



A University of Sussex DPhil thesis

Available online via Sussex Research Online:

<http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/>

This thesis is protected by copyright which belongs to the author.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

Please visit Sussex Research Online for more information and further details

**Constructing Higher Education Experiences through Narratives: Selected Cases of
Mature Undergraduate Women Students in Ghana**

Christine Adu-Yeboah

Submitted to the University of Sussex for the degree of Doctor of Education

March 2011

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study has been made possible through the funding from the Economic and Social Research Council and British Department for International Development (ESRC/DFID RES-167-25-0078). Having gained admission to the University of Sussex, I had to wait in queue in my institution to be considered for funding, which was offered periodically. I therefore count myself privileged to have been the only one selected for the award of a grant on the ESRC/DFID research project on Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania. But for this sponsorship, I might still be waiting in queue, and perhaps the interest for a doctoral study would have waned. My gratitude for this grant cannot be quantified. I am most grateful for it.

I also express my sincere thanks to my supervisors, Professor Louise Morley and Dr. Sara Aynsley for their patience for me, and their relentless effort at helping me to get my thesis right. I also thank the Widening Participation research team: Professor Fiona Leach, Dr. Rosemary Lugg, Dr. Linda Dzama Forde and Mr. Gordon Egbenya for their assistance in various ways throughout the four years of my study.

I owe my present academic status to Dr. Kwame Akyeampong and Dr. John Pryor who first gave me the desire for doctoral study and actually showed me how to begin. I also wish to express my gratitude to the women students who shared their life histories with me. Without their stories, there would be no thesis. I pray they will read this final work and be inspired to aspire to greater heights.

My family deserve special mention for coping with my absences and neglect. I will never forget my husband's constant question 'woetumi aye kakra?', meaning have you been able to do some of the work? and his reassuring encouragement 'ebeye yie' (everything will be okay). There has never been a time in my marriage that he has been this caring and supportive. Should all mature married women students receive

this support from their spouses, the journey to academic heights would be much more easily attained by many more women.

At long last, Maame and Nana can have their mother's full attention and care! My children's strong desire to go to my graduation ceremony made them keep asking when I would finish writing my thesis, and many times they would hang over my shoulders when I was behind the computer to read what I was writing, and to find out how many more chapters I needed to write. Nana left the house reluctantly to spend the holidays elsewhere so that I could have space to write, when he realised that I had to attend to him every day, cook for him and make sure he was alright, which he saw was draining my energy and time for my thesis writing.

Reverend Ampadu Duku, Pastor Francis Williams Aubyn and Neenyi came into my life at a time I most needed encouragement, spiritual and moral support, especially when my mother passed away at a crucial stage of my thesis writing. They are the closest to my family and I know that without them, I would not have come this far. Their support cannot be quantified; the Lord Almighty knows, and will reward them accordingly.

Finally, I acknowledge the familial affection I enjoyed from 'Sis' Margaret Ethel Taylor and Dr. Ato Essuman, my course mates with whom I shared the complexities of adult learning with job and family. Bless you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
DECLARATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	ix
SUMMARY	xi
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	 1
1.1 My Journey through Higher Education and Career	1
1.2 Introduction to the Study	4
1.3 Background to the Study	8
1.4 Why Study Mature Women Students in Ghanaian Higher Education?	10
1.5 Research Questions	15
1.6 Purpose of the Study	15
1.7 Organisation of the Study	17
 CHAPTER 2: THE CONTEXT FOR GHANAIAN EDUCATION	 19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 The Geographic Locations and Education Delivery	19
2.3 Cultural and Socialisation Processes in Ghana	22
2.4 Pre-tertiary Schooling in Ghana	23
2.5 Higher Education in Ghana	25
2.6 Chapter Summary	31
 CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW:	
MATURE WOMEN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION	32
3.1 Introduction	32
3.2 Concepts	32

3.3 Women Students' Age, Socio-economic Status and Gender Roles	38
3.3.1 Introduction	38
3.3.2 Women Students' Age and HE	39
3.3.3 Socio-economic Status and Higher Education Participation	41
3.3.4 Gender Roles and Higher Education Participation	44
3.4 The Conceptual Framework of the Study	47
3.5 Chapter Summary	52
 CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGICAL, PRACTICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES	 53
4.1 Introduction	53
4.2 Research Paradigm and Methods	53
<i>Research Paradigm</i>	53
<i>Research Methods</i>	55
4.3 Research Design	56
<i>Narrative Interviews</i>	56
<i>Life History Narrative</i>	57
<i>Doing Life History Differently</i>	59
<i>Population and Sample</i>	60
4.4 Data Collection	61
<i>Preliminary Survey</i>	62
<i>Planning the Interview</i>	63
<i>The Interview Process</i>	66
<i>Obtaining too much or too little from interviews</i>	67
4.5 Data Analysis	69
4.6 Reflection	71
4.7 Chapter Summary	74

CHAPTER 5: SIMILAR AND COMMON IDENTITIES OF MATURE WOMEN

STUDENTS	76
5.1 Introduction	76
5.2 Characteristics of Participants	77
5.3 Identity Formation: Common Themes	78
<i>Socialisation</i>	78
<i>Previous Schooling Shaping Academic Identity</i>	81
<i>Change of Location</i>	84
5.4 Identity Formation: Differences	86
<i>Socio-cultural Background</i>	86
<i>Marital Status and Family Life</i>	90
<i>Socio-economic Status</i>	93
5.5 Chapter Summary	95

CHAPTER 6: HOW MATURE WOMEN STUDENTS EXPERIENCE HIGHER EDUCATION

6.1 Introduction	97
6.2 Returning to Study as an Older Student	97
6.3 Socio-cultural Background: Marital Status, Family Life and Higher Education	103
6.4 Socio-economic Status and Higher Education Participation	107
6.5 Navigating through Higher Education: Agency and Structures	109
6.6 Chapter Summary	114

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction	116
7.2 Summary of the Study	116
7.3 Conclusion	121
7.4 Contribution to the field	123
7.5 Recommendations	125

REFERENCES	130
APPENDIX A	145
APPENDIX B	146

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Mature Students' Enrolment in one Public University in Ghana	11
Table 4.1	Profile of Participants	63

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AA	Affirmative Action
ADPE	Accelerated Development Plan of Education
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
DBE	Diploma in Basic Education
EFA	Education for All
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GES	Ghana Education Service
GPI	Gender Parity Index
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEIPR	Higher Education Initial Participation Rate
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
JHS	Junior High School
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
NCTE	National Council for Tertiary Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SLP	Study Leave with Pay
SSA	Sub-Sahara Africa
SSSCE	Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination
TLRP	Teaching and Learning Research Programme
UCC	University of Cape Coast

UEW	University of Education, Winneba
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Education Fund
URC	Universities Rationalization Committee
WB	World Bank
WP	Widening Participation

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**Christine Adu-Yeboah****International EdD****Constructing Higher Education Experiences through Narratives:
Selected Cases of Mature Undergraduate Women Students in Ghana****Summary**

Higher education has expanded in many countries, including Ghana. This is attributed to the realisation that economies can only be developed and sustained through the development of human and knowledge capital, which is obtainable through higher education participation. Consequently, higher education institutions in Ghana have experienced some diversity and heterogeneity in their composition in terms of participants' ages, socio-economic status, culture and gender, among others. However, it is important to ask how different groups of students fare once entered. A recent ESRC/DFID research project by Morley et al (2010) found that mature students are most at risk of dropping out of higher education. Yet, the experiences of mature students are under researched in Ghana.

My study employed the interpretive qualitative research approach to examine life narratives via interviews with eight mature undergraduate women from different socio-economic backgrounds in one public university in Ghana. The study is based on the idea that women who combine domestic work with academic work experience tensions, and therefore must devise strategies to manage their conflicting roles in order to navigate their way through higher education. The women in this study were sampled from the departments of Sociology and Basic Education, where they are known to be clustered. The rationale was to explore their experiences, describe the strategies they adopt to navigate through HE, and to use the findings to make suggestions for institutional development and learning.

The findings indicate that the women students' different socio-economic backgrounds, marital status and family lives influence the way they experience

higher education and the strategies they adopt for progressing through it. Most of the participants found academic work difficult and made reference to gaps in terms of their knowledge deficit, unfamiliar courses and teaching methods. Again, some women students felt out of place in the higher education arena and therefore had to 'cut down much of their years' psychologically so that they could mix easily with the younger students.

The implications drawn from this study are that there is need for the formulation of an institutional policy on mature women students in higher education, which would also ensure the regular provision of professional development programmes for higher education practitioners. It is expected that when higher education practitioners are regularly trained and sensitised about the heterogeneity in the composition of higher education, and particularly about mature women students' conflicting roles, it will improve their practice, enhance the qualitative experiences of mature women students and consequently, help to retain and increase their participation in higher education.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 My Journey through Higher Education and Career

I went through Higher Education (HE) as a poor student, though I gained entry rather easily, having qualified after sixth form. My father died when I was only three months old and my mother was illiterate and had nine other children to take care of. I remember growing up in the village where my mother was struggling with farming and petty trading to take care of us. Some of my siblings had to relocate to live with other members of the extended family elsewhere while the last two children, my brother and I, lived with my mother. Mother left me (under-aged) in my brother's class in the dilapidated village church building as she went about her farming and trading. Steadily, I progressed through the grades until I got to grade 4. The subject of girls entering education was only gradually gaining acceptance and recognition at that time.

My mother made me move to the city to live with my eldest brother who had just completed training as a teacher. That was such a huge difference: from a rural village without any social amenities, with a peasant-farmer population, barefooted school children in tattered clothes (or none at all) to a school (university primary school) where the children of the elite professionals were educated, and then to an elite secondary school. To say that the experience was tough and challenging is an understatement! To make it worse, when I gained admission to the secondary school, my brother travelled abroad (to Nigeria) for greener pastures, leaving me to my fate. I made it through the secondary school and the university through my acquaintance with two wealthy class mates, whose parents provided some of my material and financial needs.

It was through my experiences as a newly trained teacher, a mother and a wife that I had my initial insights into the patriarchal nature of the Ghanaian society, where women, educated or not, are subordinate to men and serve their interests.

My husband and I were both graduate teachers teaching in the same college. He was an experienced teacher while I was newly trained. I had more teaching load (as an English teacher) and needed to prepare extensively before each lesson, and yet, had to manage the home and our children, as he relaxed and waited to be served his timely meals. It was (and still is) the cultural norm that women served men's interests, and in spite of my husband's university education, I think he feared stigmatisation from offering domestic assistance.

As I reflect now, I see that my career achievements with my combined roles exemplify the nature of power which can be both oppressive and creative (Foucault, 1980). That is, in the face of the unequal socio-cultural roles, I earnestly determined to prove that a woman could combine parenting with domestic chores single-handedly and still perform excellently in the public domain. I was thus adjudged the national best teacher in the teacher training colleges division and also won a scholarship award to pursue a master's degree abroad, leaving the domestic responsibilities to my husband who, unable to handle it as I did, sought help in my absence.

The period was marked by two important macro-level landmarks namely, the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (United Nations, 1995), and the African Governments' preparatory meeting for the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (UNESCO, 1997a). It was also the period when the Ghana government's action plans emanating from these conferences were being vigorously pursued namely, to address the discrimination against women, ensure gender parity in education and enhance women's status through the promulgation of policies and legislations which aimed at challenging and reviewing institutions that did not augur well for their wellbeing (CEDAW, 2005). These measures were based on the recommendation that women have a major role to play in the development of the African region and therefore the need for measures to be taken to double the number of women in HE within the next ten years through affirmative action, among others.

Thus, I was one of the few women to benefit from a sponsored second degree programme as a result of the government's initiative of making HE accessible to more women.

The journey in developing my identity has shown that higher education has contributed to my new social status, my financial independence and the respect I have earned from my husband (partially because I now earn more than him and am not financially and materially dependent on him). It has also made me realise how helpless and marginalised uneducated females are, in the sense that whereas some are completely dependent on their spouses and in some cases, are subservient to them, some single, uneducated, low-income women also struggle to make a living.

My early schooling experiences have also demonstrated to me that socio-economic disadvantage, lack of social capital and in some cases, family circumstances such as family size are some of the factors that characterise exclusion from education. Now, as a university teacher to adult working-students many of who are women, I see that some females who for some of these reasons enter HE late as mature women might have experienced these earlier on in their lives, which might have acted as barriers to their HE access. In fact, a research project jointly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the British Department for International Development (DFID), from which I received funding for this study, found that people from poorer communities were often motivated to enter HE in order 'to become somebody in future' (Morley et.al., 2010, p. 62).

Mature women have to combine many roles such as working in the public domain and the home (domestic/private) with their HE studies. Moreover, my new status as a full-time teacher and a part-time distance doctoral student, and my immersion in the literature on women's education have revealed to me that these roles (i.e. worker, home-maker and student) depict very different forms of identity, and that each is a major institution that competes with the others for equal attention (Edwards, 1993). This issue is expounded further in this work.

These revelations have given me a new understanding about my taken-for-granted assumptions about the mature women that I teach: that though they share certain similar experiences with regard to work and domestic care, they have different life experiences, socio-economic backgrounds and identities which might influence their HE experiences. Given the imperative to improve women's access to HE (UNESCO, 1998a) and to ensure their successful participation and completion (UNESCO, 2009a), I see that a deeper understanding of the dynamics that facilitate or impede mature women's meaningful participation in HE is important through research in the Ghanaian context of multiethnic and varied socio-economic backgrounds.

It is my anticipation that my experiences and participation in a study of this nature would help to make insightful contributions that would influence my practice, inform further research and institutional policy on women's HE participation in general and mature women students particularly in the Ghanaian context. The study was also meant to serve as a medium of reflection on my own experiences as a mature woman student and an academic in HE.

1.2 Introduction to the Study

This study focuses on mature women's participation in university education in Ghana rather than issues pertaining to access. It is part of an international research project jointly funded by ESRC/DFID (RES-167-25-0078) on Widening Participation in Ghana and Tanzania which started in 2006 to 2009. This first chapter describes the background to the subject under investigation and the rationale for this study. The meaning of the terms 'tertiary education' and 'higher education', as have been used in this study, need to be clarified. The General Conference of UNESCO at its 27th session in November 1993 (UNESCO, 1998a) approved the definition of Higher Education (HE) as the following:

... all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities (p. 1).

Tertiary education, according to UNESCO (1997b), refers to the content of all the programmes at levels 5 and 6 of the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (see appendix A of this thesis), provided at all post-secondary institutions, as being more advanced than those offered in secondary education. These may be provided at institutions such as universities, polytechnics or colleges (Eustace, 1992; Charles and Bradley, 2002) and provided by the Government (public) or private sector.

Higher Education plays an important role in the economic and social development of nations and individuals, and this fact is well articulated in both international and national policy documents (e.g. Singh, 2001; Morley et al., 2010). Singh (2001) for example calls this the private and public good of HE, which means that the knowledge and skills participants obtain in HE enable them to be able to manage and transform national economies, and also improve the social lives of citizens.

Additionally, the UNESCO (1998a) report on the World Conference on Higher Education attests to HE's viability and ability to change and to induce change and progress in society. In search of new dynamics of HE for further societal change and development, UNESCO (2009a) made its position on the public good of HE clear at the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education, considering HE as an important tool for the development of the African continent (UNESCO, 2009a). The report further adds that the public good of HE contributes towards the eradication of (*national and individual*) poverty and sustainable development (my emphasis). This point is further highlighted in a recent World Bank (2009) document which stipulates that investment in human capital through a quality-assured growth in HE is crucial for accelerating economic growth and reducing national poverty, and thus improving the social lives of citizens.

Research evidence also suggests that participation in HE produces public returns to the state from the tax revenues generated by individuals' higher productive contribution, thus contributing to wealth creation, the development of civil society,

democratisation, social security and peace (World Bank, 2000; Hannum & Buchmann, 2004; Okolie, 2003; Morley, 2007).

Apart from the evidence from international and national policies about the public and private good of HE, in both high and low-income countries, research shows that HE participation can also enhance the wealth and life choices of graduates (Hannum & Buchmann, 2004; Okolie, 2003; Morley, 2007); what David (2009, p. 65) calls the ‘graduate premium’. In this sense, participation in HE is said to bring private returns to the individual through higher earnings and improved individual, social and economic status, promotion of income inequality, reduction in poverty (in terms of physical, social, psychological/intellectual disempowerment), illiteracy and social inequality (World Bank, 2002; Morley, 2007).

The debate about the public and private good of HE has led to an increasing social demand, to diversity and heterogeneity in the composition of HE participants in both high and low-income countries (Middlehurst, 2001; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002), and to the change in the perception of HE participation from ‘privilege to right’ (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002, p. 310). It is against this backdrop that issues relating to women’s meaningful participation and successful completion of HE are of research interest to me.

Women’s Participation in HE

Statistics indicate that globally, rates of HE participation are now slightly higher for women than for men, with a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.08 in favour of women (UNESCO, 2009b). In North America and Europe, the report indicates that the female participation ratio is one-third higher than for men, and in Latin America, the Caribbean and Central Asia as well as the Arab States, females outnumber men or at par with them (UNESCO, 2009b). The situation is however, not the same in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana.

The UNESCO (2009b) report indicates that in South and West Asia, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for men is one-third higher than that of women with sub-Saharan Africa recording the lowest representation of women in HE. The report (UNESCO, 2009b) shows that in 2007, there were 66 female students for every 100 males (1.5 times as high) in sub-Saharan Africa. Research evidence shows that in Uganda, Tanzania and Ghana for example, women from advantaged socio-economic backgrounds who also attend elite secondary schools normally in urban areas access HE, with the poor, rural and older groups underrepresented or not at all (Morley et al., 2006; Morley, Leach & Lugg, 2009).

In Ghana, women's participation in HE dates back to the colonial era where it was reported that by 1943, only two women were among the 98 students in the first post-secondary institution which was opened in 1924 (Daniel, 1996). With the establishment of the university system in 1948, women's participation in HE began to rise steadily. Statistics show that from 1981/82 to 1989/90, the average percentage of females enrolled in the three oldest universities was 18% (NCTE, 2000). Enrolment of female students as a percentage of total enrolments increased from 21% in 1991-92 to 26% in 1998-99. From as low as 3,630 in 1993 (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), 2001), female participation increased to 29,059 in the 2005/2006 academic year (NCTE, 2006b) compared with 11,302 and 54,729 of males in the same years. The most current figures show that 35% of females are enrolled in public universities and 41% in private universities (UNESCO, 2009b) with the national policy target at 50% for women.

With regard to underrepresented groups in HE in low-income countries, the debate is that beyond access to HE, their meaningful participation and qualitative experiences are not given due attention (Morley and Lugg, 2009). Indeed, in both high and low-income countries, it is known that in some situations, negative experiences impede the successful completion especially of underrepresented participants (TLRP, 2008; UNESCO, 2009a; Morley and Lussier, 2009).

In respect of females' participation in HE in low-income countries for example, the UNESCO (2009a) communiqué stresses that equity is not simply a matter of access but most importantly, ensuring successful participation and completion of women in HE. The communiqué therefore charged governments and institutions in developing country contexts to make efforts to ensure the success of all learners, particularly women. As a higher education practitioner, I find it important to understand the qualitative experiences of women's HE participation, and what might negatively affect their progress and success in HE. This is the subject which has captured my attention and which I seek to investigate in the Ghanaian context.

1.3 Background to the Study

Between 1948 and the early 1990s, access to HE in Ghana was limited to the elite, the rich and urban inhabitants (mainly men) of southern Ghana (Antwi, 1992) where the first three institutions were sited. Obviously, this excluded women, the rural majority and those with lower socio-economic backgrounds (Daniel, 1996; Dei, 2005). However, realising the potential of human resource for developing the economy, various Governments have introduced initiatives to widen HE access to students who were previously excluded. For example, from 2000, two groups of underrepresented students' HE access attracted policy attention, namely poor students and women.

In Ghana, research evidence suggests that poor students are the most underrepresented in HE, although there is no systematic collection of data to prove this (Morley and Lugg, 2009). The particular group of poor students are those from any of the 53 districts designated by the government as deprived or 'less endowed'. They are so called because of lack of economic development, low educational participation as a result of lack of/deteriorated infrastructure and teaching/learning materials. For these reasons, teachers are unwilling to be posted there. As such, there is a policy for tertiary institutions to institute special concessions for the admission of such students who obtain Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations

(SSSCE)-qualifying aggregates beyond the universities' cut-off points (Government of Ghana, 2007).

The second under represented group to receive government policy attention for HE access is women. A national policy framework was instituted with the aim of targeting a 50-50 enrolment ratio for males and females to ensure gender parity in HE (AAU, 2004; NCTE, 2006b). The national policy to achieve gender parity is linked to international policies that advocate gender equity and equality in HE access and participation (UNESCO, 1998a; World Bank, 2002; UNESCO, 2009a). At the regional level, the meeting of African Governments, in preparation towards the World Conference on HE, acknowledged that because of the role women have to play in the social and economic development of the African region, measures should be taken to increase their numbers in HE (UNESCO, 1997a). Consequently, in the World Conference (1998a), Articles 45 and 46 of the Declaration requested governments and HEIs to develop well-articulated policies, including Affirmative Action, to remove gender inequity in education and double the number of women students in HE within the next ten years (by 2007) (UNESCO 1998a, p. 40).

In some African countries including Ghana, the benefit of women's education, especially at the HE level, has been explained relationally, in terms of the returns for economic and social development. This translates into decrease in infant mortality rates, a higher probability of children getting a good education and most importantly, women becoming income generators, thus increasing the economic power-base of the family (Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), 2001; Hannum & Buchmann, 2004). As such, rationales for women's education have been couched in terms of their instrumental role in development. In Ghana, a Gold Coast scholar and educator, Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey, is purported to have stated that *If you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, you educate the whole nation* (Ephson, 1969). It is on this catchword, which is also a UNESCO slogan, that the campaign on girl-child education in Ghana is founded.

These assumptions seem to suggest that women should only have education in order that others (children, the home, society, etc.) will develop, as though they do not have any entitlement to education in their own right.

By 2009, the gender parity target had not been achieved in many countries including Ghana (UNESCO, 2009a), where it is known that poor and rural women are excluded from HE (Morley & Lugg, 2009). Reasons for exclusion and meaningful participation include cultural and political obstacles (UNESCO, 2009a, p. 6). This situation necessitated UNESCO's call on member States and all stakeholders to collaborate to develop policies and strategies at system and institutional levels to encourage women's access, participation and success in higher education.

Available research evidence in Ghana shows that at all levels of education, certain socio-cultural and socio-economic factors impede females' participation in education. These make some drop out along the way and even at HE level (Stephens, 2000; Pryor & Ampiah, 2003; Dunne and Leach, 2005; Morley & Lussier, 2009). (This issue is discussed in the next chapter) However, at the national and institutional levels, the main aim is to increase their number in HE without due attention to how their experiences facilitate or impede their success in HE. In the recognition of the new international imperative (UNESCO, 2009a) to ensure not just their access to HE but their participation and success, this study focuses on the participation of mature women students in HE. It seeks to explore their experiences of HE and describe how they navigate their way through it. The term 'mature' is being used to refer to the age (25 and above) on entry into undergraduate programmes (UCC, 2006).

1.4 Why Study Mature Women Students in Ghanaian HE?

The mature students' route to HE is one Widening Participation (WP) strategy which provides opportunity for adult students to access HE through the full-time, campus-based model. In Ghana, all the five public universities offer this alternative route to HE. This study focuses on the mature women in one of the oldest public

universities in the southern part of Ghana, and the first university to officially admit mature women students. At its inception in 1974, two groups of students were admitted into two academic programmes: B. A (Education) with 90 students (84 men and 6 women) and B. Ed with 53 students (45 men and 8 women), making a total of 129 men and 14 women. At present, the mature students are clustered in the B. Ed programmes run by the Faculty of Education. Over the years, participation in the mature students' route seems to be decreasing. Table 1.1 below shows the enrolment trend since the 2005/2006 academic year.

Table 1.1 Mature Students' Enrolment at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

Year	Group	Male	Female
2005/2006	Total	247	83
	Prim Ed. Dept	68	33
2006/2007	Total	309	98
	Prim Ed. Dept	73	39
2007/2008	Total	249	76
	Prim Ed. Dept	71	26
2008/2009	Total	158	54
	Prim Ed. Dept	18	6
2009/2010	Total	215	64
	Prim Ed. Dept	21	8

(Source: University of Cape Coast admissions Office – File name *Statistics-General*)

The enrolment figures above show that the 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 academic years recorded the lowest enrolment of women (6 and 8 respectively) in the Primary Education Department through the mature students' route, even though at present, mature students are given a 10 % enrolment quota (UCC, 2006). A finding from the DFID/ESRC research project shows that the rate of withdrawal of mature students is much higher than that of other students in the cohort (Morley et al., 2010). Additionally, the study found that the percentage of mature students achieving second class degrees was lower than for their cohorts on five academic programmes studied, including Education. These suggest that probably, they face problems in their HE life, which affect their retention and successful completion.

The literature on mature students' HE experiences available to this study is mainly from developed country contexts. It indicates that factors which influence women students' HE experiences include cultural norms, which refer to gendered distribution of labour in the family that make women mainly responsible for domestic chores (Edwards, 1993; Tett, 2000), social class differentiation (Moreau & Leathwood, 2006), life course events including being deficient in ability and lacking a proper educational background suitable for HE (Wilson, 1997; Tett, 2000) and history of HE in the family (Tett, 2000). However, information on the effect of poverty and particular African cultural practices on the experiences of women's education is not explored in the literature.

