial support. The views collected from the two teenage girls who had dropped out of school owing to pregnancy in the urban areas also suggested both poverty and ignorance as being responsible for why they became pregnant. Teenage pregnancy thus became a factor outside the school that pulled children out of school. Once it happened the stigma of becoming pregnant was enough to pull the student out of school. Found below is a presentation of the findings as it relates to the reality on the ground among both urban and rural girls who dropped out of school because of pregnancy.

##### **4.1.4.1. Teenage pregnancy and drop out in the urban area**

I live with my mother in a single room which she rented about three years ago when we first came to this community. When I was in school, I used to help my mother sell fried yams in front of this house and sometimes in her absence, I did sell alone. It was during one of the evenings when my mother was not around that a man who came to buy yam here proposed to me. I did not know what he meant but he gave me his mobile phone number that I should call him the next day when I closed from school. So the next day when I closed from school, I called him and he gave me directions to his house. When I went there he gave me food, watched television with me and took me to his bed room. When I went to his bed room he told me a lot of things which got me confused. He told me when I complete school, he will marry me and a whole lot. By the time I came to my senses, he had already made love to me.....It did not happen once, he invited me on subsequent days to his home and on each of these occasions he 'slept with me'.....I did not realize I was pregnant until my class teacher detected it because I was caught vomiting one day during class session while at school. I denied that I was pregnant but later a doctor told my mother I was pregnant because I became frequently ill and weak. And since the day the doctor detected that I was pregnant, I did not go back to school again.

The above was captured from a girl who dropped out of school at the age of 16 years and while in class three. Her drop out of school per my observation, the interview I had with her and that of her mother made it evident how she was ignorantly lured into premarital sex which affected her education as she became pregnant.

Still, another girl had dropped out of school because of pregnancy. As for her she told me that she was promised by a man that her needs at school would be provided for her and that lured her into a relationship with the man who later put her in a family way.

*'...he told me he was going to buy my books for me and also give me money every week to school. I was happy when he promised me because my mother was having difficulty buying my books which I needed for school...'*

From the account she gave she further told me that the man provided some of her books for her but when she became pregnant those books became useless as she could no longer go to school with her pregnancy. When asked whether she will return to school after giving birth she told me she would not because her peers at school would laugh at her and call her names. This implies that she has become a long term school drop out (Ananga, 2011).

#### **4.1.4.2. Teenage pregnancy and drop out in the rural areas**

As was part of the incidence that resulted in children dropping out of schools in the rural areas understudy, three girls at the time of interview told me they had dropped out of school owing to the fact that they became pregnant while in school. In their stories they reported having engaged themselves in relationship while in school which eventually resulted in getting them pregnant and thus dropping out of school. In the case of a girl who reported dropping out of school while in grade five, she reported that the boy who made her pregnant lured her into a relationship at a time when she was novice about it and like she said, her class teacher was the first to observe her pregnancy which was later confirmed at the hospital. Though her boy friend and his mother recommended that she aborted the baby at that early stage when the pregnancy was detected, her mother on the hand was against it and so upon dropping out of school, she finally had to give birth.

In the case of this girl like it was found among the three other girls, they came from families with poor financial background and so their decision to accept proposals from the boys who made them pregnant was met by getting financial assistance from them. In the case of the grade five girl being talked about she told me she received some money from her boy friend to buy books because her father was not helping her and although her mother was supporting, she could not do it all.

While narrating her story another girl told me she became pregnant while still in school as she sometimes was challenged financially and while giving the history of her issue, she confessed



going for a boy friend ignorant of getting pregnant. Unfortunately, her educational ambitions seemed to have been brought to a close as she told me she no longer has the interest of going back to school for fear of being faced with the double responsibility of taking care of herself and those of her children. In narrating further her story, she told me she had dropped out of school for three years and had two children who were of ages three and one.

Below is also an excerpt of an interview I had with a relatively grown up girl who dropped out of school while she was in grade six:

*“...we went into financial problem and my father was not getting money to take care of me and so I went for a boy friend who later made me pregnant”*.

In the above case and so in relation to the girl being talked about, her major concern was with getting support to meet her basic needs such as books, uniforms, food, among others which were lacking as her father who is the bread winner of the family did not have the means to help with her education and so according to her she went for a boy friend who supported her with buying some books which she needed at school and it was this relationship that got her pregnant.

#### **4.1.5. corporal punishment**

Though the Ghana Education Service has launched a ban on the use of corporal punishment (CP) in schools (GES, 2001), there are existing evidences to show that teachers still use corporal punishment. During my study corporal punishment was found to be used by teachers to instill discipline in the children. While the head teacher in one of the urban schools told me CP is administered by the head teacher alone, found out from my observations and the interviews I had with some children that teachers in both rural and urban schools did apply CP to some extent. Mostly CP was inflicted on the child when he or she is late for school, performs poorly in class, behaves badly towards other students, absent himself from school. Though according to head teachers and some teachers, CP helps shape the behaviour of students, a study has found that the negative experiences of corporal punishment endure long in the memory of its victims (Akyeampong& Stephens, 2003). This implying that children who suffer CP are more likely to drop out of school.

##### **4.1.5.1. Corporal punishment and drop out in the urban areas**

Various forms of CP were observed while on the field and this range from the use of the cane to the use of the hand. The hand was used sometimes when the cane was not available or the teacher could not reach out for the cane. Apart from the hand and the cane, it was found from children that teaching materials such as measuring rule, T-square, dusters were employed as forms of punishment in their schools. In a study conducted in America, the author found other forms of CP such as twisting of the arms, banging children's heads on desk, ramming them up against lockers or walls, punching, among others (Hyman, 1990). The author described such acts of CP as humiliating and violent acts taken by adults against children. Interestingly, children studied in the urban areas and even in the rural areas were of the same thinking as they did not like CP itself and so some of them through that have abandoned the education. A girl who had dropped out of school to engage in hair making told this '*my class teacher used to beat me many times in class. Sometimes I do not do anything wrong but she beats me up with the cane. she has been doing this for long and because of that I lost interest in schooling*'. When asked why her teacher did beat her often, she had lot of complains to give:

sometimes I do not do well in the dictation test which we normally do in class on Fridays every week. My last day at school was when my teacher beat me and threw my bag out of the class because according to her I had not bought all my books. Meanwhile this was not my intention because I had already told my mother about it and she was putting herself together in order to buy those books for me. I saw that my teacher actually did not like me and so was always on me with the cane and that was why I did not go back to school, the last time she beat me in front of the class.

#### **4.1.5.2. Corporal punishment and drop out in the rural areas**

Students are mostly subjected to different forms of punishment in order to ensure conformity mostly to school rules and regulations in order to create that friendly atmosphere for teaching and learning to take place and also to instill a sense of discipline in the children. As it is the case, children especially in the rural areas were caught in certain behaviour that though normal in so far as the rural setting is concerned as most of them spent some days off school in order to meet obligations such as farming activities and others, their returning to school was equally met by some challenge as they were mostly subjected to punishment for being absent from school and sometimes for being late, among other student related practices. In a discussion I had with a pupil who happened to attend a school which is about a mile away from his village

told me that owing to the fact that his village had no school infrastructure, he complained about how he was punished and how that affected his decision not to go back to school.

“...The day when school resumed I did not go and when I went on Monday, I was told by my teacher to weed a piece of land that belonged to somebody but I told him I will not but when he insisted that I did so, I resisted that and he told me not to come to the school again...”

In the above case, the pupil felt he was given a punishment beyond his strength and he also felt equally maltreated as according to him the piece of land given to him to weed was much larger and the fact that it did not belong to the school made him feel not well handled by his teacher and so did not conform to the punishment, which formed the basis for his drop out of school.

Below is also another case of a grade six pupil:

‘We were writing a class test and even when I had not started, my class teacher told me to come in front of the class and kneel down. When I had done so he sent some boys to go for a stick and when they had brought it, he beat me till I had some injuries on my body and I found it uneasy sitting on a chair’.

In the case of this pupil he went to stay home not because he wanted to become a school drop out but according to him he had the intentions of wanting to recover from his injuries which he sustained when he was beaten by his teacher but at the time of visit he was still at home and though he expressed interest in wanting to go back to school, he was also very pessimistic of being readmitted as in his own words he feared his teacher would not accept him back at school.

#### **4.1.6. School context and drop out**

Interviews with some children and teachers revealed that certain conditions prevalent at the school level were to some extent responsible for explaining why some of those children were pushed out of school. Some of the pupils in the sampled schools experienced difficulties at their schools ranging from the lack or absence of school infrastructure, teacher attitude and also teaching and learning materials. Ananga (2011) has found that children do drop out of school when their personal, financial or home conditions coincide with other school conditions. This is to mean that children's education are terminated when they do not have enough 'confidence in the ability of the school to provide them with the needed support'. Found below are sections of what was found in relation to the school context in the urban and rural areas respectively.