The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (2009a) attributed the factors related to women's access, participation and success in HE in low-income countries to 'various socio-economic, cultural and political obstacles' that continue in many places in the world (UNESCO, 2009a, p. 6). Indeed, the DFID/ESRC study found that in Ghana, mature students are among the groups that are most at risk of dropping out of HE (Morley et al., 2010). Moreover, among HE practitioners in Ghana, the reasons for mature women's declining number in HE, their high withdrawal rate and comparatively low academic performance have been mainly speculative. Some of the reasons are based on the fact that many more access routes to HE are available (e.g. Distance Education (DE) and evening classes) and more convenient than the campus-based, full time mode. With the DE for example, study centres are sited in rural, urban and semi-urban areas, close to the participants. Other reasons are that the campus-based model is more stressful for mature women because the length of break in their academic work may contribute to a knowledge deficit, and thus they may require a longer time to catch up with academic work in HE, a situation which is believed to be compounded by their multiple roles as house makers and mothers.

Until the commencement of the DFID/ESRC research project on Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana (Morley et al., 2010), research on

females' qualitative experiences of education in Ghana was scant. The few available also did not address the situation of undergraduate women in full time campus-based study mode. For example, Dunne and Leach's (2005) study on gender and schooling in Ghana compared boys' and girls' gendered experiences in basic schools and found that gender-appropriate behaviour is enacted through teacher-pupil/pupil-pupil relationships, with teachers holding greater expectations for boys than girls and treating them differently in class. Stephens' (2000) and Pryor and Ampiah's (2003) studies also focused on girls' access to basic education in Ghana. They also found that certain socio-cultural and socio-economic factors such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy, house chores and economic activities serve as barriers to their access, participation and retention in school.

Kwapong's (2007) study on WP for women in HE in Ghana researched women's participation in DE and found that women encounter challenges relating to their combination of the demands of their career with frequent travels to learning centres for tuition and house management. Overall, the study concluded that the DE is flexible in terms of its location and the time it offers learners for tuition and private study, and that on the whole it suited women's study plans and learning styles.

Another study on HE participation in Ghana by Dei (2005) explored the experiences of conventional-age minority students. The author (ibid) used the following five factors as reasons for under representation: poverty, language, ethnicity, religion and gender, and found that certain dominant social groups in HE are privileged in the process of knowledge construction, especially as the HEIs are sited where such groups are the majority. In his treatment of the subject of difference among the groups however, he appeared to homogenise the social groups he addressed and thus made an argument about their difference in terms of the binary oppositions of rich and poor, male and female, Christian and Moslem, etc. But the study did not address the actual factors that may be accountable for different individual identities and experiences of HE.

It is this gap that this study seeks to address by describing the different experiences of women students in HE in the light of their cultural roles and socio-economic status, and the strategies they adopt to succeed in HE.

The studies outlined above seem to suggest that minority groups (females in this case) experience education the same way. The different experiences of individual members of minority groups in general and mature women students in particular has not been explored in Ghana. Morley and Lugg's (2009) study of underrepresented groups in Ghanaian HE found that Socio-Economic Status (SES) and the gendered division of domestic labour impede or facilitate women's education. Their analysis of the retention, achievement and SES of HE students through the equity scorecard showed that in the B. Ed programme, more mature students were from low SES backgrounds as compared to other programmes such as Bachelor of Commerce. However, it is not clear how these factors influence mature women students' particular HE experiences, and the strategies they adopt to navigate their way through HE.

A preliminary interview in my study with the Assistant Registrar in charge of academic affairs in the HEI under investigation revealed that no structures have been instituted to monitor, evaluate and support the progress of mature students/women. Moreover, there is no institutional policy to guide the running of the programme, apart from the provision of guidelines on admission processes (UCC, 2006). These gaps demonstrate the paradox of the WP strategy: its aim is to ensure access and participation of the underrepresented group, yet without an understanding of their experiences, their withdrawal, low retention and poor academic performance, the WP strategy appears to be contributing to their under representation. It is important that HE practitioners become aware of the structures that have constructed mature women's different identities, and how these facilitate and/or impede their participation, retention and successful completion of HE so that the appropriate teaching, learning, monitoring and support structures can be instituted for them.

1.5 Research Questions

This thesis addresses two main questions:

1. How do mature women students experience HE in Ghana?
2. What are the implications of their experiences for developing HEIs in Ghana?

The first question has two subsidiary questions:

- a. What impact does mature women students' socio-cultural backgrounds, marital status, family lives and socio-economic status have on their experiences in HE?
- b. How do mature women students navigate their way through HE in respect of their marital status, family life, socio-economic status and agency?

I believe that the social reality under investigation is subjective, residing with the individuals the study investigates. Therefore, I have adopted the life history interview, which is one of the methods of interpretive qualitative research. The paradigm believes in the involvement of the individuals under study in order to understand their opinion and gain an understanding of what is unique and particular to them, rather than what is general and universal (Creswell, 2003). In order to answer the research questions, eight mature undergraduate women in one public HEI were selected through a preliminary survey for life history interviews. The life history interviews were conducted within a month, analysed according to the common and uncommon themes and presented according to the research questions. (These are discussed in detail in Chapter 4) It was expected that in answering the study's questions, the findings would be useful for HE academics and managers in their practice and ultimately improve the institution's WP strategy. This objective is expounded in the next section.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

This study has two main objectives: (a) to explore how mature women students experience HE and (b) to use the findings to create awareness about their different

experiences and learning needs to HE academics and managers, and inform institutional policy on mature women students.

The first subsidiary research question is interested in finding out about the profile of mature women students in terms of their socio-cultural backgrounds, marital status, family lives and socio-economic status. The second question focuses on how these influence their HE life. Answers to these questions will provide information on the schools they attended (rural or urban, elite or not), why they did not access HE earlier and how their previous schooling experiences facilitate or impede their academic work in HE now. Again, it will reveal their cultural roles, which in this study, relate to their gender roles in the home and community, their marital status and family commitments. The reason is that these may have implications for their social and academic lives in HE. It will also provide insights about the value placed on females' education, which might explain the participants' motives for coming to HE at a later time.

Their SES will reveal their economic power for HE life, since I believe that many of the mature women students may be married with families as Kwapong (2007) suggests, a situation which may have implications on their HE spending. Knowledge of their economic power will also indicate the type of accommodation they have, their access to HE facilities and their financial ability to acquire HE-related items, and how these affect their academic work. Moreover, information on the experiences of mature women-returners to education as single or married, with or without family commitments will provide information on how they are able to strategise and juggle their different roles, and progress through HE.

These findings will be important to both HE academics and managers. Firstly, it will bring awareness to HE academics about the profile of different constituents of HE, and the fact that their different identities require different treatment socially and academically. Findings from the participants' experiences with HE practitioners and academic work will make academics reflective of their teaching and modify their

teaching to meet the different learning needs of HE participants generally and mature women students particularly. The findings will also provide insights into the strategies mature women students employ to cope and progress through HE. This should inform institutional strategies that would focus on the retention and successful completion of mature women students specifically and other minority groups generally, and in effect, widen HE participation for such groups.

Finally, the findings of the study will point to the need for the HE institution to take action on a number of points. Firstly, as there is no deliberate documented policy on the management of mature students in the HE institution under investigation, the findings should point to the need for such a policy. Such a policy should include the regular collection of data on HE participants, particularly non-traditional students such as mature women, and the use of that data to identify students who may need academic, financial or other forms of assistance. The findings of this study will also create the need for HE managers to regularly monitor and evaluate the retention, successful participation and completion of mature women students, and aim at training HE practitioners regularly in teaching methods that would be useful for addressing the different learning needs of diverse HE clients. Ultimately, these should lead to ensuring the meaningful participation of mature women students in HE.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

This study employs interpretive qualitative research methods through conducting life narratives of eight mature undergraduate women in one public university in Ghana. The intention is to explore, identify and describe the profile of the mature women sampled for investigation and show how their identities influence their HE experiences. The findings are expected to create awareness and sensitisation about, and responsiveness to the participants' diverse learning needs, thereby providing insight for widening HE participation strategies.

This thesis is therefore divided into seven chapters. This first chapter described the background to the issue under investigation and the rationale for this study. The second chapter describes the socio-economic and cultural milieu in which the participants live, and in which HE thrives in Ghana. Specifically, it sets out the different geographical locations of the country, the peculiarities of the locations, the provision of education and how these influence access and participation.

Chapter 3 discusses the literature on the experiences of mature women in HE in different contexts and Chapter 4 discusses my methodological orientation: what led to my choice of the interpretive qualitative approach and the life history narrative. The procedures I used for gathering and analysing data, as well as the practical and ethical issues I encountered in the process are also addressed in the discussion on methodology. The fifth chapter discusses the themes that emerge from the data and presents the issues that are common to all the participants, as well as those that construct their identities differently. In Chapter 6, the factors that influence the participants' experiences of HE are discussed, thus, demonstrating that though mature women students share certain common identities, their experiences of HE are different.

The last chapter summarises the study and draws conclusions on the findings. It also suggests recommendations for the formulation of an institutional support policy for mature women students in HE in Ghana, or in any context that may find some of the recommendations applicable.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONTEXT FOR GHANAIAAN EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, it was pointed out that as a result of international and national policies aimed at increasing the participation of women in HE, women's enrolment in Ghanaian universities has increased over the years. Yet, in one public university in Ghana, mature women students' rate of withdrawal from HE is higher than that of other students of conventional age, and their academic achievement is also lower. However, reasons for this situation are not available through research. This study therefore set forth to explore the experiences of mature women students in HE with the aim of drawing attention to them as individuals who may have different learning needs as a result of their different identities, and with the findings, provide recommendations that would ensure their meaningful and successful participation in HE.

This chapter describes the context of the research and shows the differences that exist in the Ghanaian society in terms of SES and socio-cultural practices and their implications for females' education. The chapter begins with a brief description of the country's demographic characteristics, including the education system, barriers and enablers for accessing and participating in education and under-represented groups in HE. The chapter also looks at gender participation rates in HE in Ghana, policies that have been initiated to ensure gender parity and mature students as an underrepresented group.

2.2 The Geographic Locations and Education Delivery

Ghana is popularly known as the black star of Africa because it was the first African country to gain political independence from the British colonial rule in 1957. At present, the population of the country is estimated to be 22.1 million (World Bank, 2007), of which about 45.9% are under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2007). A UNESCO (2006) report shows that the youth literacy rate is significantly higher than that of the adult population as a whole, with 71% of the 15 to 24 age group being literate.

The country is divided into ten administrative and commercial regions and three geographical belts (the northern, middle and southern belts), with Accra as the capital. The northern belt is made up of three regions namely Upper West, Upper East and Northern Region. The middle belt is made up of the Ashanti, Eastern and Brong Ahafo Regions, constituting the forest zones, where some commercial and subsistence farming activities take place. The southern belt comprises the Central, Western, Greater Accra and Volta regions where there are fishing and commercial activities and some subsistence farming.

The different geographical locations of Ghana are characterised by uneven socio-economic conditions and infrastructure, especially for education delivery. The North/South divide is the most striking feature of the Ghanaian context, affecting almost all indicators of development, including education (Rolleston, 2009). The northern belt constitutes the three poorest regions of the country, and due to its harsh climate and poor vegetation, the people are dispersed, nomadic and deprived, with some community settlements in the rural areas sometimes comprising about ten household units (Akyeampong, 2004). The inhabitants face challenges with regard to water, food and employment opportunities. Therefore, there is a higher demand for basic human needs than for education.

The Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS, 2000) indicates that the literacy rates for the northern sector of the country are significantly lower than those in the south. The survey reports that while more than two-thirds of adults in almost all the regions in the south have been to school before, only about a third of adults in the north have done the same. With regard to children's participation in basic education, statistics from the GLSS (2003) show that 50% of children in the Northern regions have access to primary education, compared with 80% of their counterparts in Ashanti and Greater Accra regions. Enrolment in secondary education is also very much lower in these regions, with only 10 to 15 percent of children enrolling in junior secondary school (Akyeampong et al., 2007).

Research evidence shows that most of the children in Northern Ghana do not go to school because they fend for themselves by engaging in economic activities to cater for their basic needs (Casely-Hayford, 2002). Moreover, as a result of poverty and the use of child labour to supplement family income, parents, most of who have themselves not had education, are not interested in formal education for their children (Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah, 2009).

In the Northern part of Ghana, higher education opportunities are also limited, given that it was not until the early 1990s that one public university was opened to serve three regions in the area, compared to three HEIs in the south. A study of 1,500 students (Manuh et al., 2007, p. 82-3) found that in 2002, the majority of students who gained admission to the five public universities came from the five more developed regions in the south and middle belt of the country while only 4.2% of students came from the Northern belt. It can therefore be expected that access to HE will be restricted to the most socially-advantaged whose parents might have had education, who attended elite secondary schools and who have the highest entry qualifications.

Rural/Urban Divide and Education Opportunities

In Ghana, the historical context and colonial experience brought about differential allocation of and access to resources and goods (Dei, 2005). Therefore, there are differences in SES in the various regions and (rural/urban) locations. Life in rural areas is characterised by differential levels of difficult economic and social conditions, which reflect in the lack of basic social amenities such as pipe-borne water, electricity, accessible roads and transportation, health and education facilities.

Whether rural, urban or peri-urban, one's location determines one's educational opportunities, academic achievement, school retention and progression. This is attributable to the difference in levels of development, in terms of the distribution of social and educational resources between towns and rural areas. USAID-supported Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT), conducted in the mid to late 1990s, found that,

rural schools were considerably weaker in academic achievement than those in the towns, with pupils in the country's capital obtaining the highest achievement (Pryor & Ampiah, 2003). In rural areas, few people go beyond the basic level of education (Stephens, 2000).

In the ESRC/DFID research project to which this study is connected, some HE students' stories about their previous educational experiences hinted that long distances to school, poor, unattractive educational facilities and lack of teachers in rural areas affected their academic achievement and their transition to further education (Morley et al., 2010). Stephens (2000) points out that in rural areas in Ghana, poverty determines who receives education in the family (mostly boys). Parents are unwilling to send their children (especially girls) to school because of some cultural practices such as early marriage and the lack of role models. The implication is that females from rural areas may not access HE as easily as their urban counterparts, an issue which this study explored.

2.3 Cultural and Socialisation Processes in Ghana

In every human society, there are beliefs and practices that regulate the way people behave and relate to each other, and 'socialisation' refers to the process by which such beliefs and practices are inculcated in people. It also refers to the process by which people are made to adopt behaviours deemed appropriate to their gender in their culture (Burr, 1998). Social structures such as the family and school, and the relationships among its members are the main socialisation agencies, which transmit values, moral and ethical instruction as well as societal obligations and privileges (Gyekye, 2003).

In Ghana, traditional gender-role identification and living arrangements have established clear delineations of household responsibilities, which continue to be passed down to children in the family, and from which they learn the gender roles expected of them (Bortey and Dodoo, 2005). As such, it is generally held that every woman 'grows up knowing that it is the woman who cooks the meals and generally

sees to it that the house is clean and well-kept' (Dolphyne, 1991, p. 5), a role which does not require formal education to perform. Men on the other hand, are supposed to be heads of households and breadwinners, and cater for all household members including their wives. Many traditional households believe men need higher income to discharge these responsibilities, which is possible by obtaining education (Boohene, Kotey & Folker, 2005).

Where men and women are socialized to conform to socially constructed and appropriate gender roles and cultural norms, gender gaps that disadvantage women are created, particularly in the education sector (Hannum & Buchmann, 2004). Although the Ghanaian education system is structured to serve girls and boys equally, females' education is hindered by certain cultural beliefs and practices such as the expectation that girls will help with household chores and family businesses, as well as early marriages (Stephens, 2000; Pryor & Ampiah, 2003; Akyeampong et al, 2007). Sometimes, there is the fear that a girl's marriage prospects will diminish if she obtains a higher education equal to men or more than men. Even when they are enrolled, girls experience schooling differently from boys, with some teachers showing greater expectations for boys and thus giving them more attention and intellectual challenge than girls (Dunne and Leach, 2005). These suggest that females' identities are formed differently based on their gender roles and different experiences of schooling.

2.4 Pre-tertiary Schooling in Ghana

Formal education started in the southern towns of Ghana, where the first two public universities were sited by the colonialists (Dei, 2005). Currently, the basic education programme is made up of 2 years of pre-school system, 6 years of primary education where a child enters at age 6 and 3 years of Junior High School (JHS) (Government of Ghana, 2007).

Since independence, there have been a series of educational reforms and reviews in Ghana aimed at improving educational delivery and increasing access and

participation. One of the reforms which sought to ensure gender parity and improvement in educational delivery was the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), introduced in 1996. Consequently, school enrolment and retention rates for both boys and girls increased. In 1999, 57% of children of primary age were enrolled in primary school, increasing to 65% in 2004 (UNESCO, 2006). This increase has been attributed to the Government's introduction of capitation grants, which abolishes all kinds of school fees and makes provision for funding to schools based on enrolment rates.

Despite the increase in basic school enrolment, a UNESCO (2006) report indicates that only 63% of primary school children reach the fifth year, with a wide gender gap especially at the higher levels (Republic of Ghana, 2004). The report on Ghana's achievement in the Millennium Development Goals (Republic of Ghana, 2004) shows that between 2003 and 2004, there was a Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 93 females to 100 males and 88 females to 100 males at the primary and junior high school levels respectively.

Admission to the Senior High School (SHS) is determined by performance in a nationally conducted examination (Basic Education Certificate Examination, BECE) and school placement through a computer selection programme. To be selected by the computer for admission to an academically good performing or elite secondary school (normally categorized from A-D according to their academic performance), an applicant has to obtain grade 1 in each of the 6 core and elective subjects, making an aggregate of 6. Because of this, the examinations are very competitive. From my experience, I observe that parents who have enough money send their children to good performing private schools, engage the services of private teachers or spend on educational materials to enable their children to obtain not just the required grades, but the highest.

A study by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2001) revealed that the poorest 45% of Ghana's population had no access to post-basic education, and that only 37% of

children of secondary school age were enrolled in secondary school (UNESCO, 2006). From this, it is evident that in spite of the free provision of basic education and subsidised secondary education, post-basic education largely excludes the poor and rural dwellers because of the uneven allocation of educational resources and poor educational delivery. Poor parents who are unable to make additional expenses will automatically have their children allocated to category D secondary schools, most of which are in deprived areas and unable to educate students to the tertiary level. In such circumstances, it is possible for females (or males for that matter) who might have missed the opportunity to access HE earlier and are still interested, to do so through Widening Participation (WP) strategies such as DE and the mature students' route to participate in education.

2.5 Higher Education in Ghana

Before gaining independence, participation in HE in Ghana was elitist, as has been pointed out earlier in this thesis. After independence, educational expansion was vigorously pursued at all levels (from primary to HE) in order to prepare citizens who would contribute to the educational, political and social development of the country (Daniel, 1996; Association of African Universities (AAU), 2004; Dei, 2004). Consequently, by the 1960s, Ghana was the first in the sub-Saharan Africa to have experienced rapid educational growth (Rolleston, 2009). This section describes some of the processes of HE expansion, the introduction of previously excluded groups generally and women particularly.

University Expansion in Ghana

Higher education began in Ghana with the establishment of the first colonial post-secondary institution in the then Gold Coast in 1924, rising to 98 students by 1943, two of whom were women (Daniel, 1996). This institution was upgraded to a university in 1948 and called the University College of the Gold Coast, (now called the University of Ghana (UG)). By 1962, there were two additional universities: the Kumasi College of Technology, now called the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), opened in October 1951, and the University

College of Cape Coast (UCCC) in 1962, now known as the University of Cape Coast (UCC).

This section traces the expansion of HE from the 1980s when statistics at that time showed the need to expand the university system. Information from the US Library of Congress (2007) shows that of the 1.8 million students who completed basic education in 1984/85, only 125,600 were able to continue to secondary school, and fewer than 20,000 entered vocational and technical institutions, with total university enrolment at 7,900. It is important to note that during that period, the three universities in the country were sited in three urban centres in the southern part of Ghana, where most of the elite secondary schools were also located. Therefore, enrolment favoured the rich and urban dwellers in the locality to the disadvantage of the poor, rural dwellers and those in the other geographical locations.

Following an educational reform programme in 1987, the Universities' Rationalization Committee (URC), which was instituted to provide information to improve the university system, reported that only a negligible number (0.7%) of the relevant age group was represented at university (UNESCO, 1988). This led to the Tertiary Education Reforms (1991) with the major objective of expanding access, improving quality teaching and learning and developing manpower for sustainable economic development (Antwi, 1992). Consequently, two more public universities were opened, namely the University for Development Studies (UDS) and the University College of Education of Winneba (UCEW) (Daniel, 1996; Effah, 2003), in the north and south of the country respectively. Also, old post-secondary institutions were upgraded to the tertiary level and polytechnics upgraded to offer university-level courses (Sedgwick, 2000) while allowing private sector participation in HE (Daniel, 1996; Effah, 2003). Through this, university enrolment quickly shot up to 15,365 during the 93/94 academic year from 7,900 in the 1984/85 academic year (US Library of Congress, 2007).

In spite of the expansion, enrolment still favoured the southerners, the urban dwellers and the rich. It was the period when the World Bank had regarded HE as a luxury which favoured the elite rather than the masses. It had therefore introduced cuts in public spending on HE, thereby making it difficult for the poor to enter HE. That situation had also resulted in the deterioration and inadequate academic and infrastructural facilities to match the growing population.

However, between 1996 and 2001, an average of 32% of the qualified applicants gained admission to the five public universities (Ministry of Education, 2000). In numerical terms, university enrolment stood at 40,673 in the 2000/2001 academic year and by 2004, it had risen to 69,968 (UNESCO, 2006). The 2005/2006 enrolment at public universities recorded a total of 83,788, reflecting 55% of qualified applicants (National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), 2006b). In spite of the expansion, the GER was 5 in 2005, as compared to 24 for the world and 71 for North America and Western Europe (UNESCO, 2009b). Although there are over 11 private university colleges that have been granted accreditation, in addition to the 5 public universities, only about 25% of qualified secondary school leavers currently obtain university access in Ghana (World Bank, 2009).

Accessing HE in Ghana

The requirement for entry into full time study at Ghanaian universities is to obtain good passes (not more than aggregate 24) in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSSCE), now known as the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSSCE). However, due to the limited space for the large number of applicants, and the keen competition to access the public institutions because of the lower cost, many qualified applicants are turned away through an institutionalized cut-off point (between aggregate 6 and 15).

Moreover, many students, especially those from less endowed secondary schools are unable to make grades within the cut-off point, and others rewrite the examinations many times without success to obtain passes in some of the compulsory subjects like

Mathematics and Science. When this happens, it appears their opportunity to access HE is lost forever. These and other factors have brought about the introduction of other entry routes to widen access to diverse clientele such as the poor, full-time workers and adults, among others.

Innovations for HE Access

Three main WP strategies are practised by universities in Ghana to make HE accessible to some underrepresented groups. These are the special concession to poor students, the use of Affirmative Action (AA) for women and the introduction of different entry routes. These are described below respectively.

The ‘special concession for poor students’ is a way of making HE accessible to students from deprived areas. These students are identified by the location of the secondary schools they attended, whether in a rural area or a location which is designated as deprived because it is lacking in economic and social development, including poor educational infrastructure. According to The White Paper on Education (Government of Ghana, 2007), HEIs are required to institute special concessions for the admission of such students who obtain grades a little above the universities’ cut-off points. Every year, a cut-off point is determined by the number of applicants and the available places for admission. At the University of Cape Coast, two hundred places are reserved for students from deprived schools, and such students are admitted at some points lower than the standard requirements, depending on the university’s cut-off point in a particular admission process (UCC, 2006).

Because of the limited places for admission, this system has not received much publicity, perhaps to avoid receiving overwhelming numbers of applicants. The criteria used for identifying potential beneficiaries need to be reviewed to attract the right persons the innovation seeks to target. For example, it is important to note that one’s participation in rural schooling may not make him/her a poor student, since such students may come from relatively rich farmers in those villages.

Moreover, the computer selection for secondary school admission might place one in a deprived school when in fact, s/he is of average SES. Again, there does not seem to be a mechanism for ensuring gender parity in the use of the special concession for poor students, in which case males could be the major beneficiaries.

The next innovation is the use of Affirmative Action (AA). In Ghana, the AA is practised at the university level, and it works only in favour of women. Female students are granted admission at one or two points lower than their male counterparts into some academic programmes such as Education, Arts and Social Sciences. Although it is practised in all public universities and some private institutions, the ESRC/DFID research report reveals that there is no formalised, documented policy on AA (Morley et al., 2010), and it appears to be used on ad hoc basis. In reaction to the practice of AA, most of the male students interviewed in the study expressed their misgivings about the practice, agreeing with Fraser's (1997) theory that affirmative action is a form of reverse discrimination and favouritism, which privileges some groups and disadvantages others. But it is important to note that in the process where men and women are socialized to conform to socially constructed and appropriate gender roles and cultural norms which privilege boys and men, girls and women are disadvantaged and in the process, do not experience family life and schooling to the same degree as boys and men (Stephens, 2000; Dei, 2004).

On the basis of the above, I am of the view that the use of AA in Ghana does not imply the admission of unqualified females into HE, and therefore find it justifiable. On the other hand, AA could be perpetuating the cycle of inequality when socially advantaged females are attracted through the practice. To make it more meaningful, certain criteria must be adopted to target females from poor and rural backgrounds, as is done with the special concession for poor students.

Apart from the concessions for poor students and females into full time HE, other alternative entry routes have been made available for part time studies in the form of

sandwich and Distance Education (DE) (Kwapong, 2007). The sandwich programmes are mounted in the HEIs whereas the DE has centres in every regional capital. These entry routes are for selected programmes only (i.e. in Education, Business Management and Administration). Access to these programmes mostly favours working adults, women and those who wish to specialise in those programmes. Participants who are located within the proximity of the centres also find it most accessible, thereby excluding rural dwellers.

Kwapong's (2007) study of the DE programme in Ghana finds for example, that because it is decentralised to the regional and district capitals and offers flexibility in study time and place, the women and adult workers in her study rate it highly as the most suitable for them. However, she also finds that DE poses a number of challenges to learners, such as difficulty and insecurity in making frequent travels to study centres, pressure from career obligations and difficulty in combining house management with private studies, especially in the case of (nursing) mothers and pregnant women. There are however, other routes to full-time HE in the form of access programmes for science and adult/mature students.

The pre-entry access programmes for science and mature students are mounted prior to the period for university admissions. A prospective student has to participate in residential remedial classes and special entrance examinations, at the end of which successful applicants are offered admission to enrol in the programmes of their choice. Unlike the sandwich and DE programmes which are part-time, the access programme offers full time admission to students. It is assumed that any mature student (especially a woman) who chooses this programme rather than the part-time route has put in place certain measures that would enable him/her navigate through HE, taking into consideration one's career obligations and family commitments.

It must be noted however that in the case of the mature students, since only a 6% enrolment quota is offered (UCC, 2006), the entrance examination is competitive, and many candidates fail in the first attempt. Therefore, many prospective applicants

do not feel encouraged to access HE through this route. Though mature women manage to access HE through this route, the available statistics show that their withdrawal rate is higher than their cohorts in other programmes, and their academic achievement lower than those who accessed HE through the direct entry (Morley et al., 2010). These statistics offer aggregated information about mature women students whereas individually, they may have personal stories which might explain their experiences of HE and the factors which might be accountable for them. It is the intention of this study therefore to let the mature women students tell their life histories and through that, describe their identities and how they experience HE, in addition to their cultural roles as home makers and carers.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has described the social and cultural contexts which enable and impede women's education in Ghana. I have pointed out that the different geographical locations of Ghana are characterised by uneven socio-economic conditions and allocation of educational resources and infrastructure. As such, one's location, being in the north or south of the country, in a rural, urban or peri-urban area determines one's access to educational opportunities, meaningful participation and successful completion. This should help to understand why women students from these locations access HE at a later time in their lives.

I also showed that to some extent, some cultural practices such as the enforcement of gender-appropriate roles in the home and community disadvantage females' participation in education, their retention in school and transition to the higher educational levels. This chapter also discussed the various institutional strategies that have been developed to widen HE participation to minority groups such as students from deprived schools, working adults and women. Given the socio-economic context in which women access education in Ghana, it should be interesting to find out about the identities of mature women students and how they experience HE with regard to their cultural roles and socio-economic status.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW: MATURE WOMEN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates how mature women students experience HE in Ghana, and describes the strategies they adopt to succeed through it. In the previous chapter, I described the socio-cultural milieu of the Ghanaian society. I demonstrated how the cultural context and uneven socio-economic development in the different parts of the country affect education delivery generally and females' education particularly. Consequently, I suggested that a mature woman student's experiences in HE might be influenced by the effects of the conditions of her location (rural, urban or peri-urban), SES and socio-cultural practices.

In this chapter, I first discuss three concepts that I find relevant to this study namely identity, patriarchy and feminism, and show how these relate to the study of mature women students' lives. Secondly, I review issues concerning age, socio-economic status and socio-cultural norms, as have been found in the research literature on women's HE participation in different contexts. The chapter ends with a summary of the surveyed field.

3.2 Concepts

Identity

In Chapter 2, I pointed out that there are socio-cultural and socio-economic gaps between the northern and southern parts of Ghana and the rural and urban locations, which translate into differences in the allocation of educational resources, access and participation. There are also variations in the socio-cultural expectations regarding a woman's role in the public (e.g. school system) and private sphere (home), depending on her location and SES. As such, there are differences in the way women's identities are formed and changed, which might be a pointer to their experiences of HE.

Sarup (1996, p. xv) describes identity as ‘who one thinks one is, what one believes and what one does’. He also points out that identity is thought of as something we do; always in process and never attained. Therefore, for him, the individual is in the process of ‘becoming’ and should not be considered as ‘being’ in any given position (Sarup, 1996). According to Sarup (1996), our identities are constructed by social institutions like the family (home, parents and siblings), schools, culture, workplace and friends, irrespective of one’s social class, ethnicity or religion. In effect, what these agents produce in one individual is multiple identities which are not fixed through class, gender or race, but keep changing (Sarup, 1996; Gee, 2000). In describing the unfixed nature of one’s identity, Gee (2000) demonstrates that the kind of person one is recognised as being at a given time and place can change from moment to moment and from context to context through interaction with others (p. 99).

In Ghana, my understanding is that a female’s schooling identity would begin from the signals she receives from the socialisation she receives from her home, which is often influenced by the cultural values and practices embedded in patriarchy. (This is discussed shortly) Secondly, having been introduced to the schooling system (which normally happens after being shaped by the family and the community), a formal schooling identity is formed, but this schooling identity would be decisive or changed depending on a number of factors relating to the family (e.g. SES), community or the school itself. Therefore, a female who postpones HE until her mature age would have experienced shifting identities from these agents that might have impacted and still impact her schooling identity both negatively and positively. The implication therefore is that the identities mature women students bring with them into HE would influence their experiences in different ways and impact on their academic work differently, though they may share and may be identified by similar cultural features and other factors.

In defining the identities of mature women students in Ghanaian HE, the patriarchal system in which culture and SES operate becomes an important focal point. It is

therefore important to consider the operation of the system of patriarchy and its relation to the study of women's lives.

Patriarchy and Feminism

'Patriarchy' is used to describe the dominance of men over women in the private (family) and public (work, politics and culture) spheres (Weiner, 1994). According to Cranny-Francis et al. (2003), in the enactment of patriarchy, men ensure that their interests prevail, and this is supported implicitly or explicitly by social and cultural institutions. They thus portray the patriarchal institution as a system in which 'structural differences in privilege, power and authority are invested in masculinity and the cultural, economic and/or social positions of men'. What this means is that to ensure that their interests prevail, men exercise power and control over women. Consequently, they gain honour, prestige, material benefits (sometimes higher salaries) and the right to command from their superior position. This also means that culturally, economically and socially, women are excluded from the privileges and benefits of power and authority.

Issues relating to women's relationship with men are of research concern in both Western and African societies (Edwards, 1993; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Dei, 2004; Morley, 2005). Weiner (1994) reveals that in Western societies, the first women's movement which became known as liberal feminism, began as a movement against sexual discrimination. The nature of women's disadvantage was in the fact that their social, political and economic positions as compared with those of men were unrecognized and untapped, and that, their particular needs and interests were not adequately taken into account. According to Weiner, the movement advocated that more women be allowed into the public sphere (education and work) and given the same rights as men to make choices regarding their social, political, economic and educational roles.

However, the movement was seen as 'liberal, bourgeois and highly individualistic' (Weiner, 1994, p. 52), because it was pioneered by white middle-class women, who

appeared to be fighting their cause and extending their legal, political and employment rights. Consequently, the second wave women's movement which was called the Women's Liberation Movement (also known as the modern, new feminist movement) started in the USA in the 1960s. Weiner (1994) reports that, a group of women who were committed to egalitarian practices, and were disenchanted with the male domination of political organisations pioneered the movement. They reportedly began to explore ideas about women-centredness in political organisations and to organise their own autonomous movement for women's liberation. Thus, the ideas developed from the movement came to be known as those characterising radical feminism.

In explaining the cause of women's oppression, the radical feminism used the concept of patriarchy as the underlying principle of the dominance of men over women, and the model of all other oppressions. Connected to this ideology was the second assumption that the oppression of women by men was universal, thus, operating on the language of collectivism or sisterhood rather than individualism. The third assumption of the radical feminism was that women have to undergo a process of 'consciousness raising' to be aware of the effects of male domination.

It is noted that radical feminist goals dominated the second wave women's movement. Nevertheless, other feminist perspectives emerged during the period, notable among them being the socialist and black feminisms. The main concerns of socialist feminism include re-theorising the significance of women's work in the domestic and nondomestic economic sphere. Socialist feminists emphasised the role of the sexual division of labour as the basis of physical and psychological difference between men and women. They argued that the roles that usually required female labour namely (a) the [re]production and nurturing of human beings to serve eventually as labour/man power need for reproduction, (b) sexual satisfaction and (c) emotional nurturing were as important as the need for production for the satisfaction of material needs. For them, the public/private distinctions rationalised

the exploitation of women as they believed that procreative activities and public sphere production are mutually interdependent (Peet & Hartwick, 1999).

Black feminism began in multi-racial societies such as the USA where radical feminism started. Women of colour regarded radical feminism as a white-women's movement (Weiner, 1994) because it failed to recognise the economic and social differences between women. The black feminist movement therefore came up in protest against the radical feminist movement and the white patriarchal society's oppression of black women on the basis of class, colour and sex. In the process, the movement shattered the universal notion of sisterhood and thus allowed for both difference and equality to become issues within feminist politics.

The feminist movements described earlier pointed out men's advantaged position over females in Western countries. Similarly, in Africa, women were engaged in activism even before feminism became a movement, although no terminology had been coined to describe what they were doing (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997). However, due to the different historical, economic and social structures between the Western and African countries, the degree of women's disadvantage differs. For example, according to Cornwall (2005), early African writing on gender focused on women's invisibility and the victimising effect of colonialism/post-colonialism and male dominance on women. These issues were of concern because according to Lithur (2004), in pre-colonial times, African women enjoyed certain levels of status and prestige similar to those of men in the role they played as traditional governors, and in the sexual division of labour which was based primarily on complementarity and was devoid of inferiority/superiority status (Stromquist, 1998).

Stromquist (1998) and Lithur (2004) reveal that African women lost their status and prestige to colonial practices, which among other things, introduced patriarchal ideologies that did not recognise women's customary rights. Additionally, the colonial practices curtailed women's autonomy in certain aspects of decision-making (Boserup, 1970; Hunt, 1990). Cornwall (2005) therefore points out that

post-colonial African literature largely portrays African men as powerful, dominant figures. Consequently, some of the post-colonial writings challenged assumptions about women's political and economic capabilities, after which came studies on the construction of gender relations, and the processes and structures through which women's and men's identities and relationships are mediated. Recent studies, according to Cornwall (2005) are multi-disciplinary and encompass a wider terrain including issues concerned with gender identities with other dimensions of difference such as elitism or intellectualism and illiteracy (Toure et al., 2003), poverty and wealth and differences in terms of the rural-urban dichotomy (Morley and Lugg, 2009).

With regard to education, recent writings on girls and women's participation in schooling in Ghana mostly compare females' experiences with those of males. For example, decisions on the level or type of education girls should receive (concurrently with male siblings or not) are made by their fathers, particularly on the basis of family income and cultural beliefs about women's role as home makers (Akyeampong et al., 2007). Again, in their mature ages, depending on their marital status, women's further education is influenced either negatively or positively by their spouses (Prah, 2002; Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). As such, women's actions cannot be taken out of the context of the patriarchal culture, which appears to authorise, make valid and legitimise men's dominant position and the performance of their masculinity in the private and public spheres (Dolphyne, 1991; Cranny-Francis et al., 2003).

Manuh (2004), a Ghanaian writer thinks that the performance of masculinity is manifest in the ways in which men see themselves, think of themselves and behave towards men, women and children. For her, men's perception of themselves as superior and more (economically, culturally and socially) powerful has an impact on women's lives. However, much as masculine and feminine identities are not exclusive to men and women respectively (Connell, 1997), masculinity is not a fixed character type but a practice which can be generated in particular situations in a

changing structure of relationships. In this sense, a change in the structure of relationships can make both women and men perform masculinities and femininities respectively.

The exercise of masculinity and femininity by men and women conversely brings into contention the issue of male dominance and power over women in patriarchy. Foucault (1980) points out that power is omnipresent and exercised everywhere by everyone, including the marginalised and vulnerable. In a Foucauldian sense, contrary to the assumption that power is exercised solely by males and the rich for example, in the binaries of male/female; rich/poor, females and the poor also exercise power.

In sum, this section has pointed out that some of the agents of socialisation such as the family, education and cultural norms also help to form and shape one's identities. Secondly, I have pointed out that especially in the African context, these agents of identity formation operate in the patriarchal system, that appears to authorise and legitimate men's superiority and domination over women, and structure women's participation in education. Therefore, we can understand how mature women students experience HE through the lenses of the institutions that contribute to their identity formation, namely the family, culture and SES. The next section addresses these issues.

3.3 Women Students' Age, Socio-economic Status and Gender Roles

3.3.1 Introduction

Mature women students' HE experiences have attracted much research attention in many developed countries including the UK, the US and Australia where the participation of mature students in higher and further education started in the 1960s (Burn, 1993). In the UK for example, since the 1996/97 academic year, women have constituted the majority (more than 60%) in HE (David, 2009). Currently, 61.4% of part-time and 64.2% of mature undergraduate students are women (David, 2009).

Some of the research on mature women students in the UK employ the constructs of social class (SES) and juggling job commitments (Reay, 2003, for example), gender roles (Edwards, 1993; Baxter and Britton, 2001) and the effect of these on mature students' HE completion (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003).

In view of the lack of research studies on mature women students in the Ghanaian context, this study sought to understand the ways in which women experience HE in Ghana, through the lenses of age, SES and socio-cultural norms or gender roles. The section that follows reviews some of the research studies on mature women students' lives in HE in other contexts, with a focus on how age, SES and gender roles influence their experiences in HE.

3.3.2 Women Students' Age and HE

In discourses on HE participation, age becomes an important concept because it is normally used to define groups of learners as being traditional or non-traditional, and thus seemingly legitimised by their ages to be in HE or not possessing the full status of an HE participant. Nisbet and Welsh (1972) identified the following popular assumptions of the mature student: oldish, over 30 years, late developer who missed his or her chance by leaving school early or failing qualifying examination. Nisbet and Welsh again revealed that the mature student is often assumed to be pedestrian and dull, conscientious, serious, often a struggler and seldom a high-flier.

Some writers indicate that traditional students are associated with youthfulness and academic brightness whilst mature students are associated with old age, invisibility, marginalisation and positioning as 'other' in social relations (Maguire, 1996; Morley and Lussier, 2009). In Maguire's (1996) study, the constant repetition of 'young and bright' by her older women-participants in reference to the younger students seemed to be in binary opposition to 'old and dull'. Again, it portrayed that the women perceived themselves as academically weaker than younger students because of the difference in their ages. Sometimes, lecturers consciously or unconsciously signalled that mothers in HE are incapable of excellent academic performance because of

their domestic responsibilities (Edwards, 1993). In Edwards' study, this assumption was proven wrong, as the mature women students performed better than their younger counterparts.

Wilson (1997) also found that the age gap between mature students and younger students led to feelings of isolation and being on the fringes. Moreover, Richardson and King (1998) think that mature students may be confronted with problems related to adjusting to the traditional academic environment and may exhibit fewer skills in coping with the academic environment, in spite of their experience with solving life's demands.

In all the above examples, the characterisation of mature students appears to be full of norms, apparently because of some of their common characteristics, and old age is constructed as incompatible with higher academic pursuits. However, evidence from studies conducted in the UK demonstrates that older age means more life experiences to draw upon in HE work (Edwards, 1993; Richardson and King, 1998; Tett, 2000). This finding is endorsed by Wilson (1997) who contends that older students' life experiences, such as having worked, brought up a family, learnt about time management, worked under pressure and met deadlines, can serve as advantages by making them more confident about what they expect in HE.

Richardson and King (1998) argue that older students are more adept at examining and exploiting their previous experience in order to make sense of new information and situations. As such, they contend that older students can exhibit approaches to learning that are more desirable than those of younger students. In fact, in Ghana, old age is associated with wisdom and therefore accorded very high respect and dignity (Lithur, 2004). In spite of the norms that seem to characterise mature students, Tett (2000) demonstrates that there are many other factors such as schooling, family and community experiences and SES backgrounds that differentiate them.

Two points are worth noting in this section: (1) older age is sometimes wrongfully associated with academic dullness, knowledge deficit and inadequate academic preparation for HE (Maguire, 1996); (2) older age is associated with family life and job commitments, in which case mature (women) students encounter difficulties in combining these roles with HE although in some cases, students are able to use their previous life experiences to make sense of new information (Richardson and King, 1998). These suggest that the effect of other factors such as socio-cultural condition, marital and family status as well as SES frame the experiences of mature women students in HE. The discussion that follows presents some of the research findings on the experiences of mature women students in HE with regard to SES and gender roles.

3.3.3 Socio-economic Status and Higher Education Participation

Earlier in this chapter it was explained that mature students' HE experiences have attracted much research attention in developed economies whereas in developing countries such as Ghana, such literature is unavailable. This study draws on the available research literature particularly in the UK, where much research has been done on women students' participation in HE. This section presents some of the research findings on the effects of SES on non-traditional students' participation in HE and makes inferences for the situation of mature women students'.

In the UK, there is some indication in the literature that HE access and participation is for the socio-economically advantaged who have all the time to concentrate on their studies, and not for poor students who might not have had adequate academic preparation prior to HE and yet have to combine part-time employment with academic work (Reay, 2003; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; David et al, 2009). In a study conducted in a socio-economically excluded geographical area in the Northern part of England, Tett (2000) examined the gendered experiences of working class mature male and female students and found that all the participants shared similar social characteristics such as poverty, lack of academic qualifications because they had not participated in post-compulsory education and the absence of

HE experience in their families. Her study articulates with others (e.g Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003) which indicate that poverty is the cause of non-traditional HE participants' inability to obtain academic qualifications apparently due to the negative experiences of their previous schooling, which also impacts negatively upon their academic performance and retention.

Reay's (2003) study focused solely on the experiences of mature women students. Her study of 12 women from working-class backgrounds was sited in an urban area in the UK where there is ethnic and cultural diversity. Similar to Tett's (2000) study, Reay's participants recounted their childhood poverty, stories of struggle in their previous education, failure in examinations, lack of interest in school and a feeling that education was not for them. For six lone mothers in Reay's study, poverty still structured their lives in further education. Consequently, five out of the 12 participants were unable to mobilise sufficient support and resources to participate in HE, despite their passionate commitment to learning. Though the participants perceived their failure as personal and not as a result of poverty, Reay argues that the class culture accounts for their experiences of struggle, failure and their feeling that education was not for them.

Reay's (2003) study relates to other findings that demonstrate that working-class mature women students are at risk of making a loss from their financial investments in HE. She argues that working-class chances of educational success are low, especially in the inner-city where she conducted her study. This is because all the women, especially those with children, were caught between wanting to study, meeting domestic responsibilities and needing to earn money. Financial hardship was especially acute in the case of lone mothers who also had to manage paid work with intensive study. This left them too exhausted for any academic work.

It is interesting to note that in the inner-city of England, Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) made findings similar to what Tett (2000) and Reay (2003) discovered in the socio-economically excluded geographical area. In their longitudinal study which

employed questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews, Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) found that the participants (mostly non-traditional students) had to struggle against the odds to succeed in HE. According to them, the major source of struggle was financial, which compelled most of the students to work during term time. The participants appeared to be self-financing, since the study does not indicate any other source of funding apart from their part-time work and loans.

The studies above indicate that financial challenges can compel students to seek loans and term-time work to support themselves and their families. Leathwood and O'Connell's (2003) participants reportedly accumulated huge financial debts. In such circumstances, mature students and those with dependent children were found to be among those most affected by financial indebtedness, which added to their pressure. Although in Leathwood and O'Connell's (2003) study, there was no clear indication of the differences among the non-traditional students in terms of their social characteristics and individual circumstances, it can be inferred that some of the women students in the two scenarios above faced the greatest challenges of having to manage child care responsibilities, studies and term-time work, a condition which was missing in the narratives of male mature students in Tett's (2000) study. In some cases, financial constraints for lone mothers also forced some of them to live with their extended families where private studies became difficult because of the lack of physical space and privacy.

Engaging with part-time employment made it difficult for some poor students to achieve higher grades in their course work, to complete their dissertations and final assessments. Reducing their working hours or giving up some of their part-time jobs seemed to be the most reasonable alternative (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). However, the financial difficulties remained in such cases, a situation which put poor women, especially lone parents at risk of dropping out of university (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Reay, 2003), particularly as a result of high additional costs that were incurred by those who had children.

It is important to note that not all mature students are from poor economic backgrounds. However, my survey of the literature found very little information on the situation of socio-economically advantaged mature (women) students. Reay (2003) reports that in the case of such students, the financial support they receive from their families allows for the delegation of both childcare and housework to cleaners, nannies and childminders. Consequently, they do not experience the struggle which characterises the narratives of poor students. The literature that is available does not however show the difference in academic achievement between mature students from rich and poor economic backgrounds.

The situation in Ghana is not very different from the inner-city and socio-economically deprived areas in the UK. In the ESRC/DFID research project from which this study emanates, the Equity Scorecards of full-time mature undergraduate students in one public university showed that such students are mostly from poor backgrounds and highly at risk of dropping out of HE (Morley et al., 2010). Moreover, a survey of full-time teachers, who were also part-time mature undergraduate students in one public university in Ghana made similar findings about stories of struggle, as the participants tried to balance their HE studies with full-time work and family commitments (Adu-Yeboah & Nti, 2007). The participants indicated that financial constraint was their biggest challenge. In Ghana, full-time undergraduate students, including mature students do not normally take on term-time jobs, and there is no indication about how the different economic backgrounds of mature women students affect their HE experiences differently. It is therefore the intent of this study to explore how the SES of mature women students in HE construct their HE experiences, as they combine HE with their gender roles.

3.3.4 Gender Roles and Higher Education Participation

In many high and low-income countries, women have sole responsibility for caring for children, elderly parents and other family relations and spouses when married (Prah, 2002; Blickenstaff, 2005). In some cases, women who embark on HE study have to combine all these competing demands with their academic work, and this

puts a strain on their student life (Wilson, 1997; Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Reay, 2003).

A number of studies on mature women students' experiences in HE note some similarities with respect to stories of survival and struggle as they combine HE with domestic responsibilities and jobs (Edwards, 1993; Baxter & Britton, 2001; Reay, 2003; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). In these juggling roles, fragmentation or compartmentalisation of the self occurs (Edwards, 1993; Baxter & Britton, 2001), which results in considerable stress on family commitments and relationships. In some cases, the women experience feelings of guilt which also leads to the erosion of self-esteem and confidence in the realisation that they are unable to devote the same amounts of time previously given to the role of wife or mother (Wilson, 1997; Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Reay, 2003).

Baxter and Britton (2001) found that mature women's HE participation posed a threat to relationships within their families, mainly as a result of the gendered division of labour. Between male and female mature students, Edwards (1993) and Baxter and Britton (2001) report that the juggling of demands from both family and HE impacted on female students much more strongly than males. Although some women in Baxter and Britton's (2001) study reported the support they received from their families and/or spouses, some revealed that there were also some subtle and sometimes overt changes in their spouses' relationship, with some marriages breaking down. For some, support from partners was defined as not opposing their decision to enter HE rather than facilitating their time as students. In this case, it was the women who had to devise strategies for managing and juggling their different responsibilities, and ensure that their new role/identity as students did not infringe too much on established relationships within the family.

According to Reay (2003), devising strategies for managing and juggling different roles involved sacrificing social life (that is, time for leisure, taking care of oneself and for going out), financial security and family relationships. Sometimes, it also

involved abandoning term-time jobs, reducing the working hours or eventually losing the investment in HE due to non-completion. In these circumstances, Baxter and Britton (2001) and Reay (2003) reveal that the risks of education are higher for working-class students, whatever their gender than for middle class students. Similarly, working-class women who obtain support from their partners and families report about success in HE as a result, whereas in other cases, with little or no support from family and partners, all these chores become some women's singular responsibility.

Conclusion

Most of the studies discussed in this section present the experiences of mature women through the binaries of male/female or rich/poor. These studies show that factors including socio-economic status and cultural disposition construct mature women students' HE experiences either negatively or positively. Most importantly, these studies suggest that these factors are inter-related (Edwards, 1993; Reay, 2003; Baxter and Britton, 2001), such that one's SES (advantaged or not) has a role to play in one's living arrangements (family support and delegation of chores), which also influence the kind of experience with HE.

The studies that are interested in the differences between mature students as a group and other (traditional) students, or between men and women mature students in terms of their experiences in HE (Edwards, 1993; Wilson, 1997; Baxter and Britton, 2001; Tett, 2000), tend to homogenise the groups under study. The assumption is that all women (or men) are affected equally by academic and non-academic factors in HE, and might require similar treatment in HE.

Lastly, in the studies that make use of quantitative data (Baxter & Britton, 2001, for example), peculiar details and experiences of the participants tend to be masked. It is those that use interviews that allow different experiences to be heard. However, the individual interviews mostly reveal the students' experiences in HE with very little or no information about factors in their lives which might offer some explanation for

their present lives. In view of this gap, this present study targets women only, and seeks to discover their individual identities through the life history narrative method and how that influence their individual experiences in HE. Through this method, it is expected that the factors that might have been instrumental in the formation of their identities would help explain why they experience HE the way they do. On this basis, this study was conducted on the framework that is described in the next section.