#### **4.1.6.1. School context and drop out in the urban areas**

An upper primary pupil complained of how the behaviour or the attitude of her teacher had led her to terminate her education.

'My teacher seems not to like me at all and its like everything I did in class did not please her. She sometimes insulted me and made fun of me in class and this made my class mates sometimes laugh and tease me at school'. It did not happen once but it seemed to happen each time I went to school and this happened especially when she suspected I did something wrong...'

The girl whose case is reported above experienced what I term as *social disengagement* (coined from Rumberger's (2001) concept of *engagement*) as on one hand her teacher was against her and on other hand too her colleagues were making fun of her. Given that she is a social being and needed the support of her teacher and that of her peers at school in order to remain in school, the absence of it made her feel isolated and so quitting school became a necessary choice for her.

Another school related factor that was pushing children out of the urban schools studied was the absence of infrastructure. The head of schools interviewed and teachers alike all complained of school infrastructure and teaching and learning materials as strong conditions that sometimes forced some children out of school. I had the chance to observe a case when I was in the head teachers office and a child was brought to the office by her mother to seek admission for him. Unfortunately for both the child and the mother, school had newly resumed and classrooms were as usual filled and there was no room to accommodate the pupil. The child was forced to return home owing to this incidence of limited school infrastructure. Though I cannot tell where this child was going, it was quite obvious to predict that he would remain a drop out until maybe in future when there is vacancy for him at the school and the mother is still willing to send him back to school.

#### **4.1.6.2. School context and drop out in the rural areas**

The situation of drop out that emerged from the context of the school expressed itself in teacher absenteeism, school child labour and also absence of school building in some villages. While giving an account of why he was in the house, the class four pupil cited among others that his teacher's absence from school was the main reason why he had stopped schooling.

'My teacher does not live in this village and he appears to be a very busy man. Sometimes he does not come to school and when he does not come we sit in class and other teachers sometimes come in our class to beat us especially when they noticed that we were disturbing or talking. This has become the habit of my teacher and I have told my mother about it so when I stopped schooling and came home , she seems not to also care about it. She sometimes takes me to the farm to help her there...'

As for the case of another child, his drop out of school was because he felt he was being used by his teacher in child labour. That is his teacher engaged him in an activity which he felt was beyond his strength as a school pupil. This is what the boy told me in an interview I had with him:

I was absent from school for about two weeks when school resumed because my parents were not having money. When I went to school during the second week, my teacher gave me a plot of land which belonged to someone that I should weed the whole piece of land. In fact, it was a big portion of land which even paid labour will complain about the size but my teacher told me to weed that land before he could consider me to participate in class lessons. I felt that job was beyond me and so I ran away that day from school and since then I have not returned...'

In the study area, one of the villages did not have a school building at all and children in that area had to walk long distances in order to access a nearby school. Children complained of the distance involved and how this had caused some of them to drop out of school.

These accounts show that the school as an institution has a role to play when it comes to retaining children in school (UNESCO, 2007a). Such roles when played will help retain children in school. Some of these roles are discussed in conjunction with others under the section that talks about the strategies to mitigate drop out in this study.

## **4.2. Strategies to reduce drop out**

In this section is an analysis of the second research question which has to do with what strategies there are in mitigating the phenomenon of drop out in the selected study areas and for that matter, Ghana. In consequence therefore, I seek to draw on the views that were collected from my research participants during the period of study and also draw some inspirations from the documents on education in Ghana which are of help to answering the said research question. As the previous section of the chapter dealt with analyzing what factors were responsible for drop out among pupils in both rural and urban areas in Ghana, this section of the chapter also looks at what strategies are identified with the school, home and the communities involved as useful for mitigating the occurrence of drop out in the Country. Such

factors emerged through the interaction I had with the Director of Ghana Education service, head teachers, circuit supervisors and other participants who were chosen for this study. These strategies are categorized as macro and micro factors and below is a presentation of such findings:

#### **4.2.1. Macro level strategies**

As was found in this study there are some factors that are classified as strategies at the macro level to reduce drop out among school children in the country. At this level therefore are factors that are associated with the government, the provision of which help in both the short and the long run aid attract children to schools and so keep them in the classrooms once they enroll. Among such factors are the school feeding programme, school uniforms and free education. These interventions were present in some of the schools selected for the study. Each of them are briefly looked at below.

##### **4.2.1.1: School feeding programme**

The Ghana school feeding programme (GSFP, 2011) is among the many commitment that Ghana has made towards attaining the United Nations Development goal on hunger, poverty and primary education and it provides one hot meal per day for every child enrolled in schools where it is in operation. The meal is prepared from locally grown food stuffs and it has its long term goal of reducing poverty and promoting food security in the country. The programme was started in the country in 2005 in ten piloted schools within the ten regions of Ghana and since then the number of beneficiaries in terms of number of schools has increased for every region in the country (GSFP, 2011). Given this fact there is every reason to believe as well that not every school and child is enrolled on the programme.

Among the schools identified for the study in both rural and urban areas, three of them were found to have the school feeding programme functioning and in relation to the policy underlying the programme children were to this effect served one hot meal each day. As it is the case with the areas chosen for the study, especially in the rural areas, children do come from such poor background and thus as it were made it difficult for them to get the means to buy food for themselves and so be attracted to go to school. In consequence, children were at home as a result of this situation and so per the suggestion made by the GES, *'when the schools*

*are made to have access to the feeding programme it will help mitigate the issue at hand and so encourage even poor families to enroll their children and thus keep them in schools until their completion'.*

A circuit Supervisor told me this in an interview I had with her:

'during my days as a head teacher there were days when I had to send food to two or three children because I observed that some of the children did come to school without eating and at that time the school feeding programme was not yet implemented'.

She likened this to be similar today with children who are through with primary education and owing to lack of support they are unable to continue and so complete the basic cycle of education. As it is generally the case in the schools chosen for this study and even in the country at large, the school feeding programme came with increasing enrollment among children as parents and children were attracted to it and so children do go to school because they know that they will get food to eat. Useful to mention here is the time frame that this programme spans while a child remains in school and so become a beneficiary of it. The programme is for children in kindergarten through primary and after primary school, the child who may so want to continue his education through the Junior High School may have to begin buying his or her own food. Reducing drop out in schools through this strategy therefore requires other mechanisms like the contribution of ones family and also the need to expand the feeding programme to cover all schools and all children if drop out related to feeding is to be mitigated and so make the schools attractive enough to parents and children and so to see to the continuity and completion of children's education once they have such interest and so enroll with schools.

#### **4.2.1.2: School uniforms**

As one of the measures to achieving UPE in Ghana and for that matter to boost the enrollment and retention of pupils in basic schools in Ghana, the Government of Ghana launched the free school uniform for school children in the year 2009. During the period of study and among the schools chosen for this study, two of them were beneficiaries of the programme and so pupils who were attending schools at the time that the school uniforms were introduced did enjoy their share of it. Though this was the case, it was found that not every pupil did have one as the number of uniforms supplied were limited. This therefore to some extent affected some students whose families could not afford for them school uniforms and so make it possible for

them to attend school. For some others who have benefited from the free distribution of school uniforms in the past also had theirs torn and completely out of use and so culminated in their drop out of school. In this regard, though the launch of the programme is purported to help children in deprived schools by way of providing such motivation to them and so to see them go to school, it does not succeed in keeping them through the entire cycle of the primary education as it does come with various challenges, especially with numbers.

The GES director at the time of interview told me that though school uniforms are social interventions for reducing drop out, it has economic challenges as not all schools and for that matter not all school children did have such school uniforms. For example the two schools chosen in the urban areas of study did not have the school uniform programme at work and so parents were those responsible for providing this need to enable their children to go through their education. Found among the children studied in the urban schools, only a pupil complained about not having school uniform though this was not the only reason why she had dropped out of school.

#### **4.2.1.3. Free education**

For some years now, Ghana in its attempt to make better basic education by way of both increasing access and retention has made it free and even compulsory to all children (Adamu-Isaah, Forson&Schrofer, 2007). This is already at work in all Ghanaian rural and urban public schools and so children do not pay tuition fees once they enroll with their schools. Though this is the case what is evident on the ground is PTA dues that is charged every pupil. The PTA fee is money charged to a pupil for being a member of a school and though this money is mostly used in supporting the schools in various ways, such as provision of infrastructure there are complaints regarding its payment as most children who are from poor families are not able to meet this demand and so sometimes do affect their education.

All the schools chosen for this study also do charge extra classes fees to the children and so parents are required to pay such fees for their children in order for them to benefit from the extra teaching hours that is organized in the schools. As part of the strategy to deal with some of these issues regarding paying monies outside that which is allowed by the government, the GES suggested collaboration between the GES and the District Assemblies. At the district level, there is the social service unit which is responsible for checking all unauthorized units



and also to work with the school and management committee (SMC) so that they can also check some of these malpractices at school.