3.4 The Conceptual Framework of the Study

In view of the absence of research studies on this subject in the Ghanaian context, I draw on some of the findings from other contexts, particularly, on the works of Edwards (1993), Leathwood and O'Connell (2003), Reay (2003) and Moreau and Leathwood (2006). The dominant discourses in these studies point to the fact that mature women students (especially, those with families) have to combine academic work in HE with family and domestic commitments (Edwards, 1993). In the process, they feel pressurized to achieve success in both domains, since they perceive their participation in HE as an individual project (Edwards, 1993; Reay, 2003). As shall be seen shortly in the discussion below, the studies under discussion show that to navigate their way through HE, women students adopt different strategies, change their approaches and renegotiate the balance as the demands of their studies and domestic lives change (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

According to Leathwood and O'Connell (2003), some women students are 'strugglers' in HE mainly because of their commitment to their families and the demands of HE study. Again, they assert that irrespective of their socio-economic status, some women students feel a lack of time to meet all the demands of education and family. Moreover, due to socio-economic disadvantage and the need to take term time jobs, some lack quality student experience such as independence, leisure and academic work, including the time to engage fully in academic life, and for caring for the self (Reay, 2003; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006).

Edwards' (1993) study of women students' HE experiences was based on cultural factors. She conceptualises education and the family as public and private spheres, which she describes as 'greedy institutions' (p. 63). She relates the public sphere to the world of paid work, politics, formal education, culture and the general exercise of power and authority, to which men appear to be naturally suited. On the other hand, the private sphere being the domestic domain and involving the world of family, home, children and domestic labour is associated with women. The implication is that if a woman adds education (which is a public domain) to the private sphere, she must maintain her full loyalty to both institutions (if she is a partner with children) by catering for all physical and emotional needs of the family and fulfilling all her academic obligations in addition. In the process, the two domains (education and home) interact, impinge upon each other and generate tension, which affects the woman's life within each. Edwards (1993) maintains that to be wholeheartedly involved in each to the exclusion of the other, a woman student must constantly negotiate her way round the tensions between family and education.

According to Edwards (1993), mental separation and connection are some of the strategies women students' adopt in order to navigate through HE successfully. For some, the mental presence of their family lives (their emotional caring in the form of thinking about them, feeling responsible for domestic tasks and their happiness), was inseparable from their identities as students. In such circumstance, it was their ability to accomplish these in addition to their education that gave them a feeling of accomplishment as women students. For others, it was their ability to 'shut off' (p. 89) their family lives when attending the education institution that enabled them to concentrate on their education.

Reay (2003) and Moreau and Leathwood (2006) add a third institution to Edwards' (1993) education and family, which is employment. Basing her study on socio-economic and material factors, Reay (2003) reveals that socio-economically advantaged students (whom she calls middle-class students) experience HE differently from their disadvantaged counterparts because some of them are

supported financially by their spouses and/or parents, and are able to pay for the services of cleaners, nannies and childminders in their homes. On the other hand, socio-economically disadvantaged women students (whom she refers to as working-class students) tread a hard and painful route through HE partly due to their material circumstances and the compulsion they feel to undertake term time jobs. Particularly for lone mothers, this compounds their challenge of ensuring a balance between their personal care, HE study, meeting domestic responsibilities and earning money.

According to Reay (2003), in order to meet the demands of family, education and employment, women students devise strategies such as sacrificing social life, financial security and family relationships. Sometimes, it also involves abandoning term-time jobs and reducing working hours.

Moreau and Leathwood's (2006) exploration of non-traditional students' (including women students) accounts of combining work and study during term-time, and the various strategies they employ in their attempts to balance the two, is framed within the neo-liberal discourse. They argue that the individual is constrained by material as well as social and cultural factors. This, according to them, is in contrast to neo-liberal discourses of the individual as an entirely free and autonomous agent, who can exercise power in making 'rational' choices and adopting strategies that can enable him or her to succeed in HE. Moreau and Leathwood (2006) suggest that the kind of strategies and choices individuals make are thus determined by certain factors including their social class. For example, in their study, they find that the students who had to take term time jobs due to their disadvantaged socio-economic standing were more likely to feel that their studies were 'always' or 'usually a struggle', compared to non-working students. Thus, depending on work and study requirements, some women students with limited financial support from parents, who see no other way of dealing with the demands of work and study, choose to limit or forfeit social activities.

In the Ghanaian context, some studies that have been conducted on females' education also explain how females experience education, based on cultural and socio-economic reasons. For example, Stephens' (2000) study on girls' basic schooling in Ghana is based on cultural factors, a derivative of the concept of culture. He defines culture as the descriptive and the normative of what people think and do, and the values and ideas attached to them. Stephens (2000) discovers that in the Ghanaian context, there are beliefs regarding females' socio-cultural behaviour which translate into certain assigned roles in the home and community that sometimes affect girls' participation in schooling. One of these roles, according to Stephens, relates to domesticity.

In both the rural and urban Ghanaian communities where he conducted his study, Stephens (2000) found that the girls in his study were socialized to do most of the domestic chores, in addition to their schooling. According to him, those who were unable to combine and balance the two were often considered academically 'weak' and 'unacademic' (Stephens, 2000, p. 40) and were at risk of eventually dropping out of school. Moreover, Stephens (2000) reveals that in Ghana, disadvantaged socio-economic status compels some girls to engage in economic activities, which serve to impede their retention in school.

Additionally, Dunne and Leach (2005) find that in the context of both rural and urban schools in Ghana, the culture of gender-appropriate behaviour is enacted through teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relationships. In such circumstances, they reveal that teachers hold greater expectations for boys than girls and treat them differently in class. Consequently, the girls in Dunne and Leach's study were portrayed to be overshadowed by the boys' domination of the physical and verbal space in class, thus making them docile and unassertive.

The only Ghanaian study on women students' schooling that is available to this study is Kwapong's (2007) study on women's perception of the distance education programme on which they were enrolled. Kwapong uses quantitative information

from men and women to advocate the improvement of the distance education model to increase women's access to tertiary education. She argues that due to Ghanaian women's domestic roles as homemakers and child minders, most of them, being married (70%), encountered difficulties in combining house management with studies. The situation, according to her, affected the females' academic work since they lacked the time for personal study and for participating in group studies. She also points out that they could not contribute to class discussion.

Similar to the discourses of the studies discussed earlier in this section (Edwards, 1993; Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Reay, 2003 and Moreau and Leathwood, 2006), the three studies on females' education in Ghana also point to the fact that cultural practices and socio-economic factors are important in the formation of females' schooling identities, and their successful participation and completion. In the Ghanaian studies however, there are no indications of the personal choices and strategies women students adopt to navigate their way through HE, given their domestic roles.

This study seeks to describe how Ghanaian women students experience HE by adopting the cultural and socio-economic frames as used by Edwards (1993) and Reay (2003) in the European context and by Stephens (2000) in the Ghanaian situation. I also employ Moreau and Leathwood's (2006) use of the individual's exercise of autonomy, which I interpret as one's use of power and agency in choosing strategies that would enable her navigate through HE successfully. This is based on my belief that the women who embark on HE study, knowing that they are solely responsible for managing the home and children as well, would have strategies for combining domestic work with academic work in HE. This would also depend on their socio-economic status. Poverty and wealth determine the kind of opportunities one will have for participating in education to the highest level (Morley and Lugg, 2009), and one's ability to pay for a decent accommodation on campus, live at home or pay for childcare services. In this regard, I presume that Ghanaian women students would experience HE differently and adopt different

strategies to succeed in their academic work, based on their different marital status, socio-economic situation and family arrangements.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature on mature women students' lives in HE and some of the concepts that are related to this. With regard to the concept of age and HE participation, old age seems to be portrayed as related to academic weakness and knowledge deficit, and therefore the assumption that mature students may not do well in HE. Some of the literature portrays mature women students as a distinct social category with particular shared characteristics, giving a wrong impression that they have similar HE experiences (for example Edwards, 1993; Wilson, 1997; Baxter and Britton, 2001). Others try to show the differences among them in terms of their biographies, socio-economic backgrounds and other factors that might contribute to the construction of their different identities (Tett, 2000; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002; Reay, 2003).

With regard to the use of research methods, it has been noted that some of the researches that are available to this study have made use of quantitative data (Baxter & Britton, 2001) whose aggregated information homogenises the participants. Those which have addressed the qualitative experiences of mature women students have employed focus group and individual interviews (Macdonald & Stratta, 2001; Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Reay, 2003). So far, this study has not come across any studies on mature women students' experiences of HE in Ghana, neither is there any such study in the Ghanaian context that employs the life history narrative. I therefore recognise that the literature provides space for the use of the life history narrative to better understand the experiences of mature women students in HE. The next chapter discusses my methodological orientation for this study, including how I made use of the life history narrative method in this study.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGICAL, PRACTICAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses my methodological frame. The methodology was chosen in recognition of the fact that in the process of research, it is impossible to talk about research methodology in isolation from theoretical and substantive issues, which according to Dunne, Pryor & Yates (2005), are always in tension, and are inextricably intertwined and related to researcher identity (Dunne et al., 2005). In this chapter, I examine and discuss the methodological choices I made in view of the substantive and theoretical issues, in order to answer the study's questions. Some of the specific issues the chapter examines are the research paradigms and strategies used and the procedures used to gather and analyse data, while bearing in mind contextual, practical and ethical issues and how these were addressed as they emerged from the research process. The methodological implications of the choices I made have also been discussed.

4.2 Research Paradigm and Methods

Research Paradigm

There are debates around which approach is deemed appropriate for researching women's lives, whether the qualitative, quantitative or both. Some researchers laud the idea of employing quantitative methods to researching issues concerning women in order to quantify and bring to light the scale of gender issues such as sexual abuse and domestic violence, which small scale studies cannot show (Kelly et al., 1994). In this connection, Letherby (2003) also argues that multivariate statistical analyses of large data sets can provide the most truly contextual analyses of people's experience because they allow the incorporation of a large number of variables, permitting the simultaneous testing of elaborate and complex theoretical models. She thus counters the argument that quantitative methods may never provide the kind of richly textured feeling for the data that qualitative methods produce (Letherby, 2003).

Others see quantitative research as incompatible with research on women because (a) it suppresses the voices of women mostly by submerging them in a torrent of facts; (b) when women are the focus of the research, the criteria of valid knowledge turns them into objects of study and thus are subjected to exploitation, since knowledge and experience are extracted from them and (c) the emphasis on controlling variables exploits women since the idea of control is viewed as a masculine approach (Bryman, 2004).

Bryman (2004, p. 288) believes that qualitative methods allow women's voices to be heard and reduce exploitation through giving and receiving in the course of fieldwork, since women are not to be treated as objects to be controlled by the researcher's technical procedures. Moreover, studies of the experiences of mature students have found qualitative methods to be more effective for understanding their peculiar circumstances and learning needs (Simonite, 1997). The use of interviews, particularly the unstructured, in-depth face-to-face interviews, are considered to be more appropriate than the structured interviews for realising many of the goals of feminist studies. This is because the structured interview has certain features in common with the quantitative methods described above in terms of it being a one-way process whereby the interviewer extracts information or views from the interviewee, whilst interviewers do not offer their views in return.

The use of qualitative methods in the study of women's lives is not without criticism. It is thought to be potentially exploitative when used in a participatory way and it is believed to possess the tendency to bring into the limelight very private aspects of the lives of vulnerable people including women, which otherwise would not have been shared (Finch, 1987). In the face of these contentions, the question remains as to how women's lived lives should be studied. I tend to agree with Letherby (2003) that 'it is not the use of a particular method or methods which characterises a researcher or a project as feminist, but the way in which the methods are used' (p. 81), and ensuring that the chosen method will answer the study's questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2005), while focusing on the purpose of

the study. This is suggestive of an open-minded approach, in recognition of the view that in the search for social reality, especially with respect to the meanings individuals attach to their own lives, there are multiple truths to be obtained for which reason the researcher ought to be open to transformation through the qualitative research process (Lincoln and Guba, 2003).

With the nature of my research questions and the data I needed to illuminate them, I found the qualitative approach to be the most relevant philosophical choice, since the social reality under investigation is subjective and resides with the individual participants within the study. In spite of the criticism that the approach is too subjective, difficult to replicate and generalise, I also found that it enables a greater amount of flexibility in research design and data collection (Creswell, 2003). Particularly in this study, flexibility was achieved in the design of the life history narrative, which is described in the sections that follow.

Research Methods

The interpretivist stance normally adopts a predominantly qualitative approach to researching the social world. By this approach, the researcher is also involved with the subjects through the use of such techniques as interviews or narratives, participant observation and personal constructs (Creswell, 2003). These methods of gathering data are perceived to be more natural (McNeill and Chapman, 2005) because they allow those that are studied to speak for themselves and offer explanation and understanding of what is unique and particular to the individual rather than what is general and universal (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, in Berry, 1998).

Of the qualitative methods outlined above, interviews and narratives lend themselves to this study of individual women's lives. Patton's (1990) view is that we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe, such as feelings, thoughts and intentions; behaviours that took place at some

previous point in time, situations that preclude the presence of the observer and how people have organised the world, and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. For him, we have to ask people questions about those things and through that, enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 1990:196).

I saw that to understand the interpretations individual women students give to their experiences of HE lives in the socio-economic and socio-cultural context of the Ghanaian society, it was important to know how they have lived their lives in these contexts. This, I thought, would help me to understand how their lived experiences facilitate or impede their present lives as HE students. These views demonstrate the appropriateness of the life history narrative method for this kind of inquiry.

4.3 Research Design

This study was designed in such a way as to enable the life histories of the participants to be heard, from which their identities and differences were inferred. Usually, life history narratives produce large volumes of data sets, most of which may not be relevant to the study's intentions. With this in mind, and given the scope of this study, I adopted an interviewing approach that would provide the most relevant information for this study and chose to study few (eight) cases of individual mature women students in one public university in Ghana. This section discusses the life history narrative approach adopted, the study site and sampling procedures.

Narrative Interviews

Some researchers suggest that identity construction is synonymous with personal narrative construction (Sarup, 1996; Lawler, 2002), and that identity is produced through narrative. For Lawler, identity is not a pre-given entity and that through narrative, we get to know how the person comes to be what he or she is. It is therefore suggested that since identity is bound up with the social world, (meaning that it is constructed in historical, socio-economic and cultural contexts), its study must be localised in space/place and time (Sarup, 1996). Such a study, it is suggested, should dwell on the retrospective account or narrative of life in the given

contexts because identity has to do with who one thinks one is, what one believes and what one does, which is not separate from what has happened to the individual (Sarup, 1996). In order to understand someone's identity, Sarup (1996) suggests that the narrative interview method should be adopted since we construct our identity at the same time as we tell our life-story.

Researchers define narratives according to their different experiences and contexts (Gill, 2005), in terms of what they believe narrative research allows the researcher to do (Lieblich et al., 1998) and the nature and amount of data it can produce (Flick, 2002). Lieblich et al. (1998) refer to a narrative as any study which uses or analyses narrative data normally collected in the form of a story (a life story/history through interviews or literary work, field notes written up as narrative, etc.) and Flick (2002) describes it as an approach which 'allows the researcher to approach the interviewee's experiential world in a more comprehensive way' (p. 96). Shacklock and Thorp (2006) summarise these definitions by calling it an inquiry which is 'concerned with the production, interpretation and representation of storied accounts of lived experience' (p. 156).

The descriptions above are based on the belief that human beings are storytelling creatures who lead storied lives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990), and that narratives are 'social products produced by people within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations', who use the stories to interpret the world (Lawler, 2002, p. 242). Biographical and autobiographical accounts, life stories and life histories fall within the broad spectrum of narratives, and the life history method particularly is known to help obtain 'evidence to show how individuals negotiate their identities' (Goodson and Sikes, 2008, p. 2), which is what this study sought to investigate.

Life History Narrative

Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 539) define life history as any retrospective account of the individual's life in whole or part, be it written or in oral form that has been cited

or prompted by another person, whilst Goodson and Sikes (2008) look at it as a way of expressing and celebrating hidden silenced lives. Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) point out that the analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story by the researcher turns a life story into a life history. From another perspective, Shacklock and Thorp (2006) bring into focus the construction of narratives ‘which recognise and reflect multiplicity in assemblage of life fragments that do not fit together in neat, predictable ways’ (p. 158); because though the events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, its significance is what is important to us and not necessarily its linearity and chronology.

The implication then is that the life story may be presented chronologically and yet, may not necessarily be analysed in terms of the social, historical, political and economic contexts. In this way, it is defined as a personal account in the teller’s own words, often selective, based on the events the teller remembers and that are amenable to being told, or an ordered record of personal truth, containing both fact and fiction (Shacklock & Thorp, 2006).

Hatch and Wisniewski’s (1995) definition of the life history narrative as an analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story (by the researcher) brings to the fore the role of the researcher in the production and analysis of the life history. The researcher is supposed to use a generative narrative question to stimulate the production of a narrative, whilst postponing his/her concrete or structuring interventions in the course of the interview till the interviewee has finished the narration (Flick, 2002). Volumes of textual material in transcripts are produced which according to Drake (2006), the researcher engages with, using words to locate the stories in a political, social or economic setting’ (p. 83). In a similar vein, it is the intention of this study to use the life stories of mature women students to locate and understand their socio-economic and socio-cultural settings in Ghana in which women’s lives take on particular meanings, and with that interpret their effects on their later lives, especially in HE.

Doing Life History Differently

Flick (2002) notes that if an interview aims primarily at interviewees' narratives, the data should be collected in a comprehensive and structured whole; in the form of narrative of life histories or concrete situations in which certain experiences have been had. A variation of the narrative interview is Flick's (2002) episodic-narrative method. This is a narrative interview approach whose central element is the periodic invitation to the interviewee to present narratives of situations. The main difference between this and the narrative interview is as follows. In the narrative interview, a single overall narrative is required, and the interviewer is not expected to direct the narration since it is believed that this might shape the structure of the interview, thus producing the interviewer's structure instead of the interviewee's (Bar-On et al., 1994). For that matter, a 'generative narrative question' (Flick, 2002, p. 97) which refers to the topic under investigation is asked first with the aim of stimulating the interviewee's main narrative.

With the episodic-narrative however, the interviewer delimits the narrative to only meaningful experiences and concrete situations through the use of purposive generative narrative questions which appear to be a dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee (Flick, 2002; Shacklock and Thorp, 2006). In this approach, an interview guide is prepared to orient the interviewer to the topical domains which are based on the research questions, and for which the narrative is required. The rigid demarcation of inquirer-inquiree role is however blurred in the process, with the end product being a joint construction between the two, through their dialogic interaction. The data thus produced appears more structured than that of the narrative interview. In this way, the production of volumes of irrelevant data would be avoided with only relevant, structured, textual material on the interviewee's life (linked to the research questions) produced.

Some of the challenges associated with the conduct of the life history interview necessitated my adoption of the episodic-narrative method in this study. It is known that 'not every interviewee is capable of giving narrative presentations of his or her

life' uninterrupted, and that some interviewees are shy, uncommunicative and excessively reserved both in everyday life and in the interviews (Flick, 2002, p. 101). It is also known that stories are told within the context of communities' narrative practice (Shacklock and Thorp, 2006), and as such the narrative interview can either produce voluminous amounts of unstructured textual material in terms of topical areas which makes its analysis and interpretation problematic or very little information, if the researcher does not give direction or structure. I envisaged that with the episodic-narrative method, I could delimit the narrative to only meaningful experiences and concrete situations through dialogue with the participants, and the use of purposive generative narrative questions (Flick, 2002; Shacklock and Thorp, 2006).

It must, however, be noted that whilst episodes constitute the object of the episodic-narrative, its use in this study was not primarily for that purpose, though the interview sought relevant concrete situations when needed. Rather, the approach was adopted mainly for the sake of eliciting relevant life experiences through the use of key questions concerning the situations to be recounted instead of the entire narrative of the life history. This was in view of the word limit of this thesis (40, 000 words), and subsequently, the limitation on the amount of data I needed to meet this word limit. Moreover, the relative convenience in the interviewer's option to intervene in the course of the interview to direct it was an added advantage which I envisaged could help me to stay within the boundary of the particular life experiences of the interviewees. The next section describes how the participants were recruited for the life history interviews.

Population and Sample

This study was carried out in one public university in southern Ghana. That institution was chosen because it is one of the universities with WP strategies that provide a number of access routes, including the mature students' programme. The accessible population consisted of all the mature undergraduate women at that

university, from which a sample of eight women was selected for the study. The sampling was done in accordance with Merriam's (1998) suggestion that in qualitative research, it should be non-random, purposeful and small.

I also considered it fitting that the sample should be intentional (Patton, 2002) and determined by the objective of the study. Again, because the subject under investigation requires the inclusion of different socio-economic and cultural groups, I also ensured that the background of the group was as diverse as possible (Ressel et al, 2002). Consequently, criteria were developed for the selection of participants, to include their biographical data such as age, differing socio-economic backgrounds and year of entry into the programme of study in HE. Parents' occupation was used to define participants' socio-economic backgrounds. The participants were selected from two departments in the Faculties of Education and Social Sciences (Basic Education and Sociology Departments respectively) where mature students are known to be clustered, and where I obtained their statistics. Having carefully sampled the right participants, I sought their consent and willingness to participate in the study.

There were 65 mature female students (50 in Basic Education: 7 in year 1 and 43 in year 4 and 15 in Sociology: 9 in year 1 and 6 in year 4). A sample of 8 women above age 25 at the year of entry was selected for the study through the administration of a short open-ended questionnaire of about 12 items that sought information about the criteria specified above.

4.4 Data Collection

The process for collecting data for this study involved two approaches: a preliminary survey which helped to identify and select the right category of participants for the study, and life history interviews. This section describes how the data gathering exercise was conducted. It includes a description of the research tools and how they were used, interwoven with a discussion of the practical and ethical issues that emerged from the exercise.

The Preliminary Survey

In the preliminary survey, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to all the first and final year mature women students of the two departments chosen for the study. The questionnaire was made up of twelve items which sought information about the following: participants' biographical data such as their ages, socio-economic backgrounds which were determined through their parents' occupation, the schools they attended and where they are located, where they grew up (rural or urban) and year of entry into the programme of study in HE. One item also asked about their willingness or otherwise to participate in the study and their index numbers, to enable easy identification of those who were suitable and willing.

Before conducting the preliminary survey, entry and access to the participants was negotiated by consulting the heads of the two departments used for this study. Following that, a research assistant was employed to administer the questionnaires to all the 65 first and final year mature female students in the Basic Education and Sociology Departments. This decision was informed by my previous experience during a pilot study in phase 1 of the International Professional Doctorate programme where I adopted a similar method to personally recruit student-participants for the study. I found that my position as a lecturer and presence as a researcher did not allow them any other option than compliance. Consequently, since none of them opted out, the interview appeared to have been granted more out of respect for my position and power as a lecturer, than as a voluntary gesture.

With this modified approach, all the 65 students answered the questionnaire, and with the use of a research assistant, I found it was easy for them to freely indicate their willingness or otherwise to participate in the study. Consequently, 8 students from the Basic Education Department and 3 from Sociology indicated their unwillingness to participate in the study. Of the number that remained, I adopted Patton's (2002) purposeful sampling technique to select a mix of eight participants from socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, rural/urban areas and a range of mature ages to ensure diversity in the sample (see table 4.1

below). It must be noted that in order to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provided, pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis.

Table 4.1: Profile of Participants

Name	Age	Prog./Year	Location (rural/urban)	Socio-economic Status	
				Father's job	Mother's job
1. Maimuna	34	Ed. Yr 1	urban	retired teacher	ward assistant
2. Fafa	43	Ed. Yr 1	urban	agriculturalist	seamstress
3. Maame	35	Ed. Yr 4	rural	farmer	farmer
4. Koutuma	42	Ed. Yr 4	rural	farmer	farmer
5. Krambaa	46	Soc. Yr 1	urban	prison officer	trader
6. Adjoa Kom	42	Soc. Yr 1	rural	post master	trader
7. Naana	30	Soc. Yr 4	urban	lecturer	petty trader
8. Akua	40	Soc. Yr 4	rural	miner	seamstress

Those who were selected for the study were then contacted by administrative assistants in the two departments for their telephone numbers and linked up to me. The next section describes the processes I adopted prior to the conduct of the interviews with the participants I sampled.

Planning the Interview

This study adopted the episodic-narrative method in which the interviewer delimits the narrative to only the relevant, meaningful experiences and concrete situations of participants through what Flick (2002) calls purposive generative narrative questions or key questions concerning the situations. Based on that, I developed six key areas of participants' lives which I saw to be relevant to this study. These are their location (rural or urban), early childhood and schooling experiences, family background and their attitude towards education, participants' personal lives, their HE experiences and finally the influences on their HE participation.

For each of these, I generated questions that would guide me to seek the kind of information to answer the study's research questions.

In March 2009, agreement was reached with my supervisor on the interview guide, which I piloted at the end of March with two mature women students who had expressed interest in the study but had not been sampled. Feedback from the piloting revealed that there was the need to use certain key words which would enable participants to understand exactly what some of my questions meant. For example, it was necessary to use *basic, secondary or university education* to describe educational background and *rich, average or poor* to describe socio-economic status. It was also important to simplify and shorten some long and loaded questions such as *how has your job influenced your **pursuit** and **experiences** of HE?* and expand some questions (asking about *what has impacted their pursuit of HE* instead of only asking about *who*).

Most importantly, I realised that certain responses which needed to be probed had not been done. With socio-economic background for example, when a parent was self-employed (trading, baking, sewing, for example), it was important to know about certain details of the job such as nature of the business and its size, clientele and patronage. This was needed to be able to determine on which side of the socio-economic divide they may be located, and whether participants had to support the business, since this could help to understand the kind of support that could possibly be given to females/males' education in the family. It was also important to probe and understand participants' views about their socio-economic background, like their indicators of wealth and poverty.

Before proceeding with the interviews, certain ethical dilemmas were addressed, namely ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2003; Shacklock and Thorp, 2006). Although the participants had expressed their willingness to participate in the study, formal consent was sought through written letters, which explained the purpose and procedure for the study, assurance of

confidentiality and anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. I made the participants aware of the foreign (rather than local) audience of their stories since the dissertation was to be submitted to a foreign university, except in the event where an article was published from it for the local audience.