What has become an advantage of the no fees charged is the observation made by head teachers that it helps encourage parents to continue to enroll their children with the schools as children are no longer sacked home for school fees which used to be the case in the past when such fees were so charged and it is still the case in private schools in the country. According to a headmaster interviewed in Accra, 'this makes parents very happy and also has helped changed the attitude of teachers towards their work at school'.

#### **4.2.2. Micro factors**

In addition to the macro factors that are predominantly those that are owned and run by the government, there are other factors as well which I term as micro factors which are also in place at the schools and these are mostly policies from the district or municipal level and which are being implemented at the schools. There are also family and community related factors identified in this section also as forming part of the micro factors as together, they also help in mitigating drop out. Found below is the presentation of such findings.

##### **4.2.2.1. School factors**

Just as the school was identified as possessing some factors that resulted in the occurrence of drop out in the study area, it was equally seen that there were some factors in place and thus made to work at the schools that resulted in reducing the incidence of drop out and thus making the school a good place that both attracts and thus accommodates children- resulting in accomplishing their educational need especially at the basic level. Though these factors are in place with such good intentions, they are not without challenges. Below are found some of these strategies at work in the schools that are intended to reduce drop out and so to improve retention.

##### **4.2.2.2. Child friendly school environment**

‘...We are emphasizing on seven principles of child friendly schools- to ensure that teachers are in schools, that teachers teach effectively and also to ensure that the child is safe at school. The safety of the children is very important because if the place is not safe children can leave. We want to ensure that classroom teaching and

learning is effective so that children can be happy. We want to look at the school leadership which is very critical to encourage children to remain there.....”

As has been cited above and as it was among the points raised by the GES boss during an interview I had with him, the school appears to be a very important place for teaching and learning effectiveness and so in responding to the question of what strategies were in place to reduce drop out, he was much interested in the principles that promoted child friendly schools, that is which factors are in place that help make the school a good site for both parents and children to gain interest in them and so enroll their children as it is very important nowadays when basic education and its completion is talked about. As it is the case in Ghana, most public schools have issues related to teachers when it comes to their availability and also how regular or punctual they report to school, even when they are employed. Owing to the remote nature of some of the communities where schools are situated, some teachers do refuse or deny postings to such areas as in some cases infrastructure may be lacking. In consequence therefore, most classrooms may be without teachers and sometimes also when the available teachers also report to school late or are not in school, children sometimes do not feel happy and so when it continues for sometime it creates drop out among such children. To heal this situation and also to reduce drop out is to get more teachers employed to the various schools and also ensure that they are in school to ensure that teaching and learning takes place. In an effort to do this, the government of Ghana has called for an increase in the number of teachers assigned to schools.

#### **4.2.2.3. Effective teaching.**

As was also identified among those factors that promote child friendly schools and for that matter help reduce drop out is the issue of teaching and learning. Some children in both the rural and urban areas were identified as having issues with their academic performance and so had at the period of this study dropped out of school. As was commonly reported, some of these children did not understand what they were taught by their teachers in the classrooms and others also did not understand what they read from the notes they made during class lessons. In Ghana as it is commonly the issue, the public schools and the private schools do have a gap when it comes to their performance in the final examinations which is conducted by the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) every year and as it is evidently the case the private schools do outperform the public schools though the public schools do have most teachers who

have undergone training in various education colleges and universities. In the same way public schools in urban areas generally do outperform those in rural areas.

#### **4.2.2.4. Child safety.**

This has to do with ensuring that the child is protected in the school against abuses such as intimidation, canning, among others which is a way of protecting somehow the rights of these children and so aid in keeping them in school. As was reported by both rural and urban school children, there were cases where some children had dropped out of school owing to the fact that they have suffered some abuses verbally or physically which contributed in addition to other factors to create the need to drop out of school. In the case of a school pupil who had dropped out of school owing to the fact that she was mostly beaten by her teacher and sometimes not allowed to participate in class activities this strategy is workable once the teachers are made to forgo enforcing corporal punishment in the classroom.

In the suggestion made by some head teachers in a public school in the urban area, they were clear that corporal punishment is now being administered by the head of schools which implies that teachers are given restricted rights when it comes to punishing children at school.

Though such is the case and so was confirmed when I was on the field children also reported evidences of they having been abused by their class teachers. It was in consequences reported by the GES that works are ongoing on them so that such abuses are removed from the schools to ensure that children become happy at school and so do not drop out of school once they enroll.

#### **4.2.2.5. Introduction of kindergartens**

The Ghana Education service which is the office in charge of seeing to the running of basic schools in the country was very instrumental in collecting data for analyzing the strategies that are useful in mitigating the incidence of drop out in basic schools in the country. As was therefore evident in the interview I had with the Director General of the GES, he raised among other factors the introduction of Kindergartens as a strategy for controlling the occurrence of drop out in basic schools in the country. In this regard, kindergartens are seen as part of the basic school structure which should help in enrolling children into schools at an earlier age with the intention of seeing to it that children do complete school in time and so to prevent

them from being affected by cultural practices such as marriage which was mentioned as one of the reasons why overage students may want to drop out of school.

Among the schools selected for this study, though there happened to be Kindergartens in all schools, there are still records of the presence of overage children who have dropped out or still be in school. What is normally the case as this research found out was that most children were not enrolled in schools at an early age owing to several factors of which are related to their familial background other than that of the school. Of very importance to the issue of reducing drop out in schools in the eyes of the GES is thus to control the rate of overage children in school and so to encourage parents to enroll their children in schools in time and thus to fight against their drop out of school owing to overage and also their having to meet certain cultural needs such as marriage, the age of which may catch up with them while they are still in school. Put together therefore, the introduction of Kindergartens alone in schools without working on encouraging parents to enroll their children in schools at an earlier age makes drop out also somehow difficult to get rid off among children as it takes these stakeholders of education to deal with a sensitive issue like this one which has been with schools for a number of years. Parents, schools and the government therefore are jointly responsible in this matter if drop out is to be removed as each one plays its role accordingly.

#### **4.2.2.6. Guidance and counseling unit**

At the district level and as it was the case with the interviews I had with the two districts involved in the study is the guidance and counseling unit which is also one of such strategies put forward as useful in mitigating drop out in basic schools in the country. This unit is basically responsible for addressing the emotional problems related to children while they are in schools and so according to the circuit supervisors interviewed in the urban district chosen for this study, children who are found in this situation are given some guidance on what they need to do so to provide a way in overcoming such problems. In citing some examples of children who may fall into the category in question are children who are maid servants and also girls who do have boy friends and therefore find them disturbing. As it did develop in the discussion I had with the assistant director of the rural municipality chosen for this study and still related to guidance and counseling is the services rendered by the Guidance and Counseling Personnels who are responsible for handling various challenges that may confront school children as they go about their day to day living at school and at home. One of such

challenges may be that of pupil-teacher challenge which when realized is brought into the hands of the Guidance and Counseling Officer who also makes efforts to talk to the teacher and the pupil involved as a way of settling the matter and thus promoting a peaceful relationship which should succeed in encouraging the pupil and the teacher to continue to attend school. If the challenge involved has to do with that of a parents action or inaction, a sensitization programme is organized for the parents at the community where PTA meeting is normally held to educate them on the importance of education and the need for children to be enrolled in schools, kept and so be seen through completing the basic school and also furthering their education even to higher institutions of learning.

Additionally and depending on what issues are to be handled, SMC meetings are also called and sometimes also meetings involving chiefs and opinion leaders – all these meetings are held in the interest of the school child and so to give parents and other stakeholders of the community a clearer picture of education and likely challenges that be and so to develop parents attitude into a positive one which should in the end succeed in retaining their children at school to become useful citizens in the future after going through various cycles of education.

Of equal importance to this is the gender girl child coordinator who is charged with the task of following up on them in schools and so provide encouragement to them as a way to overcoming the very situation for which they find themselves. Present also in the schools are the various assistance provided to children by teachers and there is also the presence of the study of religious and moral education which is a subject which touches on morality and issues pertaining to religion and culture- which provide a form of education to the children and thus has the effect of encouraging them to appreciate the importance of education in order to encourage them to be sustained in schools until their completion.

#### **4.2.2.7. Social clubs and Religion**

The schools also have other activities such as worship which is a Christian gathering of all children disregarding age, gender and class. As it is mostly the case, a teacher normally the one on duty for the week is selected to give a sermon from the Holy Bible to encourage the spirits of the children and so to draw their minds. This is purported to introduce in them the fear of God which is able to make them wise for salvation and so somehow believed to influence and shape their attitude and conducts as they learn that which they are taught and so grow with it. It

is said in the Holy Scriptures to *'train up a child the way he should go and when he grows, he will not depart from it'*. It is here believed that children having the fear of God instilled in them will choose doing the right thing than otherwise and so issues regarding those who may choose to have boy or girl friends while in school may be mitigated and so may have implications for their having to remain in school. It thus has a further implication for controlling teenage pregnancies which were also found in this study to have resulted in drop out among girls in both rural and urban areas in Ghana.

Additionally as it is present in most schools in the country, there are social clubs where children meet in the presence of teacher and student leaders where they are taught very important issues pertaining to their world. Mostly, these clubs are organized on the basis of interest and subject matter and students who have the interest do register and join and become active members of it. There is mostly a particular day of the week or depending on the plans of the leaders, meetings are held where the members do attend and so are taught issues pertaining to subject areas that their associated clubs do address. Children are here open to ask questions where responses are given them and thereby shaping their way of thinking and behaviour. As I was told by the head teacher of a school in the urban area studied, teenage pregnancy which is mostly seen as one of the issues affecting drop out of school girls is mostly talked about in such meetings and children are educated possibly on its causes and effects as well as other matters on teenage living and so the need for these girls and even boys to learn in order to be informed about prevailing dangers and so to live very well and remain committed to their books which is the fundamental reason why they are sent to school.

#### **4.2.2.8. Workshop**

As it is the case and so commonly done in the education sector is the organization of workshop for teachers mostly to update and upgrade their knowledge and also make them rich in the current happenings pertaining to their work. In responding to the question of which strategies are in place to reduce drop out, one circuit supervisor mentioned that a workshop is organized for them and thus head teachers who are mostly in charge of running the day to day affairs of the schools do provide the very help that are needed and so to help them out of their situation. This help mostly has to do with identifying the drop outs, following up on them, advising them and also getting them back to school. By way of giving an example related to this strategy is one that was done by a head teacher who happened to have followed up on a drop out who was engaged in smoking 'marijuana' and was part of a group who were into it. As it were, the head

of school succeeded in bringing the boy back to school and as the circuit supervisor gave this testimony she made reference to the fact that this boy has turned over a new leaf and so has become a responsible person found in the education sector and no more out of school. So while it is the teachers who watch the movement of these children as well as give them the needed support where they have the capacity for so doing, the circuit supervisors who are inspectors of schools and its administration do follow up and since they work closely with the head teachers, they mostly are given updates or records of drop outs who have returned to school and so do provide additional help to these children by way of encouraging them and thus drawing their minds on the importance of education and so the need to keep them retained in the classroom until completion.

#### **4.2.2.9. Scholarships**

At the district level is also that of scholarship schemes which help to encourage children to remain in school and so to reduce drop out and it is mostly for the brilliant but needy children. In addition to the effort made by the district in mitigating drop out among children in the schools located within the urban municipality is also the work done in connection with NESTLE Ghana Limited which is a company that deals in commercial production and sales of groceries in Ghana and which by virtue of its status mostly provide aids to children. This firm was thus consulted and the municipality received assistance in the form of T-shirts, football, school bags, among others with the purpose of providing motivation and encouragement to children in order for them to gain interest and so be happy at school. This promotes regular attendance of these children to school. This has implications of healing absenteeism which is also one of the factors which gradually ushers its victim into becoming a school drop out. As it is mostly the case with scholarship and the provision of aids to children and others, it is mostly limited to some people other than the entire population of children and so though mention is made of it as useful in addressing a particular issue, it is mostly those who are beneficiaries that do merit its effect.

#### **4.2.2.10. Parents- Teachers Association (PTA)**

The PTA has a periodic but very important meeting which is organized and held in the school premises and it is mostly composed of the school head, teachers, parents and guardians whose

wards are enrolled with a school. During such meetings issues related to the school especially that of academics, school infrastructure, student needs, among others are being raised and thus discussed among the parties involved. Whatever the issues discussed may be it has the effect of meeting and for that matter addressing the most important stakeholder of education- who is the child enrolled in the school. During such meetings and in relation to the phenomenon of drop out, parents are given advice by circuit supervisors at PTA meetings to encourage their children to become responsible and so to help them become good future leaders in the near future where their human resource will be needed. In effect therefore, parents are educated on the comparative advantage of seeing ones child through schooling than being at home. As it did come to my knowledge when I was involved in an interview with the circuit supervisors of the urban district, it is relatively better to work in the informal sector after one is done with his or her schooling than it is to be involved in the same economic activity when one happens not to have been to school or completed schooling.

*'...if you want your child to become an electrician or mechanic, he should go to school and complete so that he will be paid well.....if one does not go to school, he or she will be taken as cheap labor which is not the best...'*

The above in italics were captured in an interview with a circuit supervisor who expressed much interest in telling me what they normally tell parents especially in relation to the value of education and how they effort in passing this knowledge to parents which is a way of inciting them and thus to keep them doing that which ought to be done in order to get their children kept in schools until they complete their very cycle of education and thus be caught as useful citizens who are capable of participating in economic activities which also has the implication of influencing their status and that of their parents. In this case therefore not only is education which is seen as human right talked about in PTA meetings but also its economic value is also discussed as it also helps parents in their various decisions even as they go about with the education of their children.

The PTA meetings therefore are very important occasions in schools as it is one of such avenues where the school management team comprising of teachers, head teachers and circuit supervisors and that of parents and guardians meet to have a discussion which is necessarily directed to educating both parents and guardians about what it is that makes schooling a preferred choice over being at home and encouragement like has already been said are given to parents and guardians so that they may equally manage the affairs of their wards' education in such a way that they may be inspired and thus be encouraged to attend school and complete in order to fit well in society.



In summary, such meetings are meant to encourage retention of children in schools as the parents are this time aware of what ought to be done to meet the interest of their wards and thus issues that might otherwise contribute to pulling a child out of school is dealt with and those that may also result in pushing children out of school are also dealt with at school by teachers and those in charge of running the affairs of the schools.

#### **4.2.2.11. School infrastructure**

Access to basic schools and retention like has been talked about in this study appears to be key issues when drop out is talked about. This is because most children have become school drop outs or denied access owing to the fact that there is limited space in the schools for accommodating them. What is mostly the case is that the PTA's do support the schools with building classroom blocks as a way of supplementing the available ones. In Accra for instance, during an interview I had with the circuit supervisors, I was told of the plans of the municipality which is a cosmopolitan area which has large numbers of children enrolled in a class (for example a class may have up to between 70 and 90 children) and this accounts for one of the reasons why in such areas an additional school is being built to support the available ones. As a strategy devised simultaneously is the municipality's strategy where some classrooms are divided and shared in order to make good use of the available ones and also as a way of improvising additional classrooms to accommodate the increasing numbers of pupils. Addition to this is the provision of furniture which together encourages enrolment and also to some extent reduce drop out among those who are already in school.

As was also put forward by the municipality in Accra is the government's support which it offers the associated schools, such as the provision of exercise books, reading materials and other teaching and learning materials. What appears to be the problem which was raised and for that matter of concern to the municipality is the fact that though such facilities and support are inadequate, they are being managed in the teaching and learning process at school.

#### **4.2.2.12. Role of some NGOs**

As it is in most cases the practice especially in relation to public schools and their operations in most African countries, Non Government Organizations mostly are interested in contributing to helping run the affairs of the school. what is seen on the ground is the provision of aids to heal

a particular problem that a school may be faced with and generally such organizations do work with schools that are deprived and for that matter are located in rural areas, though they do not forgo supporting schools in some urban areas as well. As was the case in this study rural schools do receive assistance from NGOs such as Plan Ghana and that of International Needs. What they do is to give some sort of education to children and they also motivate them by giving them exercise books which are needed by children in order for them to meet their classroom obligations. As I was engaged in an interview with the head teacher of one of the rural schools, I was told of Plan Ghana and their donation of bicycles to the schools to be used by children who stayed farther from the school and also during the rainy seasons which sometimes discourage children from coming to school. What was complained as a challenge by the school head was the fact that some of these bicycles have broken down and since repairing them involved the responsibility of the student, at the time of visit to the school, the ones that were broken down were packed in the school library.

Another role that is played by the NGOs-Plan Ghana is the provision of other school infrastructure such as the building of classrooms, libraries, ICT laboratories, toilet facilities, provision of water tanks, among others. These were seen in the rural schools and unlike the urban schools, infrastructure of these nature were provided by the government and sometimes the Parent Teacher Association. Furthermore, Plan Ghana has also in past helped one of such rural schools by providing them with school uniforms and the head of the school openly made it clear that 40 students had benefited from this- those who were considered as needy children.