I then made phone calls to those who had expressed willingness to participate in the study to arrange an initial meeting with them. It was also intended to establish familiarity, trust and rapport and to make interview appointments with them. The purpose and procedure of the interview was also explained to them during this first meeting so they knew what to expect.

Bell (2006) suggests that no matter how inconvenient the participants' choice of time for the interviews may be for the researcher, the researcher must fit in with their plan. In view of this, during the familiarity meetings which were done within three weeks in April 2009, I scheduled interview dates, times and venues to suit the convenience of the participants, especially as they had separate lecture times, group-studies and quiz schedules. Also, at this initial meeting, I reassured them of confidentiality and anonymity, thereby making them suggest suitable and neutral venues for the interviews to avoid interruptions and distractions.

Permission was also sought for the interviews to be audio recorded. Qualitative studies such as this require a critical and in-depth analysis and reflection of detailed and accurate accounts. I therefore envisaged that recording the interviews could facilitate the flow of the narration, help me to get an accurate and full record of the interview and make it possible for me to play back and improve on the conduct of subsequent interviews (Merriam, 1998). Some agreed outright to the audio recording whilst others asked questions about its implications. This was in contrast to earlier research in phase 1 where mature students, who were interviewed about their route to HE, turned down my request to audio record the interviews because the discussion would implicate lecturers on the programme. In the absence of the audio recording in that study, they were more at ease to disclose information which they

admitted they would not have divulged under different circumstances. Having explained the importance of the recording to the research, and after guaranteeing that they would be allowed to verify/validate the transcripts, they all agreed to the recording.

The interviews were scheduled for four weeks in May 2009 with a plan to conduct and transcribe two interviews in a week. When asked for their choice of a venue for the life history interviews, all the participants hinted that my office was ideal since it was serene and comfortable, and was also a neutral site since it was located far away from their departments. I had to ensure that there was minimal intrusion or interruption to assure confidentiality. I therefore stuck an 'Engaged' notice on my door throughout the periods of the interviews.

The Interview Process

Ensuring a non-hierarchical relationship was one of the ethical considerations that I addressed during the interviews. First of all, I needed to make the participants comfortable. I did this by cooling the room, playing relaxing music and offering refreshments on their arrival. Secondly, I had to guard against any impression of superiority and centralisation of power that my personality, appearance and composure or the seating arrangement with the participants would create (Ressel et al, 2002). I therefore arranged two similar seats (other than my high, glamorous chair) that would enable a face-to-face interaction and good eye contact between us.

The interview then began with broad questions that allowed me the freedom to establish a conversational style around the predetermined themes (Patton, 2002). I first asked about how each participant felt about being a university student. Based on the responses, probing questions were asked to make them explain why they felt that way. This led to further questions about where and how their lives began, their family members' educational and socio-economic backgrounds and how these positively or negatively influenced their pursuit of HE. Apart from the initial question, almost all the other questions attracted different responses and unique

experiences from the participants as their SES and cultural backgrounds were also different.

There was also the issue of my insider role, first as a lecturer to a group of mature women students, which meant I was knowledgeable about the issues concerning mature women-students' lives and secondly, as a researcher adopting a participatory interviewing model. Being mindful of this, it became important for me to ensure a relationship devoid of exploitative participation (Shacklock and Thorp, 2006). This was ensured through the initial formal consent in writing in which the participants also confirmed their voluntary participation in the interview, and their acceptance to read through the transcripts to check and update them when they were completed. Most importantly, I realised that I needed to be conscious of the possible effects my insider role and position could have on the interview process. It has been hinted earlier that being a lecturer in the same institution as my participants had the potential to create a hierarchical relationship, as well as place a limitation on the amount of information the participants could freely provide on their HE experiences. These I safeguarded by constantly ensuring rapport, participants' ease of communication, trust and a high degree of reciprocity (Finch, 1987).

Being guided by this kind of relationship, it did not come as a surprise when two of the participants asked about my own experiences as a doctoral student, mother, worker and wife, and how I managed these commitments. One also sought my opinion on whether I thought she could also embark on a doctoral study, given her similar roles. This was the occasion that required that I shared my own experiences as well as offer advice as a way of ensuring reciprocity of information sharing.

Obtaining too much or too little from Interviews

I agree with Merriam (1998) that the amount of information one can obtain in a life history interview depends on a number of factors, including the personality of the interviewee, the researcher's method and skills as well as narrative culture of the community. The duration of each interview differed for each participant depending

on the atmosphere, frankness and openness of the individuals. Whereas some interviewees were open, volunteered information freely and stayed beyond two hours in the interview (Akua and Fafa), others (like Maame) were nervous, very brief and did not volunteer more than what the question demanded. I tend to attribute these to the personality of the interviewees and their narrative culture rather than to my method and skills since I employed the same interviewing skills with all of them.

At the onset, Akua, for example, admitted that she was nervous, probably because of her job as a police detective and the fact that the interview was being recorded. I therefore had to spend about 30 minutes to establish conversation that would make her feel at ease and oblivious to the recording. Fatima, whose entire life was filled with difficult circumstances, appeared happy to have had someone to talk to about all those difficult moments of her life and perhaps to be appreciated for struggling to come that far. Adjoa Kom on the other hand, asked for the recording to be switched off at certain points of the interview, and when the interview was over and the recording off, stayed on and established a long conversation with me, telling me about very private aspects of her life and seeking my opinion on a number of sensitive and confidential issues. Maame, who said no more than was requested, did not feel nervous but exhibited an air of importance and appeared to be in a hurry to go through it quickly. In the course of the interview, she paused a few times to receive phone calls without apology.

Each completed interview was transcribed before the next one was conducted, and participants were called on phone for any additional information or to fill missing gaps. They were also asked to validate the data, though only one participant had the time, and requested that some private aspects of her life be deleted because she felt it had the potential to reveal her identity, should it be published even with the use of the pseudonyms. The section that follows describes how the data was managed and analysed.

4.5 Data Analysis

The technique I adopted to transcribe each completed interview before the next one was informed by Merriam's (1998) advocacy for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data rather than analysing only after all the data has been obtained. The idea is that once the first interview has been conducted, emerging insights, hunches and tentative hypotheses would direct the next phase of data collection, which might lead to the refinement or reformulation of the research questions. I found this approach to be really useful because while transcribing the very first interview, I realised that there were some key areas of the participant's life that needed further explanation and probing, which I had failed to do. For this reason, I had to call the interviewee on phone to fill in that missing information since she could not grant another interview time. The conduct of subsequent interviews was therefore informed by my experiences of the first, which resulted in a fuller version of the second interview. Moreover, by the end of the third interview transcript, some common themes were beginning to emerge, which helped me to open up further probing of such commonalities in the other interviews.

My initial reading of other researchers' analysis of qualitative data had revealed that personal engagement and immersion with qualitative data yields better understanding of the data than the use of computer-assisted programmes. Humphreys (2005) and Gill (2005) believe that the computer-assisted programmes sometimes tend to distance the researcher from the transcripts, thereby objectifying the research participants. Therefore in my study, I personally transcribed all the interviews, printed them out and subjected them to thorough reading and re-reading and then applied my intuition to its systematic analysis. This was done by assigning codes to common and isolated ideas or phrases which were suggestive of common themes.

The presentation of the analysis began with a narrative description of some individual stories. I followed this with a thematic analysis, comparison of the cases according to the thematic areas as well as the isolated ones and then the

identification and grouping of participants according to the common or isolated themes (Creswell, 2003). This process is what Merriam (1998) refers to as within-case and cross-case analysis which helps to look for processes and outcomes which occur across the individual cases, and which eventually enables the building of abstractions across the cases.

The last segment of the analysis was the interpretation of the findings. For me, the interpretation of the research texts was continual (Dunne et al., 2005), in the sense that as I transcribed each interview, I began to have a feel of the data and emerging themes. As I noted down how my initial understandings of the subject was shifting and changing, I was involved in interpretation, albeit unconsciously.

Qualitative data production, analysis and interpretation are sometimes viewed as lacking rigour, the samples usually being too small to be representative and the findings being subject to the researcher's bias. The potential for bias also lies in the fact that the 'researcher brings a construction of reality to the research situation which interacts with other people's constructions or interpretation of the phenomenon being studied' (Merriam, 1998, p. 22-23). Consequently, qualitative researchers (myself included) are impelled to address the standards of quality and truthfulness of their research findings in their work.

Denzin and Lincoln's (1998, p.g 330-1) interpretation of some of the standards of quality are credibility, dependability and confirmability. I adopted the meaning of credibility as referring to the relationship between the participants' actual view points and what have been portrayed by the researcher and thus tried to involve the participants in the construction of their biographies and themed findings. This I did by adopting Cobbold's (2006) approach with his Ghanaian participants, in which he summarised his qualitative interviews at the end of each interview and allowed his participants to ascertain whether the summary accurately reflected their position.

If a study's findings are credible then its conclusions would be supported and confirmed by the data (confirmability) and the findings replicated should the study be conducted with the same participants in the same context (dependability). I envisaged that the processes I employed in arriving at the data production, analysis and interpretation as outlined in this chapter would address these standards. Since identity is not fixed but goes through constant shifts and transformations, replicating life history interviews with the same participants in the same context may portray these shifting dynamics.

4.6 Reflection

In this section, I reflect on the approach I employed in this study in relation to my theoretical, methodological and practical positions which were influenced to a large extent by my identity and position and my ethical orientation towards the research. The discussion also includes how the ethical and practical rules I employed shifted and changed and how I established legitimacy of the findings in the face of my ability or inability to stick to the rules (Dunne et al., 2005).

My Identity and Position

Dunne et al. (2005) point out that the researcher's identity and stance is central to research knowledge production and its representation in text. Whilst reflecting on the transformation I have experienced through this research, it is important to reiterate that I embarked on this research because of what I found to be a parallel between my identity as a mature Ghanaian woman doctoral student and that of the mature undergraduate women whose lives and experiences in HE I was interested in. Being part of the social world that I was investigating (Dunne et al., 2005), and in my multiple identities and varied experiences as a worker, mother, wife and homemaker, I envisaged that in some ways, I shared some common identities (of struggles with juggling roles and academic work) with the participants. I also thought that this accorded me an insider role and the power of knowing about the issues concerning mature women-students' lives. Because of this, I adopted Flick's (2002) episodic-narrative interview approach which allowed me the use of

predetermined themes. At the same time, I entered the research process with an open mind as a way of guarding against any biases my multiple identities might produce; particularly, that of being a woman in a research on women and the effect my insider role would have on the process of investigation and the meanings I attached to the findings.

However, I was to learn from my interaction with the participants that I was really an outsider to some of the cultural values of some of the participants, which made their experiences as women and wives different from mine and *vice versa*. For example, it is common knowledge among Ghanaians that in some parts of northern Ghana, male domination and female subordination is stronger than in other areas of the country. This is because in the north, there is a cultural practice of early marriage which literally forces women into marriage at an early age to older men, for which reason they cannot access secondary or higher education before settling into adult life.

Therefore, the assumption is that for a married northern woman to access HE, she should have experienced a different form of marriage (probably with a southerner). The interaction gave a new twist to this common knowledge, that some women (like Maimuna) defied the tradition of marrying early and went through secondary school and teacher training college, and further rejected marriage to a man she did not know and chose her own (northerner) spouse. It was also interesting to learn that for her (and Koutuma, also a northerner), it was her husband who literally pushed her into HE as a mature woman. In that sense, it appears that they were personally responsible for the transformation in their identities as Ghanaian women from the north.

Another dimension to my 'outsiderness' to Ghanaian women's education was that I had been born and brought up on the coast which is believed to be the cradle of formal education in Ghana. This is where early missionaries had settled and established schools. For me, accessing university education was almost like a norm

and without as much struggle, as I had been to an elite secondary school, and progression to university was rather normal/smooth. These laid bare my own ignorance and limitations of the experiences of some of the women from other geographical locations in Ghana. This discovery exploded my prejudgement and bias of the interpretation I would have rendered to the participants' experiences and developed cautiousness in me towards my claims of knowledge and its interpretation.

Power Relations

Often in qualitative research, the researcher exercises power in his/her social interaction with the researched and in his/her imposition of order on research texts in analysis, interpretation and writing (Dunne et al., 2005). All these are mediated by the ethical orientation of the researcher and the research practice of the community of professionals and/ or academics to which s/he belongs.

My position as a lecturer in the same university where the participants are students predetermined an unequal relationship with the research participants and culturally positioned me with a command for a kind of authority and respect that had the potential to earn me the privilege of accessing the information I needed from my student-participants. Being aware of this, I took into account the issue of social positioning by adopting some interpersonal skills as discussed earlier, in order that the participants would not feel coerced or obligated to let me into the privacy of their lives but be at ease to talk about them (Finch, 1987).

However, Foucault's (1980) image of power as capillary, whereby it is seen as being exercised everywhere and by everybody through every social interaction was to be realised in my interaction with the participants. In the first place, power was exercised through my potential participants' decline to participate in the study. Secondly, those who had consented to participate in the study possessed the power to decide how much detail they wished to disclose, as well as whether to embellish their experiences or not and withhold information on some aspects of their lives.

During the interaction, some did actually object to being audio-recorded while others expressed unwillingness to talk about certain aspects of their lives. Finally, they exercised their power to decide whether to validate the data or not.

More importantly, in the process of interaction, similar to what Gill (2005) experienced in her interaction with her participants, there was a switch in power-relation at the point when Akua asked for my version of my life experiences, and when Naana switched to the position of the interviewer and asked for my opinion on a number of personal issues in her life. It is important to note here that this was contrary to culturally appropriate Ghanaian behaviour where in conversation, a younger person turns to 'quiz' an elderly person on his/her life when s/he (the elderly) had initiated it. Through their exercise of power in the research process, I was made to play by their rule: neither to delve into some aspects of their lives nor audio-record some of it. In the end therefore, I had to call them on phone to confirm some of the summaries I had made of the data which they had not found time to validate.

4.7 Chapter Summary

This thesis makes a case for an exploration of the experiences of mature women students in one Ghanaian public university. It was indicated that few of the studies on mature women students have employed the life history method. In the Ghanaian context, though some seminal studies have been done on this subject, it addresses difference among HE students in relation to language, ethnicity, gender (relationship between men and women) and religion among traditional students (Dei, 2004). So far, no study has addressed the issue of non-traditional students and women in HE in Ghana.

In the light of the identified gaps, this chapter discussed my use of the interpretive research approach and life history narratives with a small sample of eight mature undergraduate women in one Ghanaian public university. The chapter presented my methodological orientation for the study, based on research evidence on the most

appropriate ways of researching women. The chapter also discussed my use of the episodic narrative method as a way of obtaining the most relevant data. The approaches I adopted with a view to avoiding the effects of my researcher position and identity on the research process and the data to be obtained were presented, in addition to the kind of data I obtained and my treatment of that data. The next chapter presents and discusses the analysed data.

CHAPTER 5

SIMILAR AND COMMON IDENTITIES OF MATURE WOMEN STUDENTS

5.1 Introduction

This study set out to explore and describe the HE experiences of mature undergraduate women in HE. The intention was that through a description of their identities and experiences, awareness would be created about their different circumstances and their likely learning needs in HE. The preceding chapters made a case for a study of this nature in the Ghanaian context, reviewed the literature on the subject and conceptualised the study in a fitting framework. The methodological and ethical issues were discussed, from which the life history narrative approach was employed to generate data for the study.

This chapter presents and discusses the themes that emerged from the data. The data were analysed through inductive orientation and presented in the form of themes, as is peculiar with qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). In the process, I was guided by Stake's (2005) notion that case researchers look for what is common and uncommon or particular about the case, and Morley and Lugg's (2009) precaution against the tendency to mask heterogeneity in the process of identifying commonalities among any group.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part titled 'Identity Formation: Common Themes' describes the participants' characteristics and explores factors that appear to be common to all the participants in forming and shaping their identities, and influencing their HE participation. Three themes have been identified as common to all the participants, though occurring in varying degrees. These are (a) socialisation and childhood experiences; (b) previous education and (c) change of location. The second part is titled 'Identity Formation: Differences'. Three themes are discussed here namely (a) socio-cultural background (b) marital status and family life and (c) socio-economic status. These themes have been chosen because they emerged from the data and also because they have been identified as significant

in the literature on females' education in Ghana (Stephens, 2000; Boohene, Kotey and Folker, 2005; Boohene, 2006; Morley and Lugg, 2009). I also find that to understand the way different women experience HE and navigate their way through it, it is important to know about the events that have shaped their lives.

5.2 Characteristics of the Participants

Eight mature undergraduate women participated in this study, 4 each from the Social Science and Basic Education Departments. The youngest in the group was 30 years old and the oldest, 46. Three were within the 30-year group while the majority ranged between 40 and 46. Five were married with children, two were single parents and one was single. The minimum length of break between leaving school and resuming full-time education was 6 years and the maximum was 14 years. The participants were either middle school leavers, secondary or teacher training college graduates. For those in the Social Science Department, two of them were police women; one was a secretary and the other, a teacher. All the participants in the Basic Education Department were teachers.

The participants' fathers had had more education than their mothers, as is highlighted in the literature (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). Four of the participants' fathers had continued their education beyond the middle school: two had master's degrees, one was a secondary school leaver and the other was a trained teacher. Of the remaining four, two had had no education and the other two were middle school leavers. Five of the mothers had had no education; two were middle school leavers and one, a primary school drop-out.

Parental level of education and type of occupation were used as indicators of participants' SES. As has been indicated above, the participants' fathers were more highly educated than their mothers. Therefore, their occupations were used to determine their SES. Two of the fathers who possessed master's degrees worked as lecturer and agricultural extension officer respectively. With only a middle school certificate, one had risen to the rank of a senior staff member in a mining company

through on-the-job training programmes. Three were postmaster, retired teacher and prison officer respectively and two were peasant farmers (see appendix B).

The participants' narratives revealed that three of the job positions (i.e. lecturer, senior officer in a mining company and agricultural officer) were high income-earning. Peasant farming was the only low income-earning job. The others were considered average.

With regard to the history of HE in their families, only two fathers had had university education. Only one participant had brothers who had also had HE. All the spouses of the five participants who were married had had university education. However, all the participants were the first generation of women in their families to come through HE, except Akua whose maternal aunts had had university education (See Appendix B for a summary of the participants' biographies).

5.3 Identity Formation: Common Themes

In this section, I discuss the circumstances and events that resulted in the way the participants were socialised, educated and relocated. Though the participants have different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, they experienced seemingly similar socialisation practices, education and relocation, and these are discussed below.

Socialisation

What is seen to be the norm in the Ghanaian culture of socialisation is that girls, whether younger or older than boys, do all the house chores whilst boys run errands and go to the farm, especially in rural areas. This division of labour socialises children into gender-appropriate roles which they consider normal and perform without question. Narrating the daily chores she had to do before and after school, Adjoa Kom for example said:

we cook, we wash, we scrub, we sell; a lot of things.

Similarly, Naana recounted:

I was cooking, I was washing, I was fetching water, I was doing everything.

This was evident in the stories of all the other participants, and their attitude to them is summarised in Akua's words: *it was normal, everybody is doing it...* In addition to the normal household chores, the participants sold or went to the farm, depending on their location (rural or urban) and household occupation. Those who grew up in the rural areas sold and/or went to the farm whilst those from the urban areas either did the house chores only or sold in addition.

It is important to note that whether they were educated or not, from the north or south of the country, there was no difference among the mothers in their socialization practices. This could be attributed to the fact that in many homes in Ghana, when daughters are ill-prepared domestically, mothers are to blame and therefore, will suffer shame, reproach and guilt for failing to 'train' their daughters well enough to be good homemakers and wives. Therefore, mothers seemed to place more value on inculcating in their daughters the practices which, to them, would make them perform their gender roles appropriately and prepare them for their future lives as homemakers and wives.

From my own experience and upbringing in Ghana, I observe that society shuns women who are unable to take responsibility over the seemingly very simple domestic chores every woman is required to be competent in. Without competence in domestic chores, a woman is not considered a good candidate for marriage. This situation appears to suggest that women do not have a right to living for themselves, but only in relation to their (future) husbands and children (Tett, 2000; Morley and Lugg, 2009). They are socialized or educated to take care of the home, their children and their husbands, not for their own survival.

It is interesting to note that their parents' SES advantage/disadvantage and level of education did not change the process of socialisation in all the stories. For example, Naana whose father was a lecturer and lived in a semi-urban area was made to help

her mother to sell, as it were, to continue the cycle of trading her grandmother handed down to her mother. Even when she relocated to live with her aunt in the regional capital, she was reintroduced to selling as a way of training her to be self-sustaining. Similarly, Akua and Adjoa Kom whose fathers were among the few educated and socio-economically advantaged people in their towns (senior staff in a mining company and post office respectively) and according to them, lived in the best bungalows and were the first to own television sets and fridges, had to help their mothers with sewing, trading and farming. From comparatively poorer families, Koutuma and Maame, who grew up in rural areas in the north, and a southern cocoa-growing forest area also had to sell and farm respectively.

The fact that all the participants saw these roles as normal is an indication that they have internalised them without reflecting on its negative impact on their schooling and learning opportunities. Additionally, the income-generating activities they were exposed to very early in their lives could have diverted their attention from education, if not for other enabling factors (to be discussed shortly) which helped the participants to stay in school beyond the basic level. The implication is that in the absence of those enabling conditions, girls in such circumstances would not progress beyond the basic education level.

The findings in this section articulate with other findings in the literature (Tamboukou and Ball, 2002; Morley et al, 2006; Mannathoko, 2008) that female students' identities are shaped mainly by family and community factors, as well as some school-based factors which are in the section that follows. Whether overtly or otherwise, the participants' early academic lives were framed mainly by their parents' devotion to or rejection of the cultural beliefs and practices of the area, and their perception of the roles girls should play in the home. Their level of education and SES however did not affect their devotion to or rejection of such beliefs and practices.

Previous Schooling Shaping Academic Identity

According to Morley et al. (2006), the social and cultural capital of the extended family (including parents' and/or siblings' education), and strategic interaction with role models, among other factors, play a crucial role in determining women's education at a higher level. In this study, all the eight participants were the first generation of females in their families to access HE, as revealed earlier. It is therefore likely that some other factors may have helped shape the academic identities of the participants rather than the multiplier effect of HE experience in the family (Dyhouse, 2002), a finding which is in consonance with what Mannathoko (2008) demonstrates.

In both high and low-income countries, there is evidence that previous schooling experiences are crucial in the formation of academic identity (Stephens, 2000; Tett, 2000; Mulugeta, 2004; Morley et al., 2009), one of which is the teacher factor. In school, the teacher is believed to be the pivot around which teaching and learning revolves. Therefore children's positive or negative images of schooling are often associated with their teachers' work and personality. Mulugeta (2004) for example found that in rural areas in Ethiopia, female teachers were role models to the children, a finding which resonates with what Stephens (2000) also found in both rural and urban areas in Ghana. In his study, Stephens (2000) pointed out that successful female teachers encouraged female students and facilitated their success in school.

Akua, one of the participants in this study reveals how her teachers affected her schooling positively. At the start of her schooling, she said she was always found in the company of a female teacher co-tenant. She said:

In the primary school, most of my friends were teachers. Instant liking, I don't know but they just took to me like that and most of the places that I went to, I don't know whether it was because I was doing well.

According to her, she was placed between first and seventh in examinations. She suggested that the teachers were fond of her because she was academically good and

perhaps because she was good-looking, as I observed. From my own experiences of schooling and as a practitioner, I observe that teachers are fond of children who are either good-looking, from rich backgrounds and/or perform well academically. This was evident in some of the stories in this study.

In all their narratives, only two participants mentioned the teacher as a positive factor in the formation of their academic identities. The others' experiences with their teachers were negative. The first had to do with the teacher's method and relationship with the children. Although her mother's relationship with a female teacher affected her schooling positively, Naana remembered that in class 4, she could not write her name, and:

... when the madam came, she said everybody should write his or her name.

According to her, she was caned for her inability to write her name, and that made her sit up. Consequently, by the time she was in class 5, she was competing with two other girls for the first three positions in examinations and even got a reward from her teacher for being the only person in the class to be able to solve a math problem. As she reflected on that experience, she thought that the teacher's action helped her to improve on her performance.

While caning was sometimes well-intended and therefore was interpreted as a way of improving their academic performance, other times, even when the motive was good, the practice left a negative impression on the children and therefore was interpreted as senseless (Maame and Koutuma). In Northern Ghana especially, research shows that many pupils drop out of school because of corporal punishment (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009). Additionally, in the ESRC/DFID research project, participants in both Ghana and Tanzania reported about the physical and mental damage they suffered from corporal punishment which sometimes, made them perceive of education as a site of danger (Morley et al., 2010). Therefore, however well-intentioned corporal punishment could be, it is a practice whose negative effects are rather detrimental to children's school attendance and learning as this study shows, and should be discouraged.

Maame's (Southerner) experience with caning was different. She recounts:

I remember my class one teacher, I will never forget her, she will always insult me, so my basic school wasn't that easy for me. I wasn't able to count even at seven years. You know you have to walk to school so you have to grow a little before. So I wasn't good. And those teachers, when a child is not good they just maltreat the child ...

In the case of Adjoa Kom (rural South), it was her teacher's verbal abuse that discouraged her. She said:

I liked mathematics in primary school ... but when I got there (secondary school) as I said, from the village I didn't know a lot of things so I was lagging behind and the maths teacher, he killed my interest in mathematics. I didn't know, so he was using a lot of adjectives on me; you useless child, this simple thing you can't understand. And all the time when I see him I panic so my interest in maths died off.