#### **4.2.2.13. School positions**

In the basic school like it is the case in almost every cycle of education, leaders are selected from among the students to be their heads or representatives in specific areas and task and these positions are mostly assigned to them by their teachers or sometimes such leaders are appointed into their various positions by their peers as they are sometimes given room to cast their votes for those who do show interest and for that matter do aspire for such positions. Interestingly and as it was given by one head of school in one of the rural schools, some children who are identified as potential drop outs are given positions in the schools to keep them and so to prevent them from becoming drop outs. In this regards therefore, students are given positions in the classrooms and sometimes outside their classrooms as a way of recognizing them and so encouraging them to attend school punctually and also regularly. This

practice is said to put fear into the children as they have to remain committed to their various positions in order not to be beaten by their teachers or head teachers. This strategy as it discourages individually acquired characteristics such as negative attitude towards schooling-lateness, absenteeism and also other factors that may be prevalent in the home or the family that might together contribute to kicking a child out of school. On the contrary, institutionally related factors such as that of assigning positions to students at school sometimes tend to turn or transform many other factors that might develop in the course of a child's education and thus serve to motivate the pupil to prefer to be in school in order to attend to his or her duty rather than be allowed to get affected by any other personal or familiar factor. In the words of the head teacher therefore, when potential drop outs are given positions such as cupboard monitors, compound overseers, office prefects, among others it is also instrumental in mitigating their tendencies to drop out of school.

### **4.3. Role of the family**

In the face of the campaigns made on the importance of education and so the need to see children enrolled in school and so to meet current demands of realizing their completion especially that of the basic school, there appears to be much effort made by some parents in order to meet the educational needs of their children. To this effect and as was evident in the discussion I had with the municipality studied in the rural area, mothers especially are working hard in various areas such as trade in order to be economically resourceful and so help with the education of their children. In addition those parents who are not into trade especially in the rural areas are into peasant farming whereby with simple tools such as cutlasses and hoes, they produce food crops on subsistence to feed themselves and their families. What is mostly seen in these rural areas is that parents do sell some of these farm produce to people who might need them in order to make some money which in addition to meeting basic needs of the family, may also help in providing for children and their needs relative to their schooling. In addition to the effort made by parents in rural areas is their engagement in cocoa farming which normally is done in the forest belt and so like I was told by the municipals assistant director of education in the rural area, some parents do leave their children behind and travel as far to these forest zones to work their cocoa farms. Though there is this mindset of having to work and so raise money to fend for their children, they normally do not return or remit money to their children and so sometimes children left behind indulge in many practices as they are faced

with economic hardship. A case is given of a girl whose parents had traveled afar and so to work out their cocoa farms and while they failed to return, their daughter became pregnant and thus became a school drop out. It was actually the help provided by the then municipal director of education in the district as I was told that saw to it that the parents of this girl were in school and after they had been talked to by the school authorities they took the girl and her other siblings along with them. Though the girl did not complete school, her other siblings are still continuing their education. In this regard therefore, the municipal Assembly by this effort helped the parents of those children to be responsible and so to take care of the children. As for parents who live in urban areas, most of them do stay with their children and there are rather some children who live with people other than their biological parents and so are being taken care of by such people. There are times however when the guardians of such children do expect remittances from their biological parents as a way of providing support to these children in order that their educational and other basic needs would be met. What has become of importance therefore is the growing awareness created on the minds of parents on the importance of education and so the need to get every child enrolled in the classroom.

#### **4.4. Communal by-laws**

Reducing drop out as was found out in the rural areas studied was very interesting as some of such measures seemed to make certain demands from parents whose wards were victims of the situation. For example, in one of the schools this study was conducted, the head teacher when touching on some of the measures to reduce drop out made reference to one of such effort which he has worked out when he took office as the head of the school. According to him and so in defining the nature of this strategy, the community folks were called and with such agenda, parents were told to be subjected to the payment of fine once their children were caught out of school. In this regard by laws have been made in that community with the interest of monitoring children who are not going to school and so any child found in the community and not in school had his or her parents called and thus made to pay a fine. What is mostly the case in most rural settings is that sense of concern that most people expressed towards one another and so what is mostly the case is that such general laws seem workable as every member of the community is expected to be responsible to the other.

The head teacher of the school was not only in charge of school administration but he is also personally motivated to work outside his office and so like he told me there are some days he makes visits to the community with the intention of fishing the homes of children found in this

situation and once they are found, advice is given to them with the intention of getting them back to school. In making reference to a case he has previously worked on, a child whose grandmother had kept him at home in order to send him on errands was visited and after discussions had been made, the child has now been enrolled in school. The same was said of a school head in the urban area, where school children who have not been attending school are visited as a way of following up on them and so ensure that they do return to school. What is mostly the case with the urban follow up is the complaint made by the school head about the difficulty encountered in locating the homes of these drop outs especially the pregnant ones. In cases where children who live with their guardians for some reasons are due for being taken back to their parents, the teachers who visited them pleaded on these children behalf in order to reverse such decisions and so to encourage them to return to school instead. What is mostly done in the school prior to the follow up is getting the list of children who have not been attending school over a period of time and chasing them to their homes when such need arises. Closely related to this is the issue of rural children who do stay home for a long period of time in order to provide assistance to their parents on the farms and how such children are traced by their teachers and thus encouraged to return to school. What is mostly the case is that because of the length of time that these children do stay at home, they sometimes feel shy or fear to return to school as they themselves feel the school authorities would complain about their absence from school. It is thus this follow up work on them that helps to get them back to school. Another practice is also in relation to the advice that are given to pregnant school girls and the need for them to return to school once they get some people to take care of their babies. As an evidence, some of these girls who have given birth do go back to school and as at the time of the field work, one of such girls had return to the classroom.

## **5 Discussion**

In this chapter, I present insights into the research questions to this study and so efforts are here made to arrive at some conceptualizations about students' drop out of school from the two social groups –rural and urban groups chosen for this study in Ghana. In making this a success therefore, the chapter has different sections which harmoniously contribute to enhancing our understanding of drop out in the study context. In doing so therefore, results that are considered common to the two groups- urban and rural areas are identified for review and interpreted for our consumption. Additionally, the findings from each group are considered separately and comparisons are made. An attempt is also here made to situate the results in the analytical frameworks used in the study: the individual and institutional frameworks. Furthermore, possible implications of the findings on the current course of action with regard to UPE are discussed as well. In relating this research to others, results are compared to previously done researches which together help realize the international and wide spread significance of the topic.

As this research sought to address two research questions, the second part of this chapter seeks to make a discussion and an interpretation of the findings on strategies available to deal with the situation of drop out in both the rural and urban areas in the country. Finally, conclusion will be drawn based on the data presented and discussed. The limitations of this study are also presented in this chapter.

### **5.1. Why children drop out of school**

Much detail about why students drop out of school in both rural and urban areas in Ghana has been presented in the previous chapter. The six areas (units of comparison) of why some students drop out of primary schools have shown very interesting revelations about what causes drop out in both the rural and urban contexts of Ghana. These involve revelations about the students themselves, their parents, teachers, head teachers and education directors and what it is that they consider as being responsible for the occurrence of drop out in the rural and urban contexts. That is findings about why students drop out of school are known through the interviews the study conducted with students who were found to be drop outs as well as the views expressed by other key stakeholders of education. These areas of why children drop out of school that were studied are household poverty, child labour, academic performance, teenage pregnancy, corporal punishment and the school context.

## **Household poverty**

The study made interesting findings about household poverty as a factor that explains why some students do drop out of school. This was found to be central to drop out because hardly did a student interviewed speak without mentioning poverty as being the main reason why his or her drop out of school became possible or a part of the reasons why he or she had dropped out of school. This leads the study to think alike with Rumberger (2001) and Ananga's (2011) findings that drop out is a complex process. It is a complex process because it is caused by some distal and immediate factors. This study reasons based on its findings that household poverty may be a distal or immediate factor that causes students to drop out of school. That is to say, to those students who drop out of school mainly because of poverty, household poverty is an immediate factor to their drop out. On the other hand those who drop out of school because poverty was secondary to another factor, household poverty can here be argued to be a distal factor.

While the study found that household poverty affected students in the urban areas in a way that they hardly afforded buying their books and other stationeries, their counterparts in the rural areas who also were faced with household poverty could not afford in addition to stationeries, their school uniforms, pay for their extra classes, buy food, among others. The study thus seems to take the position of the findings of (Ananga, 2011) where he has stated that the absence of school supplies lead students to drop out of school. The study is here by tempted to argue that the family where an individual student belongs has because of poverty become an agency which pulls children out of school. This argument seems to be consistent with the institutional framework adopted for this study which claims that the family is an institution which by virtue of some factors such as poverty affects the occurrence of drop out.

By reason of the fact that families in rural areas especially could not afford the basic school supplies of their wards, thereby depriving them of having to continue their education, this study reasons with Tickly et al., (2013) that when children are limited by certain institutional challenges on their rights to education, inequality is said to be experienced. It is therefore shown in this study that children who have become school drop outs because of poverty in the family are less advantaged than their counterparts in school whose parents could afford their needs and so their retention in school.