It is likely that her dislike for maths affected her performance in other subjects like accounting, and that made it impossible for her dream of being a banker to be fulfilled. So according to Adjoa Kom, she performed poorly in the O' Level examinations and therefore had to stay at home for two years, trading. The negative image females have of mathematics runs through the literature in both high and low-income countries. These range from the perception of the subject as masculine (Jones & Smart, 2005), troublesome, hard, boring and challenging (Rodd & Bartholomew, 2006), and more difficult for girls and women to feel talented at, and comfortable with and do well at it (Mendick, 2005). Therefore, the teacher's attitude, as in Adjoa Kom's experience would rather make the subject more detestable.

Also common among the rural dwellers in this study is the situation where children have to walk long distances to schools which have poor school facilities and lack well-experienced teachers. In such areas, children suffer the consequences of the teachers' dislike for the area, by receiving canes for lateness to school and poor performance. This resonates with Mulugeta's (2004) study in Ethiopia and Morley et al.'s (2010) in Ghana where they found that some rural female students faced

double constraints in the sense that they came from poor families, had to undergo all the house chores and village (farming) life and also suffer from all the inadequacies of the education system.

Change of Location

Earlier studies on girls' education in Ghana have found that in rural settings, parents who want their daughters to be educated usually relocate them to live in the cities with other relations, mainly because in the village, there is lack of role models and ambition to aspire (Quarcoopome and Ahadjie, 1981). These resonate with Mulugeta's (2004) finding in Ethiopia, where rural girls relocated to other towns and cities for the purpose of obtaining better/higher education. Other studies conducted in Ghana indicate that migration resulting from increased urbanisation and changing attitudes towards the economic value of children, among other factors, also impact on family life (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1994; Peil, 1995).

In consonance with the findings of the studies aforementioned, all the participants in this study relocated to bigger towns for various reasons including the aim of obtaining better and/or higher education, for marital or occupation purposes. While some of them were fostered for educational reasons, others moved for marital reasons. All the incidents of relocation however, culminated into their further education, whether it was intended initially or not.

In Ghana, research shows that in many instances, fostering hinders the education of foster children (Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah, 2009), and this was evident in some of the narratives of this study. For example, Akua's father made her move to the nearest big town to live with a family friend to attend a better elementary school, and though she was subjected to much domestic chores, she was able to successfully pass her secondary school-qualifying examinations. On the other hand, Maame's and Naana's mothers, though uneducated, made them move from their farming village and small town respectively to live in the city to attend secondary school when their fathers did not show interest in their education. Even though they were

made to do much more house chores than they did in their own homes, living in the city and, in Maame's case, on a university campus with her maternal uncle, a lecturer in a public university, served to develop her interest in education and obtain secondary education. Maame said:

I was living on campus, so I saw the campus life and I developed the interest...

Maame's experience is reminiscent of my uneducated mother's insistence on my relocation from the village where most of the inhabitants agreed that I was a 'star' (academically bright) and should be given the right environment to shine. With the death of my father while still a baby, I was made to move to the regional capital to live with my elder brother who was a teacher at the primary school of a public university. Although, the prestige and physical appearance of the advantaged children affected my confidence and self-esteem negatively, the quality of education and my exposure helped me to gain admission to one of the elite secondary schools and eventually to that same university.

Some of the participants in my study relocated for marital and occupational reasons. Some of their stories resonate with studies conducted elsewhere in Ghana which suggest that migration of educated men from rural to urban areas in search of jobs leads to a situation where husbands desire to have educated wives who would perhaps match up to the urbanized lifestyle (Nukunya, 1992b; Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1994). This was evident in the stories of Koutuma, Maimuna and Fafa whose husbands are educated Northerners. Once settled in the South, their husbands encouraged them to obtain HE.

The parents and husbands' insistence on the participants' relocation for the purposes of further education can be viewed as a process of de-traditionalisation (Morley et al, 2006), a rejection of community/cultural and social beliefs about girls' education, though they are devoted to the gender-assigned roles, as was evident in their socialisation processes. This is quite different from Morley et al.'s (2006)

description of de-traditionalisation which relates to the changes in gender roles in the wider civil society, accompanied by the changing attitudes and educational opportunities, which allow women to move out of traditionally prescribed roles of wives and mothers. In this study, it is the change in attitudes about female education and therefore the need to offer them the available educational opportunities. It is such a change that makes parents and husbands send their daughters and wives away for better and further education, as has been seen in the participants' narratives.

5.4 Identity Formation: Differences

Morley et al. (2009, p. 61) demonstrate that 'different student narratives reveal a complex combination of differently distributed emotional, social, cultural and material capitals', some of which according to them, are based on parental biographies. This section looks at the social factors that constructed the participants' identities differently. Three aspects of the participants' biographies are discussed namely (a) Socio-cultural Background (b) Marital Status and Family Life and (c) Socio-economic Status. I use the data from this study to discuss the different ways in which cultural beliefs and practices affect parents and community's attitude towards females' education. I also discuss how these affect the participants' own marital status and family lives.

Socio-cultural Background

The participants' stories showed that their lives were framed by their parents' devotion to or rejection of the cultural and social beliefs and practices of their area and the community, similar to some of the experiences of mature students in the European context (Tett, 2000) and some other African contexts (Mulugeta, 2004; Morley, 2006; Morley and Lugg, 2009) including Ghana (Stephens, 2000; Morley and Lugg, 2009). In this study, these beliefs and practices were related to the woman's role in the home and community, the level of education perceived to be suitable for females and marriage.

Some research evidence suggests that when people experience (higher) education, they encourage others around them to do the same (Morley et al, 2006), and that parents' education, particularly that of the mother, influences their attitude and support for female education (Stephens, 2000; Mulugeta, 2004; Reay et al., 2005). As indicated earlier in this study, the participants' fathers had more education than their mothers. However, there were differences among them in their attitude towards their daughters' education. Moreover, the signals they sent about their HE were not dependent on the level of education they had attained. Though none of the parents objected to their daughters' enrolment at the basic school, with regard to their pursuit of HE, some of the fathers sometimes showed signs that they were not particularly interested. In some cases though, both parents were willing and committed to their daughters' education while in others, some mothers were more proactive than the fathers. Again, this did not depend on their level of education.

The parental support in the narratives was also gendered and differentiated according to its form and degree. Maimuna for example, pointed out that though her father was a trained teacher, he did not care about her education. It was her mother, a middle school leaver and a hospital ward attendant who provided her material, financial, motivational and academic support. These were in the form of provision of educational and other materials, as well as motivation. She also exempted her from the house chores so that she could have time for private studies at home. This articulates with Mulugeta's (2004) finding that mothers' understanding of educational issues is very important to the support they give towards their daughters' education because they could spare their daughters from the very household activities that conflicted with their education.

Maimuna's father's lack of interest in her educational aspirations was, according to her, for cultural reasons, because in her area, *majority* (of fathers) *do not have influence on their children's education*. She revealed:

*even your own father is not in control ... it's your uncles,
the older ones, they have a say ...*

In some communities in the Northern part of Ghana, the patrilineal family system enjoins children to be members of the father's extended family. In that system, fathers and paternal uncles are likely to encourage females into early marriages in order to benefit from dowries in the form of farm animals (Hagan, 2004). In fact, Maimuna revealed that her paternal uncles, who were the custodians of the culture of the area, controlled her life by insisting that she terminated her education after middle school and married someone they had found for her. She recounts this experience thus:

I remember when I took the common entrance to go to secondary school, my older uncles said I should wait when I complete middle school then I marry.

For them, secondary schooling was not necessary, and was too long for a girl because she was expected to marry and have children to continue with the family lineage. In fact, all the stories from the north indicated that people in that area did not see why a woman should have so much education, so they discouraged girls from going to school. Maimuna for example said:

Some of them did not see anything in school. They will tell you that you are a woman and if you go to school you will go and marry.

The assumption is that when a woman gets married, she ends up serving her husband's interests and may not put her education to any beneficial use. Therefore during her common entrance examinations, though three girls had been registered to take the exams, she was the only one left; the others had dropped out. Being the only girl to write the exam, she said she was taunted that she was 'too known'. Her story was corroborated by Koutuma, also a Northerner who said because of the dowry (e.g. cows), the villagers pressurised her father who was uneducated, to arrange for his daughters to be married. If her father had succumbed to these pressures, they would have dropped out of school.

It is interesting to note that though Koutuma's father is also a Northerner from the same region (Upper East) and uneducated,

he was the first to send his girl-child to school at the village because he was working with the mines (in the south) and he used to admire those (female staff) at the offices.

He rejected the cultural practice of the area and disregarded the pressure from the community to arrange for his daughters to be married for the dowries. The support he gave to Koutuma was more motivational than otherwise, saying: *if you are highly educated you'll be better in your marital home than if you're not* and according to her, that made her focus on her education. The same is true of Krambaa, also a Northerner, born and raised in the south. When her father died, her uneducated mother and her maternal uncle saw to her elementary education through the provision of educational materials and payment of school fees.

The stories from the South had more subtle rather than overt descriptions of family or community perception of girls' education. For example, although Naana's father was a university lecturer, he sent her to a vocational school, similar to Maame's father, a farmer whose custom was that after junior secondary school, *if you are a boy you go and learn a mason work*, and the females were made to learn dressmaking. In their cases, their mothers were instrumental in their education beyond the secondary school. On the other hand, both Fafa and Adjoa Kom's fathers (with a master's degree and secondary education respectively) were assertive of their HE whilst Naana and Maame's fathers (with a master's degree and elementary education respectively) were interested in vocational education for them.

Adjoa Kom's father's attitude to her education was demonstrated in his constant interest in her examination results and the gifts he bought for her, which according to her, motivated her to learn. According to her, her father *used to say that ... he will give everything to send me to the university* while her mother also provided her provisions and other items she needed in the boarding house. Though her father was unable to finance her HE, she nurtured his dream until she had the opportunity.

Data in this study show that parents influence their children's educational achievement through the signals they send about the level of education they want their children to attain. There is indication that fathers' level of education may not affect their interest in their daughters' education. For some of the highly educated fathers, the culture of the area was strong in influencing their decision about their daughters' education. For others, even though they were uneducated, they were able to reject the culture because of their exposure to other lifestyles through migration. For some of the participants, in spite of their mothers' lack of education, their support was more crucial than their fathers' for their progression through basic education and beyond. Perhaps they wanted to give to their daughters what circumstances did not allow them to have, a situation which articulates with what Morley and Lugg (2009) portray. These are demonstrative of the fact that the participants' location and cultural context, and their fathers' defiance of, or adherence to the cultural values, were instrumental in determining their pursuit of further education.

Marital Status and Family Life

In Ghana, there is the belief that a girl's marriage prospects will diminish when she obtains (a higher) education, equal to men or more than men (Republic of Ghana, 2004). Moreover, in spite of the changes brought about by urbanisation and modernisation, some people especially in some small towns and rural communities, still think that a taste of schooling makes girls rebels. They also believe that when girls get to a higher level in education, they will refuse to farm and will prefer loitering about. This is particularly so if their schooling cannot be catered for, and yet they do not wish to drop out (Stephens, 2000). Especially in the Northern part of Ghana, there is a cultural belief that a girl should marry as a virgin, and the general feeling is that if a girl pursues education for too long, she would enter into a close relationship with boys during her adolescence and might lose her virginity on the way (Stephens, 2000). As such, many females tend to be influenced by these societal expectations and therefore terminate or postpone HE for marital reasons.

It comes as no surprise therefore that all the participants in this study had been married or co-habited with men since in the Ghanaian society, a woman is expected to be married latest, by age 30. At the time of this study, five of the participants were still married whilst three were single. Among the three single women, two were divorcees and one had been in a relationship which broke up as a result of her entry into HE.

Again, there is a general belief that the best time for a woman to have children is between ages 26 and 28. As such, seven out of the eight participants had children before entering HE. It appears as though they had an obligation to satisfy cultural norms before seeking their own interest (of entering HE), as it is believed that HE disrupts hegemonic age-related marriage and motherhood norms (Morley and Lugg, 2009). In their narratives, it was observed that their marriage experiences and family arrangements were varied, as were also their SES and their cultural beliefs regarding men and women's roles in the family.

Koutuma made many references to her husband in her narrative, and among all the participants, appeared to be the only one in a good marriage relationship. She seemed to be completely dependent on her husband, who occupies the highest position in the national revenue office. She said: *we have our own house, we are comfortable by God's grace*. Therefore, there was an indication that her family arrangement allowed her much time for social events. She attributed her advantaged social standing to her marriage, which enabled her to relocate to the capital city.

On the contrary, Maimuna said relatively little about her husband, and her account hinted that he was not very supportive. For example, when she was pregnant and teaching in another town, Maimuna had to travel every week end from her station to her husband to do all the house chores for him. Now, she lives with her husband (an average income earner, e.g. he owns a car) and their three children (four, six and nine years) in a rented apartment. Nevertheless, she had to personally arrange for a house help to help her manage her home and career. In the accounts of both Adjoa

Kom (with two teenage children) and Maame (with two children aged 2 and 4), there was an indication that their husbands did not play much role in their lives. Each of them personally arranged for house helps to help them take care of their homes.

Normally, when it comes to decision-making in marriage, married women in Ghana are disadvantaged by the traditional norms which designate men as heads of households. They are therefore the principal decision makers in matters concerning house hold resource control, who to manage the home and take care of the children (The Women's Manifesto for Ghana, 2004). In this study however, all the married women seemed to share in matters concerning their home management and care of their children. It can be inferred that the contribution they make to the house hold income is accountable for their ability to initiate favourable living arrangements.

The situation of the two single women was different. They appeared to have had unpleasant experiences in their marriages. Krambaa with a thirteen-year-old son, shared very little about her marriage experiences, which lasted for four years and was dissolved twenty years ago. On the contrary, Akua with two children, felt freer to share her experiences in her seven-year-old marriage, in which they lived apart (her husband resident in Germany and she, in Ghana). Though her divorce was finalized less than a year prior to this interview, she did not appear to be affected by the experience. For these participants, their family arrangements were constructed around their extended family members.

In sum, the marital experiences of the participants varied according to their spouses' social standing, the role they played in the home and the women's contribution to the way their family lives should be managed. They also constructed their family life identities in relation to what pertains in modern societies with nuclear family structures and the use of house helps. In the case of the single women, their family life stories were constructed in relation to their children and extended families. Given these different experiences with marriage and family life commitments, it can

be expected that the participants' HE experiences would be varied and different. This is discussed in chapter 6.

Socio-economic Status

Morley et al. (2009) found that in Ghana and Tanzania, students' biographies include a range of (gendered) parental influences and orientations, where for the more socio-economically privileged students, their families carefully managed their entry into HE. Studies that have been conducted in other African countries also suggest that the SES of a family is highly correlated with school enrolment and persistence of daughters, and that girls who come from economically advantaged families are more likely to enter and remain in high school and beyond (Hyde, 1993; Stephens, 2000; Mulugeta, 2004). It was the intention of this study to identify the SES of the mature women students whose lives are under investigation in this study and to understand how their economic backgrounds influence their HE participation and experiences.

The lives of the participants in this study show all the levels of SES (i.e rich, average and poor), irrespective of their (rural/urban) location. Whereas some of the childhood stories were characterised by poverty, which was transformed through education or marriage, others suggested that they experienced socio-economic advantage throughout their lives. Six out of the eight participants described their childhood SES as 'good'. For example, in her childhood, although they lived in the rural area with the extended family, Koutuma's mother's petty trading and her father's pension benefit and farming activities placed them at an advantage over other inhabitants, as she remembered: *sometimes we were not able to eat all the food*. Therefore, all her siblings were educated at least to the middle school. She contrasted her experience with other children in her village who she claimed *it wasn't good for them*, because they did not have food to eat before going to school.

As most rural Northern villages in Ghana are deprived, underdeveloped and poor, Koutuma associated good SES mainly with having enough food to eat. Currently,

she lives in the national capital with her husband and children. She described her current SES in relation to two main factors: (a) her husband's position as the head of procurement at VAT service and its associated privileges and (b) external indicators of wealth such as ownership of a house and a car. Though also a teacher, her own income-earning and financial status did not feature at all in her narrative.

On the other hand, Maimuna described her childhood social standing in rural north in terms of their nuclear family system (four), their private accommodation and the provision of the food and educational materials. Though her father was a trained teacher, she claimed that he was irresponsible, resulting in her mother being solely responsible for them. Now, her own nuclear family has an average SES, and the only indicator of social standing she mentions is her husband's car.

The participants from the South also described similar indicators of social standing, though there were differences among them. Akua, for example experienced advantaged SES during her childhood in a mining town. Her father was a senior staff in a mining company and *the first to own a television and double door fridge* in their small town, similar to what Adjoa Kom described as indicators of their advantaged social standing in her village. Consequently, she had the privilege of attending a private school, which was the preserve of staff of the mining company. She also enjoyed the privilege of a shuttle bus service from their home to the nearest big town to visit the library. In her home, she claimed there was always extra food for anyone who visited, for which reason many people frequently visited them. Thus, she viewed advantaged SES in terms of their household items, the type of school she attended, the shuttle bus service and the availability of food in their home. Now, though a lone parent, she describes her advantaged SES in terms of her position as an international police detective, her car and other income-generating activities. Similarly, Krambaa, also a police woman and a lone mother describes her social standing mainly in terms of her income-generating activities.

Maame is the only participant who experienced poverty as a rural dweller. Her parents were subsistence farmers. Her village had no electricity, pipe borne water, hospital facility or good roads. The main occupation was farming. Maame's narrative demonstrates how her family's disadvantaged socio-economic status made her secondary school education almost impossible. Her mother could not afford to give them money or food before they went to school in the morning so they ate any left-over food they could find. She recalled: *so far as we are able to pay our school fees, feed, its enough, we were okay*. Thus, their SES was described in terms of their ability to pay their school fees and afford at least one meal a day. Now, though she is a teacher and on study leave, she seems to depend on her husband's income since according to her, he is in a good job and owns a car and a private accommodation.

The different narratives create versions of identity which are located in advantaged and disadvantaged SES in rural and urban areas, where participants lived in their childhood, and also their present social standing. Indicators of poverty or wealth were described in terms of the following: (a) their parents' occupations, (b) what was available or not in their childhood (e.g. food, type of schools they attended, educational materials, housing, television, refrigerator, etc.) and (c) their present status. For some of the married women, their social standing was described in terms of their husbands' position in their jobs and their property, such as a car or private accommodation whilst the lone mothers described it in terms of their own job positions and other income-generating activities that placed them at an advantaged economic status.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and discussed some of the themes that emerged from the life history narratives. It found that the participants have multiple identities (Sarup, 1996; Gee, 2000) some of which are common to all of them. Three things were found to be common to all the participants. Firstly, in the process of their identity formation, they all went through similar processes of socialisation, which were influenced by cultural norms. Whether they were educated or not, their parents

(especially their mothers) socialised them into gender-appropriate roles at home and the public sphere, which the participants perceived to be normal activities for girls. Secondly, they all received parental support towards their basic education, and experienced early schooling in unique ways that made them form both positive and negative images of schooling. Lastly, each of the participants had a change of location in the course of her life, which helped to change/shift their identities.

Participants' multiple identities were also formed and shaped by other factors that were unique to them individually. These are factors related to family background and influence such as parents' education and attitude/support towards female education and their socio-cultural context and socio-economic status. These themes were found to be similar to findings of studies conducted in different socio-economic and socio-cultural contexts (Mulugeta, 2004; Morley et al., 2006; Morley and Lugg, 2009).

Parental support was financial, material, motivational and academic, and these were gendered and differentiated according to their form and degrees, and according to the cultural context. In terms of the socio-cultural contexts, the location (northern-southern/ rural-urban divide) and the cultural values of the area in terms of female education were discussed.

The participants' marital status and family lives were also found to construct their identities differently. Lastly, it was found that the participants described poverty and wealth differently, based on their location and family contexts, and that socio-economic background was a factor in determining their family arrangements.

CHAPTER 6

HOW MATURE WOMEN STUDENTS EXPERIENCE HIGHER EDUCATION

6.1 Introduction

This study was conducted to explore and describe the HE experiences of mature undergraduate women in Ghana, and to show how they strategise to progress through HE. The previous chapter discussed the commonalities and differences among the mature undergraduate women who participated in this study. It became evident from the data that the participants constructed their shifting identities in similar ways with regard to their socialisation, early schooling experiences and change of location. However, differences existed among them with regard to certain sociological factors such as socio-cultural backgrounds, marital status and family life and socio-economic status.

This chapter answers the study's main question by discussing how mature women students experience HE with regard to the following four areas which run through the data: (a) Returning to Study as Older Students (b) Socio-cultural Background: Marital Status and Family Life (c) Socio-economic Status and Higher Education Participation and (d) Navigating through HE: Agency and Structures.

6.2 Returning to Study as an Older Student

'It's great to return to school, but ... What have I got myself into?'

Some of the studies that have been conducted on adult students in high-income countries relate old age with academic capabilities (Nisbet and Welsh, 1972; Maguire, 1996; Wilson, 1997; Richardson and King, 1998) but with variations in their findings. With regard to old age and academic work for example, some of the studies suggest that there are age-related deficits in the intellectual capacities of adult students, as a result of which they are less well-prepared academically than younger students in HE (Woodley, 1984; Wheeler and Birtle, 1993). Adult students sometimes blame the HE institutions for making them feel out of place within the

HE institutions (Edwards, 1993), and this negatively affects their self-confidence, self-esteem and academic life. Other studies dispute the assertion of age-related deficits in adult students' intellectual capacities, some drawing conclusions that adult students rather exhibit approaches to learning that are more desirable than those of younger students (Edwards, 1993; Richardson and King, 1998). But it is agreed that over the ages of 50 or 60, age-related cognitive deficits are observable in poor physical health and physical disenablement (Richardson and King, 1998).

In this study, issues concerning old age and its relations with academic and social life in HE run through most of the narratives. In Ghana, the conventional age for HE entry is between 18 and 21 years. All the participants in this study entered HE after age 25, the youngest being 30 years at the time of the interview and the oldest being 46. The minimum length of break between leaving school and resuming full-time education was 6 years and the maximum was 14 years.

Most of the participants described academic work as difficult and made reference to gaps in terms of their knowledge deficit and unfamiliar courses they had to take, such as Information Retrieval and Communicative Skills. According to some of them, they did not understand these subjects and therefore could not make high grades. Koutuma, with 14 years break between leaving school and returning, failed in Phonetics in the first semester of the first year when she was still trying to adjust. Similarly, Naana used the expression *it wasn't easy* many times in her description of her experiences as a fresh student in HE. Naana who had 10 years break in academic work before returning to HE recounted how she fared in her first university quiz:

I remember the first time we did a quiz, it was com skills (communicative skills). I had two out of ten, and I said oh! When I went back to my hostel I wept, and I asked myself if I could go through ... I really struggled, because it wasn't easy for me.

Krambaa with about 10 years break in academic work however described academic life in terms of studying for examination purposes:

Academic work is manageable because whatever they teach is what we will study; whatever the lecturer is lecturing you is what he will bring. ... The quizzes that we've been writing the young ones and us the difference (in terms of scores) is not much.

However, many times in her narrative she described her experience with academic work with the following expressions: *not easy, you struggle with it a little, we get tired; it's a bit stressful*, etc. She said:

With the age it's not easy because I am not having a sound mind.

In her case, the difficulty with academic work was attributed to the fact that she had many other commitments that occupied her mind and probably, disoriented her as a result of her age and maturity. She thought that this condition was different in the lives of younger students.

Adjoa Kom described her experience with academic work in terms of her inability to retain information:

... certain things, I need to consult the dictionary for some words and sometimes I find it difficult to recollect certain things but some of the things you need recollection or memorization and then I find it difficult to memorise.

The participants enumerated factors which made their first year in the university academically challenging. The first had to do with the lack of institutional structures that could have allayed their fears and anxieties. In that connection, Koutuma said: *people who are grown ups* (referring to herself and other mature students) *and we were all mixing with them* (younger students). This statement reflected her view that returning students are not at the same level of intellectual ability as the younger ones who are coming to the university straight from secondary school. Moreover, she seemed to hint that they were less well-prepared academically than younger students who were familiar with note taking, writing essays and examinations. This seems to articulate with Wilson's (1997) finding in the UK that some mature students see themselves as old and different in terms of cognitive capabilities and therefore have special need which requires special treatment and provision. There is also indication

that younger students may feel more at home with the 'modern' courses the participants found unfamiliar.

Some of the participants also attributed their emotional anxiety to the institutional structure that is responsible for the dismissal of students for failure in a number of courses, a practice which according to them, generates a lot of tension in students.

On this issue, Koutuma had this to say:

You go to lectures, you don't understand anything then what are you doing here? Is it not better you drop out than the school to sack you? It's like if you fail communicative skills you are sacked ...so you wonder what have I got myself into?

Again, she hinted that lecturers do not seem to appreciate the difficulties of fresh students but threaten and intimidate them on first contact with them. Her experience was expressed thus:

... when we went for African studies too and Mr. ... was teaching us, the first day he came in he started intimidating us. He said if you don't do well he will sack you. He always talked for us to see ourselves to be stupid.

Maimuna pointed out some mature women's circumstances thus:

You know because we are coming with problems ... we've left our children, our families and even there are some who have to fight with their husbands before coming here, so when we come here and they are intimidating us then they put a lot of pressure on us.

And to make matters worse, she said the lecturer ... *sometimes talks and ... I don't even understand what he is saying.* She felt intellectually lost during the lectures and thought that the teaching method was problematic. On this issue, Naana recalled that in the first few lecture sessions she attended, she did not understand anything, apparently because according to her, both the course and the teaching method were unfamiliar.