As for what was different among rural and urban families when it came to meeting the needs of their children in the face of poverty, the study found a somewhat interesting result. While it was found that most urban parents strived harder even in prevalence of poverty to meet some needs of their children and so keep them in school, it was quite different among some rural parents as from the interviews I had with some rural children, they seem to have problems with the seriousness that their parents attached to their education. The study seems to share a similarity in an earlier research done in a different part of Ghana where the author reported that rural parents were least willing to sacrifice for their children's educational needs (Acheampong, 2006) leading to drop out. This thus partly explains why in relative terms drop out in the rural areas appear higher than that of the urban areas studied.

### **Child labour**

Another crucial area of reasons why students drop out of school worth discussing here in this chapter is child labour. Child labour was found to be important to drop out because almost all the students who had dropped out of school as this study observed were engaged in some kind of economic activity. To some of them, it is because of the need to work in order to make a living that necessitated their drop out of school. Others however who had dropped out of school owing to some other reasons were also engaged in some kind of economic activity. By far the study seems to indicate that the number of students who drop out of school because they have to work out-number those who engage in some kind of economic activity after they had drop out of school. This seems to suggest that child labour plays a significant influence when school drop out is talked about. Authors such as (Imoro, 2009; Sottie et al., 2011; Barimah et al., 2005, Ananga, 2011; Ananga, 2011b) have also found that children interviewed in their studies almost without exception mentioned child labour as being part of their decision to drop out of school.

It appears that not much significant differences exist when it comes to child labour and how it results in drop out among rural and urban kids. In most cases the difference lies in what kind of economic activity rural and urban kids engage in once they drop out of school. It was found in this study that the informal economic activity prevalent in most rural and urban areas made it possible for school children to gain employment. It was also found that the presence of household poverty or the inability of families to meet the needs of their children drove such children out of school in order to engage in an economic



activity. While children in urban areas dropped out of school to engage in economic activities such as carpentry, masonry, trading, among others, their colleagues in the rural areas did engage predominantly in farming activities. This finding is somehow consistent with the findings of the Ghana statistical service which found that as high as 34.58% of children aged 6-11 and 44.26% of those aged 12-15 left school to engage in child labour because they found school uninteresting and useless (Ghana Statistical Service, 2003 as cited Ashong, 2013).

It appears child labour reflects the individual framework (Rumberger, 2001) which makes sense of the fact that certain individual factors do affect children and their decision to drop out of school. This study however found that the individual factors are not independent in themselves. This is because a child who may have dropped out of school to engage in an economic activity might not only be influenced by the child's interest in that economic activity. There are cases however where poverty in the individual child's family necessitated his or her decision to drop out of school. Studies conducted elsewhere in Ghana also found similar results where children were pulled out of school owing to poverty in the family which led them to work in order to make a living and also to save (Ananga, 2011; Sottie et al., 2011; Braimah et al., 2005).

### **Academic performance**

The study also has interesting reports on the academic performance of students as contributing also to drop out in both rural and urban areas. Some students who were found to have problems with their academics therefore dropped out of school. Unlike the other factors that led to drop out where most of the students expressed their willingness to return to school should their basic needs be met, those who dropped out of school owing to poor academic performance were least willing to go back to the classroom. This is quite interesting as it tends to create the impression made by the individual framework (Rumberger, 2001) that when students are not academically engaged they may want to drop out of school. While for most urban parents studied they tried their possible best to get their wards back to school by providing their basic needs for them, their children on the other hand whose drop out was mainly because of abysmal academic performance shared the opposite view as they felt going back to school was not that helpful. The study thus is tempted to indicate that children have a strong voice when it comes to their decision to be in school or not.

As for rural kids who have dropped out of school because of academic performance, their decision not to go back was mostly because of their peers. That is to say not only did their academic performance deter them from going to school but also the fact that their class and school mates did make fun of them. Children who found themselves in this shoe preferred to spend the rest of their days at home than be in the classroom.

As for what makes academic performance an issue worth looking at, some children especially in the rural areas studied could not pronounce simple words (two and three lettered words) which create worry on the minds of the children themselves. Most of these children are over-age and so when they failed to pronounce given words correctly or had their class work right, their colleagues who are mostly younger than them subjected them to various forms of teasing both in the classroom and even outside the school environs. In some of the cases students reported that their teachers made the class shame them when they failed to perform well in a given assignment in class. Students' inability to withstand such pressure from both adults (teachers) and their peers made them drop out of school.

Because of the involvement of both teachers and other students in 'forcing' the student whose academic performance is not all that good to write home about out of school, the study seems to argue that academic performance cannot be said to be only an individual factor to school drop out as (Rumberger, 2001) has stated. The study thus suggests that academic performance could also be institutionally motivated as certain factors available at the school plays simultaneously with students' academic performance in order to influence their drop out of school. The study hereby identifies a link or coincidence between the individual and institutional frameworks and argues that the two are not necessarily independent in themselves as an earlier research by (Rumberger, 2001) seems to indicate.

### **Teenage pregnancy**

This study reports teenage pregnancy as one of the factors that affected school drop out. The study considered understanding of why children drop out of school as incomplete without delving into the issue of teenage pregnancy. This factor appears important as it renders girls especially as long term school drop outs (Ananga, 2011). That is to say those girls who have dropped out of school because they had to give birth did not say they would return to school.

Except for one girl interviewed in the urban area who said she would return to school after giving birth, the other pregnant girls were bold in stating that they would not go back to the classroom.

As for why such girls became pregnant leading to the termination of their education, the study seems to indicate from the evidences collected that ignorance and poverty played instrumental roles. While for most of the girls poverty in the family accounted for the reason why they entered into pre-matured relationships leading to their pregnancies, one of the girls in the urban area stated that she had no idea of what she was doing and that she was lured into a relationship which consequently led to her pregnancy.

The involvement of the family (poverty) in the pregnancy of a school girl makes pregnancy not only an individual issue but also institutional. That is to say there is a somewhat coincidence between the individual and the institutional frameworks thereby making pregnancy the case for the two that pull children out of school.

Pregnancy was found to be high in the rural areas as in the rural areas majority of the people are poor and mainly engaged in farming activities. Some of them belonged to families which found it very difficult if not impossible to meet their basic needs such as food. Girls here were compelled to accept proposals from males who came their way. Such relationships normally begin with promises from the male party to take care of the girl's needs while in school. However such promises usually end on rocks as girls become rather pregnant and abandon their school. In some of the cases the male parties refuse to accept the pregnancies and when this happens it becomes the burden of the girl's family to take care of both the girl and the baby in the making. There is also a case where pregnant girls attempt to escape such responsibilities and so try using local herbs to abort the baby which according to one of the girls nearly ended in her death. The study thus indicates here the dangers associated with girls becoming pregnant while they are still in school and being taken care of.

### **Corporal punishment**

Additionally, this study made interesting finding about corporal punishment which also pushed children out of school. Corporal punishment according to the (GES, 2001) is banned in public schools. However at the time of conducting this study, it was found that both teachers and

school heads employed it in their schools. It was found that corporal punishment was used when a child reported to school late, absent himself from school, perform poorly in class, failed to do his or her home assignment, among others. This was believed to instill discipline in the children and also keep them away from engaging in bad practices. While to teachers CP appears to be a good thing, children on the hand saw it as something else as some of the students who were subjected to CP have dropped out of school. A research work done some two decades ago found CP as a humiliating act taken by adults against children (Hyman, 1990). To authors such as (Ananga, 2011) corporal punishment is a push factor as it is an act that existed at the school that served to make the school not attractive to students thereby driving them out of the school.

As for what forms of CP that existed in schools in the rural and urban areas, the study found that rural children were mostly given portions of land either belonging to the school or not to weed. In addition to this and like their colleagues in the urban areas, children were subjected to caning and the use of the hand as major forms of corporal punishment. Apart from the hand and the cane, it was found from children that teaching materials such as measuring rule, T-square, dusters were employed as forms of punishment in their schools. In a study conducted in America, the author found other forms of CP such as twisting of the arms, banging children's heads on desk, ramming them up against lockers or walls, punching, among others (Hyman, 1990). Because of the somewhat humiliating nature of CP it usually generated into conflict between students and pupils. For example, a rural student who was beaten by his teacher and later asked to weed a portion of land assigned to him refused to do so. This developed into something else as he subsequently left school to be in the house.

Corporal punishment studied here seems to reflect Rumberger's institutional framework for understanding why children drop out of school. The institutional framework highlights that certain institutions where a child belongs may limit his or her participation in education. And since CP is an act that is employed by the school in the name of ensuring discipline among students, it could be labeled as institutional. The school thus because of corporal punishment provides barriers to the retention of children at school as some students who do not want to continue to be afflicted with CP do drop out of school. Though the institutional framework is here said to be important as it gives some meaning to CP, it could be otherwise said that for drop out to happen because of CP, the attitude of students do count as well. That is to say here that the attitude of the student towards schooling in general sometimes coincide with CP in

order to finally result in a child's decision to either remain in school or become a drop out. Interestingly, all students in rural and urban areas who reported to have dropped out owing to CP made it clearer that they would not return to their schools unless they were sent to other schools in different communities. Their attitude towards their schools therefore is nothing to write home about.

### **The school context**

Finally but not the least, the study found the school context where the child is sent for education as also a factor that contributes to why children dropped out of school. In this study it was found that inadequate infrastructure, teacher attitude and also teaching and learning materials form the school related factors that lead children to drop out of school. The school as it has been argued in the previous unit thus becomes an agency for the occurrence of drop out.

On the attitude of teachers, a pupil in the rural area reported absenteeism and lateness to school on the part of his teachers as being the reason why he dropped out of school. According to this pupil, they sometimes go to school only to have another teacher come to their class to beat them when they made noise. This is because their teacher hardly comes to school and on days where he had to come to school too, he reported late. The pupil being talked about has dropped out of school and is now working with the mother on her farm.

Inadequate school infrastructure and teaching and learning materials also walked some pupils out of school. The limited school infrastructure could not provide accommodation for all children who were brought for admission. This study observed a case in the urban area where a mother and her son were walked out of the headmistress office simply because the available classrooms were filled and there was no room for him.

The school condition reflects the institutional framework to this study as the school by virtue of teacher attitude and limited infrastructure limit the participation of some children in education. The school context especially that of limited infrastructure appears to be the only factor that is mostly beyond the control of the individual child who drops out of school owing to that. This is because in situations where the individual child may have the interest of wanting to be in school, it is in most cases difficult if not impossible as it is the available infrastructure that dictate the number of pupils to be kept in a particular classroom for a period of time.

## **5.2. The strategies that are in place to mitigate drop out in rural and urban Ghana**

As conceptualized and evident through the findings, drop out and its occurrence is not left in isolation. Rather there appear to be some strategies that have been laid down at the macro and micro level which are meant to mitigate it. This section discusses briefly the findings on the research question: what strategies are in place to mitigate drop out? Much has already been learned about the strategies that are in place to mitigate drop out in the previous chapter. However this section briefly provides a discussion on the most relevant points to aid a better understanding of the topic.

### **School Feeding Program (SFP)**

The study uncovered at the macro- level the school feeding program as one of such important strategies that have been put in place by the Government of Ghana to ensure that children are retained once they get enrolled at school. The GSFP provides one hot meal per day for each child and it was started in some schools in 2011. Among the four schools studied only one of them in the rural areas did not have the school feeding program in operation. This study indicates that the SFP is helpful as it has helped most parents especially in communities where the program is in operation to enroll their children in school. A study has also indicated the importance of the SFP as it has helped improved the quality of education and also increased retention at the basic school level (Adamu-Isaah, Forson&Schrofer, 2007).

The operation of the SFP is not without challenges as especially in the rural area the head teacher of one of the schools complained about water shortage which sometimes delays the preparation of the food. When this situation happens, children do not eat at the right time during the lunch break. This situation sometimes creates a problem whereby during normal classes hours children do walk out of the classroom when the food gets ready with the time. This study seems to indicate from the evidences gathered that in addition to getting the food programme at work in some schools, children should be served at the right time and interruptions in lessons will cease. This according to the view shared by one head teacher will encourage children to stay in school and not run home.

A similar issue worth discussing here also is the complain made by the two head teachers of the two urban schools studied. According to them, the food stuffs and other inputs that are needed by the cooks sometimes do not arrive on time and also some of the cooks complain about the delay of their salaries. This problem like the water shortage in the rural area talked about sometimes makes the operation of the SFP in the schools less effective.

## **Free education**

The study made some findings about free education at the basic level as one of such macro strategies that are meant to encourage access and for that matter reduce drop out among school children. All four schools captured in this study had this free education policy running. Children were thus expected to come to school without paying tuition fees. This policy introduced at the basic level has come to replace the past where children were driven home for school fees. According to head teachers and teachers in both rural and urban areas the policy talked about here has come to encourage parents to send their children to school without having difficulties.

Like the School Feeding Program, the free education program is mostly criticized as to most parents and students the kind of education they are being provided with is not entirely free. Evidence gathered from the three out of the four schools show that children are still asked by their schools to pay what is called extra classes fees. Details of this fee have been talked about in the previous chapter. In the rural area this fee has resulted in the drop out of many children as their parents are mere peasant farmers who hardly sell anything to make some money to honour some of these educational obligations.

In addition, children in all four schools are required to pay what is known as PTA dues. This dues according to head of schools are used to supplement the effort made by the government when it comes to infrastructure and provision of teaching and learning materials. Parents who do not have the means normally did not allow their children to return to school once they got driven home for these fees.

Interview with the GES suggested that some of the monies charged the students are unauthorized and that they have laid down some measures in place to check that. Some of these measures include collaboration between the GES and the District Assemblies. Also at the District level, there is the social service unit which is responsible for checking all unauthorized units and also works with the school and management committee (SMC) so that they can also check some of these malpractices at school.

## **Free School uniforms**

The study also collected from the GES that the 2009 initiative where school uniforms are distributed freely to school children is one of such strategies that are meant to mitigate drop out in both rural and urban schools. What is interesting about this program is that like the SFP, not all schools and children are beneficiaries. In other words, the program is limited to children in deprived schools in both rural and urban communities in Ghana. As at the time this study was conducted on the field, the two schools studied in the rural areas have benefited from this initiative but none of the urban schools have.

In the face of the fact that the rural schools have benefited from the uniform initiative, it was also found that most of the children who have dropped out of school had in addition to other financial needs, school uniform as the reason why they have dropped out of school. All children who had this problem confessed that they have been given school uniforms but that was just one copy and it happened in the past. They complained of the inferior nature of the fabrics which made the uniform wear out so easily.

As was complained by some children they did not have access to another uniform once the one already given out wears out. This has become the problem of the day as this has come to be a nine day wonder. That is parents were influenced in the beginning to bring their children to school because of the free uniforms but with time as the uniforms wear out and they do not have money to buy new ones for their wards, the motive of seeing to it that they complete the basic cycle of education gets defeated.

The study here indicates that the free education policy, free uniform and school feeding program are good initiatives but because they embody some challenges, they need a critical assessment to ensure that the government's vision to remove the schools' institutional challenges and so to discourage drop out would be fully met.

### **5.3. Summary**

This study has a general purpose of understanding why students drop out in four community – based schools with urban and rural differences by achieving specific objectives. These have been addressed focusing on two research questions, namely why do children drop out of schools and also what strategies are in place to mitigate drop out? Together, these questions have revealed why some children do drop out of school and also the strategies that have been



put in place at the macro and micro level to mitigate it. The study is a comparative study of the reasons why children drop out of school in four basic schools which are not only community based school but also under the same central education authority. The comparative interest of the study lies in the rural-urban experiences of why children drop out of school. Therefore, the same type of basic school under the same central educational authority but different research sites (rural and urban) gives a rich comparative and contextual understanding of school drop out.

The study is illuminated and position through a number of literature review on drop out and the strategies in place to reduce it.

A case study research design was used in a qualitative approach to guide the study towards its purpose. A purposive sampling technique was used to select information-rich-cases about the research questions. Students, parents, teachers, head teachers and directors of education constituted the respondents to this study. Through the analysis, the study came out with six units of comparison that address the first research question. Three prioritized units of comparison (dubbed macro- level strategies) also provide insight into the second research question. Below are the findings to this study under the respective research questions.

### **Why students drop out of school**

This is the main research question. The units of comparison below reflect the findings based on why children do drop out of schools in both rural and urban areas studied:

- In the four schools studied for both urban and rural communities, it appears that poverty contributes significantly to the reason why some students drop out of school. While poverty in the rural communities is high because majority of the people living there are peasant farmers, it is not too different from the urban areas as the data gathered shows that majority of the parents who send their wards to public schools are poor.
- Child labour also accounted for the reason why some children had dropped out of school. While in most cases children in the rural areas dropped to engage in farming, their counterparts in the urban communities usually engaged in trading activities, carpentry, masonry, and in some cases assisted their mothers to sell at the market.