These stories point to some of the institutional practices that act as barriers to women students' successful participation in HE. Grace and Gouthro (2000) argue that the competing responsibilities and different dispositions that mature women bring with them into HEIs necessitate participatory pedagogical approaches that also connect their lived experiences. Grace and Gouthro corroborate hooks' (1994a) view that knowledge production is 'a field in which we all labor' (p. 14), suggesting that pedagogical approaches should emphasise teacher responsibility and locate teacher authority within a teacher-learner interaction that highlights co-operation, collaboration and sharing. In this way, classrooms become sites of participatory learning rather than places where learners are passive recipients of incomprehensible knowledge, which is disconnected from their experience.

These pedagogical approaches are also highlighted in the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP, 2008). The TLRP is a UK-based research brief that provides evidence-informed pedagogic principles. These include taking account of the personal and cultural experiences of learners and promoting their active engagement in the teaching and learning process. This responsibility lies with educators whose institutional roles, power and authority (Grace & Gouthro, 2000), empower them to create such a learning environment.

Another issue that runs through the data relates to mature women students' relationship with younger students. Some writers suggest that the age gap between mature and younger students affects mature students negatively, leading to feelings of isolation or being on the fringes (Wilson, 1997). In their narratives, the participants in this study used expressions such as *small ones*, *children*, *young ones*, *boys and girls*, etc. to refer to younger students. These expressions suggest that the women students perceived themselves to be old and different. Interestingly, some younger students also regarded the mature students as very old, and called them names like *mummy*, which, according to the women, made them feel out of place.

These descriptions point to the way mature and younger students use family classifications (e.g. mummy, children) to describe their age differences. This seems to indicate that the parent/child role and relationship in the home gets transferred onto the student relationships in the higher education arena. From my experience, I observe that this phenomenon appears to be evident at all educational levels in Ghana, where the practice of under-age and over-age school enrolment is fairly old. For example, I was enrolled in elementary school under-aged to enable my mother attend to her farming activities. However, being under-aged is not as problematic as being over-aged. Mostly, over-aged learners are subjected to ridicule by younger learners, and they either have to cope with it (as is the case of the mature women students in this study) or drop out of school (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009).

In this study, sometimes, some younger students reportedly treated mature students with contempt. Krambaa for example reported that a younger student related to her rudely, which made her feel bad. This resonates with Maguire's (1996) study in the UK in which some of her participants revealed that they were frequently silenced by the youth and a certain degree of contempt was shown for their age. However, in some situations, younger students were reportedly much helpful in academic matters, and associating with them helped to progress through academic work. Akua for example recalled:

I faced a situation where I was not performing like I wished, so some of these young ones were telling me some of the things you have to learn, acronyms and those things. Those young people helped me to learn.

Similarly, Adjoa Kom said:

Sometimes they know things that you don't know so I just approach them. I am not shy to ask for information. If only I can get something from them, I wouldn't mind at all.

Therefore, the only way they could get academic assistance from them was to *cut down much of* (their) years (psychologically) so that they could mix easily with them. But progression through HE was dependent on other factors which are discussed later in this chapter.

6.3 Socio-cultural Background: Marital Status, Family Life and HE

Out of the eight participants in this study, five were married with children, two were divorced with children and one was unmarried but had a relationship which broke up as a result of her entry into HE. In the case of some of those who were married, their marital status contributed to their HE entry. From their narratives, it was evident that their different marital status and family lives constructed varied experiences, which influenced their HE lives differently. Although all the narratives were characterised by expressions such as ‘it’s not easy’ and ‘I must struggle’, there were observable differences in the degree of struggle. There were also indications that in spite of their seeming neglect of their families, some of the participants were happy to be out of home because of the relief from domestic chores and family/social responsibilities.

A Ghanaian writer has demonstrated that across Africa, women perform many more roles than men (Dolphyne, 1991). Some of the named roles involve responsibilities in the domestic, conjugal, occupational, maternal, kinship, individual and community domains. Hagan (2004) however argues that men perform similar roles, but the fact remains that in most of these domains, women have a larger share of duties, especially when they are married. It can therefore be understood why expressions of difficulty and struggle were recurrent in the participants’ description of their experiences of HE study.

Tensions: Marriage, Family and HE Studies

Some studies conducted in the UK show that when describing their life and HE experiences, mature women tend to emphasise the domestic domain, and their narratives are much more about themselves in relation to others as compared with male students, who often draw clear distinctions between the public and the private, and present a unitary self (MacDonald & Stratta, 1998; Tett, 2000). Especially in their first year in HE when they have not quite adjusted to their academic work, some mature women find the volume of work more than they expected because of the non-academic responsibilities they hold that may make them more sensitive to

the pressures of time and workload (Smithers and Griffin, 1986a). In some cases, some mature women indicate that the support of their partners and families is central to their success in HE (Reay, 2003), though in others, the demand of family put a strain on their student life (Wilson, 1997).

This study has shown that in Ghana, the socialisation processes women receive make them the carers and nurturers of the home and the children, and these roles do not change when they embark on higher education. Adjoa Kom's experience depicts the situation of those who combine HE with family life:

He (her husband) was expecting me to do my normal cooking at home. In fact, it wasn't easy. We were then introduced to these new courses; especially the sociology. I was confused and when I got home I couldn't study. In fact, the beginning wasn't easy for me.

She further lamented:

He doesn't get time for the children, even doing their homework; from job to town, so everything was left on me. Even apart from my learning I have to assist the children in their home work because he might not be in the house. When he comes back too, after eating, he relaxes in the sofa and he sleeps.

At the time of this interview, her husband had travelled outside the country for a year, and she found this such a great relief since she did not have to do any *organised cooking* in her husband's absence. Her description of her husband's attitude towards domestic support is typical of many Ghanaian men, educated or not, which is blamed on the socialisation processes that assign them heads of households and control over all resources, including women and children (Dolphyne, 1991). One of the ways they exercise control is to be served and accorded very high dignity/respect.

Maame's story is different from all the other participants' because her children are younger (2 and 4 years old), and she had to live on campus with them. She described her experiences thus:

In the morning you have to get the kids ready for school. I couldn't learn in the morning. Sometimes I am even late for lectures. After lectures, you must prepare something for them before they come. Sometimes, I don't even wash my utensils. I leave them, then when I go back after lectures I wash them, prepare supper, get ready for my squad (children).

In such circumstances, the consequences are not farfetched. Maame revealed that after all these chores, she gets so tired that studying becomes difficult:

The little time you have to study you are already tired, if you don't take care, you will even sleep.

This concurs with Tett's (2000) study of mature students in the UK in which she found that the family was cited by her women participants as the central feature of their experience in HE. She argues that the experience reveals societal suppositions about women's role as carers for their children, where their core work is seen as being focused around the details of maintaining family.

Mature women students whose children are less dependent appear to have more space for their academic pursuits. In such circumstances, they have to devise strategies that would help them to navigate their way through their domestic commitments and HE studies, and ensure that their home is 'in order' before they embark on further studies. As such, all the participants had helpers at home, in addition to their husbands who would take care of their home while they embarked on further studies. The single participants also had elderly people, such as their mothers, and other extended family members to take care of their homes. These notwithstanding, some of them encountered what they found to be insurmountable demands and pressures that threatened their academic pursuits. Maimuna's story exemplifies the experiences of most of the participants in this category. She thought that she was ready for HE studies, given the following indicators in her home:

My small girl is now four, and then six and then nine, but I said this was the time for me to come. But you know you have to set the preparations for your coming. I feel that at age four, at least she can attend to herself in so many ways.

However, once in HE, she saw that combining HE work with domestic commitments was not as easy as she had imagined. She said she had to *call them every day before they go to bed*. She also described the despair she experienced in being told about her child's illness at a time she could not abandon her lectures and quizzes to go home to see him, and her divided mind due to this impossibility:

Sometimes they call you, your son is not well and you can imagine, you are thinking, you have assignments, quiz to write, a whole lot of things coming ...

On the contrary, Koutuma's children are older (14, 9, 6 and 4 years), with house helps and her husband to manage her home while she studied. When asked whether her absence from her family affects her, she answered in the negative because according to her, her husband, older daughter and house helps took care of the home. However, she also recounted the tensions she experienced between going home to visit her family and staying on campus at certain times during her study, and the difficulty of not being able to go home because of lectures and quizzes:

Mostly the problem is trying to live away from home. It's like every time, you have to call home and find out what's happening with them. Sometimes too the quizzes ... they come at a time maybe you need to go home and see your people so sometimes, you can't go home.

These observations are evocative of Edwards' (1993) and Baxter & Britton's (2001) study of mature women in HE in the UK and Morley et al.'s (2009, p.60) study on women's participation in HE in Ghana. In all these studies, it was found that there was the fragmentation or compartmentalisation of the self (Edwards, 1993) in the accounts of mature women in HE in the sense that the women were caught between two 'greedy' institutions: the home and the university where 'survival involved complex splitting and disconnection between the two highly gendered worlds' (Morley et al., 2009, p.60).

The Guilt of an Irresponsible Mother

Whilst combining HE with family commitments or psychologically disconnecting oneself from one of the roles, it is possible that one of the institutions receives less

attention. In the event that the home suffers most of the consequences of the mother's physical and psychological disconnection, there is the burden of guilt for being an irresponsible mother. Maimuna revealed how her children felt abandoned and forsaken because she was not there on their special days in school and at home. And on her visits home, when she had to part company with them, she cried all the way back to the campus, because though her husband was at home with them, she felt guilty about not doing so well as a mother. According to her, sometimes, she wondered whether her coming into HE at that stage in her children's life was the right decision:

The mother is the best person to be there for them. When they (the kids) are not well, you know you feel that if I were there I would take care of them, or maybe if I were there, they wouldn't have fallen sick.

Sometimes, there were indications that in the absence of a mother, the children's academic performance deteriorated, as indicated in Adjoa Kom's and Akua's stories. Adjoa Kom thought that her son's academic performance started deteriorating because he fell into bad company when HE took almost all her attention. Similarly, Akua said this of her daughter:

The girl for instance was very good but her academic performance just dropped when I was not there. I wanted to be there myself to see how she is being catered for and brought up.

It is therefore not surprising that for one of the participants, after going through two years of unsuccessful HE study, she had to start the degree programme afresh. This was because as she combined HE with childcare and her career, she realised that her home and her career took most of her attention, making her HE work suffer. According to her, HE became easier the second time because her husband managed the home while she concentrated on her academic work.

6.4 Socio-economic Status and HE Participation

Similar to what Morley and Lussier (2009) found in their study, data from this study show that the participants' positional advantage served to construct their HE

experiences differently from the socio-economically disadvantaged. Six out of eight of the participants in this study were on study leave with a salary whilst two were dependent on other sources of funding for their HE. All the five married women had some financial support from their husbands in addition to their salaries. Koutuma had a prestigious life in the university due to her husband's social standing and its associated privileges, and these, according to her, facilitated her progression through HE. She said:

*My husband calls me about hundred times in a day.
Sometimes he even buys (call) credits for me.*

Many times through her narrative, she mentioned how well her husband took care of her in HE: renting a fully-furnished single room in a relatively prestigious hostel for her, visiting her and spending time with her on weekends. She added:

Whenever I vacate he comes to pick me. I've never gone home on my own'.

As if to demonstrate her SES, she pointed out that although she owned a car, she did not like to use it on campus.

Similarly, Maame revealed that her husband's financial support enabled her to rent a double room private accommodation near campus for herself and her children, unlike many women with families who are from average or poor SES. Though divorced, Krambaa and Akua's narrative suggested their advantaged SES, as they talked about the businesses they are engaged in which supported them through HE. Both of them revealed that they owned cars which in Akua's case, she used on campus. Such stories typify the situation of women who are socio-economically privileged. For them, their struggles in HE related to academic work rather than to financial difficulties. These findings concur with Reay's (2003) discovery in the UK that socio-economically advantaged students experience HE differently from their disadvantaged counterparts because they are able to pay for the services of cleaners, nannies and childminders in their homes so that they can concentrate on their academic work.

In both Adjoa Kom and Maimuna's cases, there was an indication that the financial support they obtained in HE was minimal. Maimuna for example, lived in the cheap, overcrowded university dormitory (six students in a room) with its associated inconveniences. She recounted some of these as follows: the behaviour of younger students and their male visitors in the dormitories, her inability to dress up or take a nap after lectures when younger students were entertaining their male guests and late night calls which lasted for long hours and disturbed her sleep. Unlike the other married people (e.g. Koutuma and Maame) in this study, she was financially incapable of renting a private accommodation, and therefore had to cope with these inconveniences. Naana (single and without a child) also expressed similar concerns, since for financial reasons, she had to share a private accommodation with her younger brother. Incidentally, she was the only participant who hinted that due to financial constraints, she could not buy educational materials and had to share with her friends.

These findings articulate with those of Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) and Moss (2004) in the UK that for economically disadvantaged women students, poverty and poor accommodation shape the amount of space and time available for studies whereas in the case of more economically advantaged students, money becomes the power (i.e. renting private accommodation and paying for childcare) to negotiate extra space and time for studies.

6.5 Navigating through HE: Agency and Structures

Morley et al. (2006) describe the ability to personally negotiate and navigate one's way around discriminatory structures and cultural barriers as the use of agency. Agency is also defined as the ability to freely and autonomously initiate action while engaging or resisting imperial power. It is independent action (i.e. the actor acting rather than acted on) as a result of escaping effects of the forces that construct them (Britton and Baxter, 1999; Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2000).

In Morley and Lussier's (2009) study of the intersection of gender and poverty in Ghana, the narratives of many students from deprived socio-economic (rural) backgrounds indicated that they were constantly navigating material and historical conditions for agency throughout their lives. As there are no standard ways of addressing challenges in any given situation (Sandoval, 1991), because individuals differ in their social status and other factors, there are likely to be differences in experiences and attitudes towards challenges. Data from this study show the different ways in which some women navigate their way round cultural and economic barriers in order to access and participate in higher education.

All the stories in this study show how women navigate around their culturally assigned roles of home-makers and (child) carers in order to participate in HE. Almost all the participants had initiated arrangements in their homes (e.g. hiring house helps) to enable them participate in HE as full time students. In Maame's case however, due to her husband's unwillingness to take custody of their children, she had to live in a rented accommodation on campus with her two children, and pay for child care services during her lecture sessions. Although some of the participants felt it a duty to juggle domestic care with academic work, it became evident that the domestic assistance they had employed contributed to their meaningful participation in HE.

With regard to their socio-economic status, some of the participants had to break the barrier of poverty in order to access and participate in HE, and that also explained their determination to succeed in HE at all cost in order to acquire a new social status. Maame recounted the effects of poverty she experienced during her early schooling in the rural area (e.g. walking two kilometres to school, going to school without money or food, poor academic performance, etc.) and Naana remembered the suffering in her home as a result of financial need:

Wherever I went I looked at my back, where I came from, my mother was really suffering, she was trying her best to take care of us, even though my father was supporting her you could see that it wasn't enough.

The women students in this study who had spouses did not appear to have financial difficulties, as some indicated that in addition to their salaries, they were supported by their spouses in HE. The stories of the lone mothers were however different. When their marriages dissolved, Akua and Krambaa decided to engage in income-generating activities, and that, enabled them to cater for their children and other extended family members, and to support themselves through HE. Krambaa's financial independence is deduced from her statement that *I pay my own school fees, I pay my son's school fees*. These findings seem to suggest that in Ghana, mature women students who are married seem to be financially dependent on their spouses whereas in the case of single mothers, it is the absence of financial support from husbands that make them realize their ability to freely and autonomously initiate action regarding their economic status.

Academic Challenges: Strategies for Coping

Some studies conducted in the European context have indicated that some mature students are unable to cope academically in HE and some actually drop out voluntarily or get sacked for non-performance (Nisbet and Welsh, 1972; Woodley et al., 1987; Wilson, 1997). In this study, some of the participants admitted that as a result of the challenges expressed above, at one time in HE, they had considered quitting. During her first year, Naana felt like quitting due to academic challenges, which was compounded by her boyfriend's pressure that she quitted. And while considering quitting, Koutuma had thought: *Is it not better you drop out than the school to sack you?* Some however (like Akua), had never felt like quitting, in spite of the challenges.

The different and multiple identities of the women students translate into different attitudes towards HE completion or dropping out, and different strategies adopted in order to progress through HE. Naana and Koutuma's stories are worth mentioning. They had not initially considered HE as an option, and since friends and husband (respectively) influenced them to enter, they were quick to consider dropping out when they encountered challenges with their academic work. Naana sought

academic help from a female friend who was her senior on the same course, who encouraged her, gave her books and explained difficult concepts to her. Koutuma also mentioned her husband as the first and the most important reason for staying on in HE.

The kind of socialisation processes and life experiences the participants have had can explain their attitude towards the challenges they encountered in HE. Maame lived with her two children of ages 2 and 4 in a rented accommodation near the university, and paid someone to take care of them while she went for lectures. Combining HE with child care, she said:

It's not easy but I have to manage it. Actually I have been brought up working, working, working so I don't even feel it.

In such circumstances, she had to make use of every available opportunity for private studies:

The little time that I have to study I make sure I get everything. I know that I have very little time so I study all that I need to study. So I lock myself up and I study. When they (her children) go to school and I don't have anything doing, I make good use of the day.

Irrespective of their individual circumstances, all the participants hinted that strategizing was important in their private studies. This is because they cannot assimilate learning as quickly as younger students:

Something that will take you two days to read they can take one day to read, and you struggle with it a little.

Apart from Maame's strategy of making use of every available opportunity to study, often under cover, others involved paying maximum attention at lectures and grasping concepts once and for all:

You have to prepare yourself psychologically that you are now a student. You listen and listen good, you try and, because you have to make the mark, so you sit up.

The participants' varied job experiences also facilitated or impeded their academic achievements differently. There were indications that being a teacher for example, gives you an advantage over others because of the nature of the job. Talking about academic challenges in HE, with a gap of six years before returning to study, Maame found academic life in HE normal because to her,

once you are a teacher you always read so I do not see the difference, staying at home and coming to the university.

In group work, her lecturer made her the leader because she is a teacher. Similarly, Adjoa Kom compared herself with other mature students who were not teachers and said that she was better than most of them because she is a teacher with an experience of always reading before going to teach. In this study, some participants with different job experiences other than teaching found academic work more challenging. Similarly, Maimuna (also a teacher) said about her HE academic work in relation to her previous academic knowledge and teaching job that it is *the old thing that you are reading*, so though it was not easy, it was manageable.

On the contrary, Koutuma who was also a teacher found academic work more challenging. Though from an advantaged socio-economic background and with positive image of previous schooling, it appears that some other circumstances are to blame for her challenges with HE life: probably her 14 years' interval before returning to study, the seeming lack of struggle in her life history and the fact that she did not enter HE on her accord.

The stories in this section have demonstrated that the kind of strategies and choices individuals make are determined by certain social factors including their socio-economic status (Moreau and Leathwood, 2006) and lived experiences. Secondly, there is indication that for mature women students to cope with academic work in HE and succeed, regular attendance at lectures is crucial because apparently, even when they are regular, they may not understand everything, so missing lectures would make academic work more problematic. Thirdly, it is important to make use of every given opportunity for private or group study. For some, the academic

assistance they obtained from their seniors was most crucial in making a difference in their academic progression. Finally, family members' encouragement served as a strong motivation for persisting in the face of academic difficulties in HE.

6.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter described how the participants' different identities affected their HE experiences. Four factors relating to their HE experiences were discussed, namely (a) Returning to Study as Older Students (b) Socio-cultural Background: Marital Status and Family Life and (c) Socio-economic Status in HE and (d) Navigating through HE: Agency and Structures.

Academic work was found to be difficult for some participants because of the gaps in terms of their knowledge and the unfamiliar courses they had to take, as well as the unfamiliar method of presenting knowledge. For some, the difficulty was further compounded by the fear of failure and dismissal, threats and intimidation from lecturers. For others, it was because they had to psychologically disconnect from the school context to the home periodically, and to physically attend to domestic matters. However, the kind of socialisation some of them experienced earlier on in their lives (such as being subjected to hard work), their socio-economic status and learning to live in poverty, and some previous job experiences (such as teaching) were found to positively impact their experiences of academic life in HE.

With regard to family life and HE, this study finds that the socialisation practices that make women carers of the home continue in HE, in spite of the difficulties of returning to study as older women. Some participants received emotional, academic, financial and domestic support from their husbands and other family members. Yet, they felt a sense of guilt about neglecting their families, a situation which compelled some of them to combine HE work with domestic commitments throughout their lives in HE.

The study also finds that mature women students who are married are financially dependent on their spouses whereas in the case of single mothers, it is the absence of financial support from husbands that make them realize their ability to freely and autonomously initiate action regarding their economic status. For economically advantaged women students, whereas money becomes the power to negotiate extra space and time for HE studies, for the economically disadvantaged women students, poverty and poor accommodation are among the factors that shape the amount of space and time available for their studies in HE.

To progress through HE in the face of difficulties, this study finds that mature students place much value on regular attendance at lectures, making use of every given opportunity for private or group study and family members' encouragement, whether they are educated or not.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This research was undertaken as an exploration of the HE experiences of mature undergraduate women in Ghana. It was based on my understanding of the Ghanaian society's strong adherence to cultural practices regarding women's roles as home makers and child carers. It was also based on my assumption that when mature women embark on HE study, their cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, marital status and family lives influence their experiences differently to navigate and negotiate their way through HE.

In the first chapter of this study, the rationale for a study of this nature was established while Chapter 2 described the cultural and socio-economic milieu in which education is delivered in Ghana. In Chapters 3 and 4, the theoretical and methodological frameworks for this study were presented while the last two chapters presented analysis of the life history narratives of the participants. This final chapter concludes the writing of this thesis. It summarises the study, draws conclusions on the study's findings and suggests recommendations for institutional development.

7.2 Summary of the Study

This research on mature women students was conceived from the experiences I encountered as a full time HE practitioner, part-time mature woman doctoral student and a wife and parent. I observed that when mature women embark on HE, their multiple roles and identities affect their academic work. It was therefore my intention to use research findings to point out that in the widening participation debate in Ghana, there is need for understanding the particular and peculiar circumstances and needs of mature women students in HE. This study is based on my understanding of women's culturally assigned roles in the Ghanaian society, and my knowledge of the differences in socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

It assumed that women have individual personal histories and different identities which are formed by cultural and socio-economic (SES) factors. Therefore their experiences of HE will vary.

This study was conceptualised on the basis that in high and low-income countries including Ghana, cultural and socio-economic factors are used to explain how females experience education (Edwards, 1993; Reay, 2003; Stephens, 2000; Dunne & Leach, 2005; Moreau & Leathwood, 2006; Kwapong, 2007; Manuh et al., 2007). I therefore adopted Edwards' (1993) use of cultural factors and her conceptualisation of education and the family as public and private spheres, where men and women appear to be naturally suited, respectively. The assumption is that if a woman adds education to the domestic domain which involves the world of family, home, children and domestic labour, she must devise strategies that would enable her manage the tensions inherent therein in order to progress through HE.

Also, it is based on Reay's (2003) and Moreau and Leathwood's (2006) assertion that socio-economically advantaged students experience HE differently from their disadvantaged counterparts. As such, they strategize differently to progress through HE. This study therefore sought to understand how cultural practices and socio-economic factors shape women's educational identities and influence their successful participation and progression through HE.

Consequently, the study lent itself to the use of the life history narrative approach as a way of understanding how women students' lived experiences influence their HE participation. Data were collected through life history interviews with eight mature women who were carefully selected in order to obtain a variety of experiences in terms of location such as North/South; rural/urban, socio-economic and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Analysis of the data showed that the participants constructed their shifting identities in similar ways with regard to their socialisation, early schooling experiences and

change of location. However, their different identities and experiences were constructed through their socio-cultural backgrounds, marital status and family life and socio-economic status, which were found to influence their HE experiences, as summarised below.

Returning to Study as an Adult

In terms of returning to academic work as older students, some mature women students experienced feelings of loneliness and isolation because they regarded themselves as older and different from the younger students. Again, comments and remarks from younger students made them feel that HE was not meant for their generation. However, others were able to mix with younger students in order to obtain assistance in their academic work, which, paid off in better academic performance.

Academic work was difficult for some women students because of the gaps in terms of their knowledge, the unfamiliar courses they had to take and the unfamiliar method of presenting knowledge. The difficulty was further compounded by the fear of failure and dismissal, threats and intimidation from lecturers, and the fact that they had to psychologically disconnect from the school context to the home periodically, and to physically attend to domestic matters. To progress through HE in the face of difficulties, this study found that depending on the social factors, mature students devised varied strategies in HE such as placing much value on regular attendance at lectures, making use of every given opportunity for private or group study and family members' encouragement, whether they were educated or not.

Marital Status and Family Life

With regard to family life and HE, this study finds that the socialisation practices that make women carers of the home continue in HE, in spite of the difficulties of returning to study as older women. Although some of them received emotional, academic and financial support from their husbands and other family members, they

felt that their husbands, family members and carers could not take full charge of the domestic responsibilities as they (the participants) would have done. Such situations compelled some of them to combine HE work with domestic commitments throughout their lives in HE. There were therefore tensions in choosing between academic work and family members (especially children) in the event of ailment, and the feeling of guilt associated with one's inability to give full attention to their children was evident.

Within the group of married students, those whose children were older and those without children experienced the least tension. Consequently, they could devote more time to their academic work than those who had younger children. However, the participants without the least burden from family and childcare appeared to be the least affected by academic challenges and also felt the most like quitting. On the other hand, those with more family responsibilities were resilient in the face of challenges, as though the family burden had toughened them for any eventuality. Irrespective of their circumstances, all the participants adopted strategies that would improve their academic work, such as making use of every available time for private studies while combining HE with childcare, mixing with younger students to seek assistance and forming study groups with colleague mature women.