- Furthermore, the academic performance of children in both rural and urban areas affected their education and thus those who complained of abysmal academic performance dropped out of school.
- Additionally, some teenage girls who engaged in some kind of sexual relationships while in school got themselves pregnant. This was recorded for both rural and urban areas and it also contributed to drop out in the schools studied. These cases of pregnancies collected were predominantly due to poverty in the girls' families and in some cases, ignorance on the part of the girl child.
- Corporal punishment which has to do with subjecting a pupil to punishment for a cause also accounted for why some students dropped out of basic schools. While in all schools both urban and rural, the hand and the cane were found to be the available forms of corporal punishment, there were exceptional cases in the rural areas where children after being subjected to caning were assigned large portions of land to weed. This also contributed to drop out in the area.
- It was also gathered that the school where the individual pupil attended also inhabited certain factors such as teacher attitude, inadequate infrastructure and teaching and learning materials. These were found in both rural and urban areas to result in drop out of some students. The school thus is argued to be an institution which in itself pushes some children out of it.

## **5.4. Conclusion**

This section of the chapter draws conclusion for the two research questions based on the units of comparison focused on to address them. Owing to the comparative nature of the findings, the study indicates that the urban and rural nature are quite influential to the reasons why children drop out of school and also somehow the strategies that are in place to mitigate it. These rural-urban contextual differences though not too significantly seen because all four schools are under the same administrative system account for the somewhat differences in the reasons provided for why children drop out of school.

### **Why students drop out of school**

First the study indicates that the reasons why children drop out of school is a very complex process. The complexity of drop out emanates from the fact that it is sometimes very difficult to trace a particular case of drop out to a single factor. That is to say multiple factors sometimes exist simultaneously to cause a particular child to drop out of school. In elucidating this, the study is attempting to establish that even though factors that lead to drop out are presented separately, it is important to acknowledge the fact that there is sometimes an overlap. Poverty for instance seems to run through the existence of other factors that account for why children drop out of school. Household poverty is therefore indicated here to be the predominant reason why children do drop out of school in both rural and urban areas studied.

Secondly, drop out caused by child labour is also significant in both rural and urban areas as majority of parents who send their wards to the public schools like it has already been established are poor.

Thirdly, there is not much significant difference in drop out caused by academic performance in the rural and urban areas. Furthermore, teenage pregnancy was found to exist because of poverty in the girls' family and it was common (high) in the rural areas than the urban communities. Moreover, corporal punishment emerged as existing in different forms and children in both rural and urban areas were subjected to it even though the GES regulation forbids its use in public schools. It took different and severe forms in the rural areas than it was witnessed in the urban communities. It was found for the areas studied and among students to be a humiliating act.

Finally, the school context where the pupil is brought for his or her education also contributed to why children drop out of school. Teacher attitude, inadequate infrastructure and teaching and learning materials were found to account for why children in both rural and urban areas drop out of school. There is not much significant differences between the rural and urban schools when it comes to infrastructure and teaching and learning materials because all the schools studied are under the same administrative authority.

### **The strategies that are in place to mitigate drop out**

The study is indicating that effective strategies especially at the macro level are key to successfully mitigate drop out in the four communities selected for this study. The school

feeding program which provides one hot meal per day to each pupil is a crucial strategy to aid reduce drop out. However, the study is pointing out that shortage of water in the rural areas, delay of food supplies in the urban areas and also delay in the salary of cooks sometimes serve to weaken the effectiveness of the program.

Again, the study indicates that the free education policy at the basic level where there is no tuition fee charged is a very useful measure to mitigate school drop out. However, it is here shown that other subsidiary fees (such as extra classes and PTA dues) which are charged by the schools sometimes create the impression on the minds of parents that schooling is not absolutely free. This needs a second look and control.

Finally but not the least, the free distribution of uniforms to students in deprived areas is one of such helpful strategies to control drop out in rural and urban areas. It is here noted that the quality of fabrics used in manufacturing these uniforms raises lot of questions about its durability.

## **5.5. Implications and Recommendations**

The study has some implications to make based on important lessons learned from the findings. Below are the major ones worth highlighting:

First, it has learned that to effectively mitigate drop out and for that matter ensure a successful attainment of UPE in schools in Ghana, it is very important to take a critical look at drop out and what is it that results in it in schools. As the findings revealed several factors contribute either as a single unit or works with other units (factors) for drop out to happen. Against this background it is important that strategies that are meant to reduce drop out address those units or factors that are found to be responsible for the occurrence of drop out in schools. The study has closely observed that just as most drop out cases recorded emanate predominantly from poverty related issues, it emphasizes here that strategies and measures meant to reduce drop out should direct its focus on addressing this barrier and thus encourage the retention of children in schools. This is not to render the other factors that also cause drop out less important. Like poverty, they also need to be carefully looked at if drop out is to be completely reduced leading to the attainment of UPE.

Secondly, presence of the school feeding program, the free uniform per child and also the free basic education are observed to be very useful strategies to mitigating dropout. The three are seen to be closely tied to the idea of relieving the financial burden of children who are from poor homes in both rural and urban communities. However, the study implicates that the excessive pestering of parents for financial contributions in the form of PTA dues and extra classes in the schools may hinder the interest of parents in retaining their children in school. This is also seen to have negative effect on access to education if parents cannot afford to pay such financial contributions decided by the schools.

Thirdly, the study also recognizes the importance of the existence of micro level strategies at the school level such as the Guidance and Counseling Unit and the existence of social clubs. It indicates that these strategies are of some significance because of their special role of providing counseling and advisory services to the student body. It recognizes the fact that effective functioning of the Guidance and counseling unit will aid address drop out cases emanating from factors such as teenage pregnancy and academic performance. That is, given that ignorance sometimes formed part of students' decision to drop out of school, there is an implication here that a good social education well handled and managed by the Guidance and counseling unit will work to sustain potential drop outs in school and also control drop out in the long run.

Finally, the study has much of its findings and implications about those students who drop out of school and return after sometime (drop- in). Because the study did not cover how this situation of drop- in occurs and its relationship to attaining UPE in schools, it is recommending future studies in these areas (drop- in). Again, the study recommends replication of this comparative study in different rural and urban settings to give a diverse understanding of why children drop out of schools under rural and urban context to help educational authorities have a much more strategic and tailored approach to mitigate drop out in rural and urban communities in Ghana.

## **5.6. Limitations**

There are few reflections for readers to be mindful regarding the limitations of this study. First the study about why children drop out of school is limited to specific areas considered important by the researcher. It does not cover all drop outs in both rural and urban areas and

thus what is presented is only a representation of what was seen and observed from the participants involved in this study. Secondly, respondents were more focused on the school children who have dropped out in their responses to questions about why these particular children dropped out of school. Therefore the findings in this study may not have ample report about why children drop out of school in the rural and urban communities in Ghana. Finally, the findings and implications of this study do not apply to all drop outs in other communities and schools, though sometimes there may be a coincidence. This is because of the qualitative nature and purpose of this study.

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# Appendix

## Interview Guide

### Introduction

The aim/ purpose of this interview guide is to derive information about why children drop out of school and also what factors are in place to mitigate drop out in rural and urban schools. The overall objective is to understand why children terminate their schooling by focusing on some schools in some rural and urban communities. Therefore the researcher seeks your permission to interview you on the following questions regarding this study. Thank you very much for your interest to participate in this research.

### Personal Information

1. Gender
2. What is your professional /occupation?
3. How long have you been involved in education?

### Interview Guide for teachers, head teachers and directors of education

1. In what ways do children come to school?
2. In what ways do they stop schooling?
3. Are there ways particular children behave before they drop out of school?
4. In what ways do such children behave before they drop out of school?
5. What major challenges do confront children who eventually drop out of school?
6. Do children who drop out of school return after sometime?
7. In what ways do they come back?
8. Are there ways school drop out can be mitigated ?
9. In what ways can school drop out be mitigated?
10. Are there challenges with mitigating drop out?
12. In what ways do such challenges (if any) do manifest themselves.
13. In what ways does the Government support education at your school?
14. Do you think such support help in retaining school children?

## **Interview Guide for drop outs/ students**

1. In what ways did you go to school?
2. In what ways did you stop schooling?
3. Was there anything that led you to stop schooling?
4. Will you consider anything a challenge when you were at school?
5. What was the nature of this challenge?
6. Was it the challenge that led you to stop schooling?
7. In what ways did your school (teacher) help you when you stopped schooling?
8. In what ways did your family (parents) help you when you dropped out of school?
9. Have you plans to return to school?
10. In what ways can you return to school?

## **Interview Guide for Parents**

1. In what ways do your children go to school?
2. In what ways did he/she stop schooling?
3. Was there anything a challenge when he/she was going to school?
4. What was the nature of this challenge?
5. Was that the challenge that led him/her to drop out of school?
6. How did your ward behave before he/she dropped out of school?
7. Do you think it was this behaviour that influenced his/her decision to stop schooling?
8. How did you as a parent support your ward when he/she was in school?
9. Was this support adequate to have kept him in school?
10. Do you think you as a parent is also responsible for why your child is at home?
11. Do you think your child will go back to school?
12. In what ways are you acting to influence him/her to go back to school?