Socio-economic Status and HE Participation

The participants' different socio-economic backgrounds translated into different home and living conditions which placed some of them at advantageous positions. For those whose lives were framed by poverty, the effects of poverty like going to the farm, walking long distances to school and back daily to continue with domestic chores, experiencing economic hardships, helped to build resilience, made them determined to break the cycle of poverty (Morley et al., 2010) and thus, helped them to manage difficulties in HE. Their socio-economic status and learning to live in poverty, and some previous job experiences (such as teaching) were found to positively impact their experiences of academic life in HE. In the case of the socially advantaged, on the other hand, the signals their parents gave earlier on in their lives

about the level of education they desired for them appeared to spur them on in their academic pursuits, as it were, to accomplish their parents' unfulfilled agenda. Lastly, the study found that for the economically disadvantaged women students, poverty and poor accommodation are among the factors that shape the amount of space and time available for their studies in HE while for the economically advantaged, money becomes the power to negotiate extra space and time for HE studies.

Agency

It was found that different socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions influenced the participants' different levels of agency. Determination to persist and succeed in the face of difficulties in HE was sometimes attributable to lack and deficit experienced earlier as a result of socio-economic disadvantage and the aim to break the cycle of poverty. For others with advantaged backgrounds, it was in order to sustain and perpetuate the cycle of socio-economic advantage. Thus, determination was partly responsible for making them negotiate and navigate their way through HE the way they did, be it single-handedly or with family support.

Differences in motives for coming to HE translated into differences in their determination to persist in the face of difficulties. For those who appeared to be 'pushed' into HE by their friends and spouses, in the face of challenging situations, the desire to quit seemed stronger than those who entered HE on their own initiative. Moreover, the mature women students who are married appeared to be financially dependent on their spouses whereas in the case of single mothers, it was the absence of financial support from husbands that made them realize their ability to freely and autonomously initiate action regarding their economic status.

Limitations of the Study

I acknowledge the limitations of this study in the following areas: (1) the relatively small sample (eight) of mature women, (2) the use of only one public university and (3) the use of only two academic departments. As such, the findings may be difficult to generalize to the population of mature women students in all HEIs in Ghana. In

this case, it would have been useful to include more participants from other departments, especially those which are known to be heavily male-dominated. This would have provided a wider picture of how mature women fare in HE disciplines, which are male-dominated and known to be difficult even for younger students without family commitments.

Again, including mature women in private universities would probably have given a different picture of their demographic data and the events that construct their identities, given the assumption that socio-economically advantaged students are known to access private universities. This is because the fees of private universities are higher than that of public universities, and the academic programmes (e.g. Business programmes) are ones that attract a particular sector of the labour market. Further research that would capture a larger group in these aforementioned areas is therefore important in order to generalise findings to a larger population and formulate policies that would be applicable to other HEIs.

7.3 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to describe how mature women students experience HE in Ghana and the strategies they adopt to progress through it. As part of the study's main intention, the life history narrative data showed that women students share certain similar identities, and for this reason HE practitioners might consider them as similar and treat them as such. The findings suggest that there is no one identity of mature women students, and that women students vary in terms of their personal characteristics, socio-economic backgrounds and family and domestic situation which influence their HE experiences differently.

Firstly, different levels of difficulty in women students' academic work in HE is attributable to the differences in the length of break in their academic lives, which results into knowledge deficits. Again, late entry into HE after a long break makes some women students find some HE courses and teaching methods unfamiliar. It is important to note that irrespective of the participants' social characteristics, they all

experienced challenges with HE academic work. These challenges are the result of (a) lack of institutional structures to offer academic and social support services, (b) the absence of participatory pedagogical approaches that connect learners' experiences and (c) feelings of frustration resulting from failure, threats and intimidation from lecturers. In such cases, depending on the social capital that brings them into HE, some may have a greater likelihood to drop out than others.

Secondly, in view of women's domestic roles, women students in HE normally initiate living arrangements such as employing the services of house helps or other family members to be able to participate in HE as full time students. These arrangements may vary, depending on the women's marital status and economic power. The findings indicate that the fact that these arrangements are in place does not mean that women students' HE life is devoid of tensions and conflicts between domestic responsibilities and academic work. In this respect, women students whose children are older and therefore independent, and those without children, are able to devote more time to their academic work than those with younger children at home or on campus. As such, to progress through HE successfully, different strategies are adopted, such as regular attendance and active participation in lectures, good use of every given opportunity for individual or group study, and initiation of interactions with younger students in order to obtain assistance in academic work. A particular strategy to be adopted depends on the participant's social characteristics.

Lastly, among the women students in this study, agency is more observable in the lives of single and unmarried women than in married women, since it was found that married women were dependent on their spouses' financial and moral support whereas in the case of single mothers, it was the absence of financial support from husbands that made them realize their ability to freely and autonomously initiate action regarding their economic status.

7.4 Contribution to the Field

This study makes a contribution to the field of research on the subject of women's participation in HE in Ghana in three ways: the substantive, theoretical and methodological.

Substantive issues

In view of the non-availability of research on Ghanaian women students' participation and experiences in full-time HE, this study becomes one of the pioneering works in the subject. Specifically, the contribution that this study makes to the substantive body of knowledge relates to the subject of male dominance in the private and public sphere and the way women navigate their way round that in order to obtain higher academic credentials. In this connection, one point is worth noting. That is, this study provides evidence to show that in the Ghanaian context, some men encourage their wives to obtain HE, contrary to what is known about the Ghanaian culture of male dominance and female subordination and relegation to the private sphere. This is drawn from the fact that the majority (5 out of 8) of the participants in this study are married, and that their husbands consented to their pursuit of HE and supported in various ways through it.

The study therefore shows that the concept of patriarchy and female subordination that have been used to explain women's under representation and participation in education generally and HE in particular may not be applicable to some contexts of the Ghanaian society. This is probably in the light of the present economic decline in Ghana which makes it difficult for the man's income alone to support the family, and for this reason there is a change in the attitude of men towards women's higher education, so that they can also earn enough money to supplement the family income.

Theoretical Issues

At the onset of this study, research on women's experiences in full-time HE in Ghana was not available to this study. However, discourses on female education in

the Ghanaian context were found to be focused on the liberal and radical feminisms (Rogers, 1980; Stromquist, 1998; Lithur, 2004; Morley et al., 2006) and post-colonial theories with its patriarchal system (Dei, 2004; Cornwall, 2005) which point out women's invisibility and the victimising effect of colonialism/post-colonialism. In such discourses, women and girls are homogenized and accorded the same identity, as though their experiences as a minority group in education should be understood to be similar.

This study therefore employed understandings of cultural norms and socio-economic discourse to explore the multiple identities of mature women in Ghanaian HE and how they construct their experiences through their stories of HE life. By adopting these concepts, the study makes a contribution to the micro domestic literature in the field, by adding to the discourse on the system of patriarchy that legitimates women's subordinate position. In this sense, it becomes one of the few studies conducted by an insider-practitioner (a Ghanaian HE practitioner resident in Ghana) that portray that with regard to women's HE pursuit in recent times, the patriarchal system of male domination in the family may not always work against them.

Secondly, this study provides some research information on the demography of mature women in public HE in Ghana, the different life events which constrained their HE entry earlier on in their lives and how their different and multiple identities construct different HE experiences, which is currently not available in the HEI under study. Lastly, this study contextualizes the subject of mature women's studies and contributes to the macro literature, most of which are conducted in high-income countries and multi-racial contexts.

Methodological Issues

The micro domestic literature on the subject of mature women's HE experiences is non-available to this study and seems to be non-existent, so is research on people's lives through the life history narrative. Most Ghanaian scholars prefer the use of the quantitative method and are more familiar with the approach, apparently because of

its relative ease and speed, its clarity, precision and standardisation (Ernest, 1994). Moreover, since the use of the life history approach is relatively new in social science research (Bryman, 2004), it has not been used very much with researchers in developing countries. Therefore, irrespective of their subjects of investigation, most Ghanaian researchers employ quantitative research methodology.

This study made a case for the use of the qualitative research paradigm and the life history narrative approach as a single method sufficient to gain a meaningful understanding of the participants' lives (McNeill and Chapman, 2005) and the most suited to researching women's lives. This is because the approach helps to understand people's opinion, offers explanation and understanding of what is unique and particular to individuals and allows those who are studied to speak for themselves as subjects rather than being objectified through the research process (Finch, 1987; Kelly et al., 1994; Letherby, 2003; McNeill and Chapman, 2005).

Through using this approach, it has been possible to access the disaggregated data of some of the mature women in HE, and to understand the life events and processes that have shaped their identities, as coming from the participants themselves. Given the above scenario, this thesis contributes to the methodological literature on qualitative research that would serve as a reference material in the Ghanaian research arena.

7.5 Recommendations

Various national and institutional strategies have been implemented to widen HE access and participation to groups of people who were previously excluded, including women. Based on the findings presented above, a number of proposals are suggested in this section in respect of socialisation and early educational experiences and mature women's experiences of higher education.

Socialisation and Early Educational Experiences

This study and the ESRC/DFID research project on which this is based (Morley et al., 2010) have portrayed that socialisation processes and early educational experiences have repercussions on women's participation and experiences in HE. As such, proposals that would address issues relating to women's participation in HE should necessarily touch on the two areas aforementioned, as is discussed below.

In this study, it has been demonstrated that the socialisation processes girls and women go through have the tendency of hampering their pursuit of HE. This implies the need to step up campaigns and activities on girl-child and women's education. It appears that the issue of female education is an international and national initiative whose importance has not transcended the local populace. It is therefore imperative that activities that are meant to encourage females' education are carefully structured and presented to areas where they are needed most, especially in areas where cultural practices that hinder females' education are deeply rooted.

It is noted that inequalities exist between the north and south of the country and among rural and urban dwellers in the provision of educational resources and facilities and modelling roles, which affect the attractiveness of education in the disadvantaged areas and the quality of education delivery. These inequalities perpetuate the cycle of poverty and social injustice in that it hampers the education of the citizenry and limits the opportunities of those who are potentially capable of high academic pursuits. The government's intervention in the form of fee-free education, school feeding programme and the establishment of model secondary schools are the right steps to widen educational access to the underprivileged.

However, it appears that the teacher's role, which is found to be crucial in making meaningful educational access available, and for retaining disadvantaged students, is underestimated. In Ghana, many teachers enter into the teaching profession with low academic qualifications, as a last resort, and are unmotivated to remain. Moreover, there are no arrangements such as institutionalised structures of continuing

professional development and enhanced conditions of service to build their capacity and retain them in the profession. It is therefore important that while making education accessible and attractive to excluded groups, the teacher factor is brought into the equation to make the interventions sustainable, as this study has shown that the teacher factor was prominent in the participants' narratives about their early school experiences.

Most importantly, there is an increase in the number of basic and secondary school participants from all locations of the country, both developed and undeveloped, as a result of the fee-free basic education. These students will subsequently access HE to add to the number of other minority groups that are accessing HE. From the stories of the participants in this study, it appears that HE institutions have not prepared for the absorption of these many different constituents of HE. The discussion below presents proposals for managing minority students' HE participation generally and mature women's experiences of HE particularly.

Mature Women's Experiences of Higher Education

Some of the mature students in this study felt that they had weak knowledge base, as a result of returning to education after many years of break, the unfamiliar courses and teaching methods that they have to experience. Given this situation, it is important that HE institutions become conscious of the different kinds of cultural capital (such as knowledge, dispositions and attitudes) that non-traditional students (like mature women) bring with them into HE (Tett, 2000; Grace & Gouthro, 2000). Moreover, in today's heterogeneous HE context, research evidence from some high-income countries make a case for the use of evidence-informed pedagogic principles, which include taking account of the personal and cultural experiences of learners and promoting their active engagement in the teaching and learning process (TLRP, 2008).

With regard to feminist pedagogies, Grace and Gouthro (2000) also suggest that since knowledge production requires a collaborative effort from both teacher and

learner, there is need to move away from traditional lecture methods to participatory pedagogical approaches that also connect women's lived experiences. The role of the university teacher is implied, and it is recommended that s/he creates a teacher-learner interaction that highlights co-operation, collaboration and sharing. In this way, it is expected that classrooms will become sites of participatory learning rather than places where learners are passive recipients of knowledge, which is disconnected from their experience.

The mature students' stories of struggle with adjustment in the first semester of HE work and their entire lives in HE suggest the need for instituting and strengthening certain academic and social support structures like tutorial and counselling sessions for mature students on first entry into HE and in the course of their HE studies. These should be made available in brochures and during orientation programmes in HE. It is also important that HE institutions prepare and regularly retrain practitioners to be able to recognise difference among the current heterogeneous group of HE participants and show sensitivity and responsiveness to their diverse learning needs. It must be recognised for example that some women students perform what Grace and Gouthro (2000) call mothering work, wife work and house work in addition to their academic work. In the light of the above, and in consonance with what Grace and Gouthro find in their review of the literature on feminist pedagogies, it is important that HE practitioners

- a. value mother work,
- b. acknowledge that women have other obligations aside their academic work,
- c. provide reasonable measure of flexibility for their academic work and
- d. provide academic and social counselling support services.

When these measures are taken, I believe that they will help to lessen the stories of struggle that mark many women's HE experiences, help women to mediate the demands from the private and public sphere and to progress through HE more easily.

In the UK, Wilson (1997) revealed that there is a system of academic parenting in one public university which assigns academic parents to all students (who wish for it) in their first year, to make the transition easier and offer advice and information. The study found that those who experienced this system found it very beneficial, particularly as the system provided information on where and how to obtain assistance in matters that were beyond their ‘mothers’. Such a practice could be modified and made suitable for the Ghanaian context, given that in Wilson’s study, most mature students complained that their ‘mothers’ were a lot younger, and that they (the mature students) could even advice their ‘mothers’. Equally important is the formation of ‘Mature Students’ Association’. Mature women find such an association beneficial because it helps them to meet with other mature students, provides information and gives them the platform to discuss problems with people of the same age (Wilson, 1997).

Finally, it must be reiterated that while widening participation to previously excluded groups such as mature women, it is of utmost importance also to pay attention to their heterogeneity and show sensitivity and responsiveness to their diverse learning needs. It is therefore crucial that HE institutions formulate policies which would incorporate all the issues that concern mature students’ HE life such as academic support structures, social matters (e.g. accommodation) and how/where to obtain financial assistance, if any. When the above proposals are considered and addressed, the WP strategy would not only be viewed as a tool for HE commercialisation or for complying with international and national policies for the purpose of HE inclusion, but as a vehicle for realising academic potential, irrespective of socio-economic, socio-cultural and marital status.

References

- Adu-Yeboah, C. & Nti, K. S. (2007), Higher Education for Practising Teachers: Participants' views about their Chosen Route, *Journal of Educational Research and Policies*, Vol. 2 (2), 95-102.
- Akyeampong, A. K. (2004), Aid for Self-help Effort: A Sustainable Alternative Route to Basic Education in Ghana, *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 7 (1), pp. 41-52.
- Akyeampong, K., Djangmah, J., Oduro, A. & Seidu, A. (2007), *Access to Basic Education in Ghana: The Evidence and the Issues*, CREATE Country Analytic Report, 2007, Sussex, CREATE.
- Ampiah, J. G. & Adu-Yeboah, C. (2009), Mapping the Incidence of School Dropouts: A Case Study of Communities in Northern Ghana, *Comparative Education*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 219-232.
- Antwi, M. K. (1992), *Education, Society and Development in Ghana*, (Accra, Unimax Publishers Ltd).
- Ardayfio-Schandorf, E. (1994), *Family and Development in Ghana*, (Accra, Ghana Universities Press).
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. & Tiffin, H. (2000), *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, (London, Routledge).
- Association of African Universities Working Group on Higher Education (AAU), (2004), *Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa with Specific Reference to Universities*, (Accra, Ghana).
- Bar-On, D. & Gilad, N. (1994), To Rebuild Life: A Narrative Analysis of Three Generations of an Israeli Holocaust Survivor's Family, in, A. Lieblich and R. Josselson (Eds.), *Exploring Identity and Gender: The Narrative Study of Lives*, vol. 2, (Thousand Oaks, Sage).
- Baxter, A. & Britton, C. (2001), 'Risk, Identity and Change: Becoming a Mature Student', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11, 1, pp. 87-104.
- Bell, J. (2006), *Doing your Research Project*, (5th Edition), (Berkshire, Open University Press).

- Berry, R. S. Y. (1998), Conducting a Piece of Educational Research: Choice of Topic, Adoption of Suitable Research Methodology, and Narrowing Down of Investigative Focus, Paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, Slovenia, 1998.
- Blickenstaff, J. C. (2005), 'Women and Science Careers: Leaky Pipeline or Gender Filter?' *Gender and Education*, 17:4, 369 – 386.
- Boohene, R. A., Kotey, B. & Folker, C. A. (2005), Explaining Gender Differences in Performance among Small and Medium Enterprise Owners in Ghana, paper presented at the World Conference of the International Council of Small Business, June, Washington DC, USA.
- Boohene, R. A. (2006), *Tracking the Pathways: Explaining Gender Differences in Performance among Small Business Owners in a Transition Economy*, an unpublished Doctoral thesis submitted to the University of New England, Australia.
- Bolam, H. & Dodgson, R. (2003), Retaining and Supporting Mature Students in Higher Education, *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, Volume 8, No. 2, pp. 179-194.
- Bortey, C. A. & Dodoo, F. (n.d.), *Adolescent Attitudes Regarding Gender Roles in Ghana*, accessed on 3rd February 2007, Available from <http://www.forms.gradsch.psu.edu/equity/sroppapers/204/BorteyChristianaA.pdf>.
- Boserup, E. (1970), *Women's Role in Economic Development*, (New York, St. Martin's Press).
- Britton, C. & Baxter, A. (1999), 'Becoming a Mature Student: Gendered Narratives of the Self', *Gender and Education*, 11, 2, pp. 179-193.
- Bryman, A. (2004), *Social Research Methods*, (2nd Edition), (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Burr, V. (1998), *Gender and Social Psychology*, (London, Routledge).
- Casely-Hayford, L. (2002), Education, Culture and Development in Northern Ghana: Micro Realities and Macro Context: Implications for Policy and Practice, unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Sussex.

- CEDAW, (2005), Combined Third, Fourth and Fifth Reports on Ghana, United Nations.
- Charles, M. & Bradley, K. (2002), Equal but Separate? A Cross-National Study of Sex Segregation in Higher Education, *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 67, No. 4, pp. 573-599.
- Cobbold, C. (2006), Policy and Practice of Teacher Retention in Ghana, unpublished Doctoral thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2005), *Research Methods in Education*, (5th Edition), (London, Routledge-Falmer).
- Connell, R. W. (1997), *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press).
- Connelly, F. & Clandinin, D. (1990), Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry, *Educational Researcher*, 19, (5), pp. 2-14.
- Cornwall, A. (2005), Perspectives on Gender in Africa, in, A. Cornwall (Ed.), *Readings in Gender*, (London, The International African Institute).
- Cranny-Francis, A., Waring, W., Stavropoulos, P. & Kirkby, J. (2003), *Gender Studies: Terms and Debates*, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan).
- Creswell, J. W. (2003), *Research Design*, (2nd Edition), (California, Sage Publications).
- Daniel, G. F. (1996), *The Universities in Ghana*, The Commonwealth Universities Year Book 1997-1998, Vol. 1, pp. 649-656.
- David, M. E. (2009), Social Diversity and Democracy in Higher Education in the 21st Century: Towards a Feminist Critique, *Higher Education Policy*, 22, pp. 61-79.
- David, M., Bathmaker, A.-M., Black, L., Cooke, S., Crozier, G., Davis, P., Ertl, H., Fuller, A., Gallacher, J., Hayward, G., Heath, S., Hernandez-Martinez, P., Hockings, C., Parry, G., Reay, D., Smith, D., Vignoles, A., Wake, G. & Williams, J. (2009), *Improving Learning by Widening Participation to Higher Education*, (London, Routledge).

- Dei, J. S. (2004), Dealing with Difference: Ethnicity and Gender in the Context of Schooling in Ghana, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 24, pp. 343–359.
- Dei, G. J. S. (2005), 'Social Difference and the Politics of Schooling in Africa: a Ghanaian Case Study', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education*, 35, 3, pp. 227 – 245.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1998), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*, (London, Sage).
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000), Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research, in, N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2nd Edition), pp. 1-32, (Thousand Oaks, Sage).
- Dolphyne, F. A. (1991), *The Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective*, (Accra, Ghana Universities Press).
- Drake, P. (2006), Working for Learning: A Case of Mathematics for Teaching, an EdD thesis submitted to the University of Sussex.
- Dunne, M. & Leach, F. (2005), *Gendered School Experiences: The Impact on Retention and Achievement in Botswana and Ghana*, (London, DFID).
- Dunne, M., Pryor, J. & Yates, P. (2005), *Becoming a Researcher: A Companion to the Research Process*, (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- Dyhouse, C. (2002), Graduates, Mothers and Graduate Mothers: Family Investment in Higher Education in Twentieth-century England, *Gender and Education*, 14, (4), pp. 325-336.
- Edwards, R. (1993), *Mature Women Students: Separating or Connecting Family and Education*, (London, Taylor and Francis).
- Effah, P. (2003), Ghana, Accessed on 20th September 2007, Available on <http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/IntHigherEdFinance/CountryProfiles/Africa/Ghana.pdf>.
- Ephson, I. S. (1969), *Gallery of Gold Coast Celebrities*, (Accra, Ghana, Illen Publications Limited).

- Ernest, P. (1994), *An Introduction to Research Methodology and Paradigms*, *Educational Research Monograph Series*, (Exeter, University of Exeter Press).
- Eustace, R. (1992), United Kingdom, in, B. R. Clark & G. Neave (Eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Higher Education*, Vol. 1, pp. 760-777, (Oxford, Pergamon).
- Finch, J. (1987), 'It's Great to Have Someone to Talk to': The Ethics and Politics of Interviewing Women, in, C. Bell and H. Roberts, (Eds.), *Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice*, pp. 70-87, (New York, Routledge).
- Flick, U. (2002), *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, (London, Sage.)
- Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), (2001), Girls' Education and Poverty Eradication: FAWE's Response, FAWE Secretariat, presented at the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 10-20 May 2001, Brussels, Belgium.
- Foucault, M. (1980), Truth and Power, in, C. Gordon, (Ed.), *Power/Knowledge*, (Brighton, Harvester).
- Fraser, N. (1997), *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Post-socialist' Condition*, (New York, Routledge).
- Gee, J. P. (2000), Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research in Education, *Review of Research in Education*, Vol. 25, pp. 99-125.
- Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS), (2000), (Accra, Statistical Service).
- Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), (2001), *National Population and Housing Census*, (Accra, Ghana Statistical Service).
- Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS), (2003), Report of the Fifth Round, (Accra, Ghana Statistical Service).
- Gill, S. R. (2005), Learning Across Cultures: An Ethnographic and Narrative Study of Postgraduate Overseas Chinese Students' Intercultural Learning, Social Interaction, Self Reflection and Meaning Making at a British University, a DPhil thesis submitted to the University of Sussex.
- Goodson, I. & Sikes, P. (2008), *Life History Research in Educational Settings*, (Maidenhead, Open University Press).

- Government of Ghana, (2007), Government White Paper on the Education Review Committee, Basic Education in Ghana in the Post-Reform Period, available on <http://www.cepa.org.gh/researchpapers/BASIC>, accessed on 10th January 2010.
- Grace, A. P. & Gouthro, P. A. (2000), 'Using Models of Feminist Pedagogies to Think About Issues and Directions in Graduate Education for Women Students', *Studies in Continuing Education*, 22:1, 5 — 28.
- Gyekye, K. (2003), *African Cultural Values*, (Accra, Sankofa Publishing).
- Hagan, G. P. (2004), Gender: Evolving Roles and Perceptions, Ghana Association of Arts and Sciences, Proceedings 2004, pp. 47-62, (Accra, Black Mask Ltd).
- Hannum, E. & Buchmann, C. (2004), Global Educational Expansion and Socio-Economic Development: An Assessment of Findings from the Social Sciences, *World Development*, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 333-354.
- Hatch, J. A. & Wisniewski, R. (1995), *Life History and Narrative*, (Lewes, Falmer Press).
- Hooks, b. (1994a), *Teaching to transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, (New York, Routledge).
- Humphreys, S. (2005), Schooling and Identity: Gender Relations and Classroom Discourse in Selected Junior Secondary Schools in Botswana, a DPhil thesis submitted to the University of Sussex.
- Hunt, N. (1990), Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa, in, J. O'Barr, D. Pope and M. Wyer (Eds.), *Ties that Bind: Essays on Mothering and Patriarchy*, pp. 149-176, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press).
- Hyde, K. A. (1993), Women's Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, in M. A. H. & E. M. King, (Eds.), *Women's Education in Developing countries*, pp. 100-135, (London, Macmillan).
- Jones, L. & Smart, T. (2005), Confidence and Mathematics: A Gender Issue? *Gender and Education*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 157 – 166.
- Kelly, L., Burton, S. & Regan, L. (1994), Researching Women's Lives or Studying Women's Oppression? Reflections on what Constitutes Feminist Research,

- in, M. Maynard and J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, (London, Taylor and Francis).
- Kwapong, O. A. T. F. (2007), Widening Access to Tertiary Education for Women in Ghana Through Distance Education, *Turkish online Journal of Distance Education*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 1-18.
- Lawler, S. (2002), Narrative in Social Research, in, Tim May (Ed.), *Qualitative Research in Action*, (London, Sage).
- Leathwood, C. & O'Connell, P. (2003), 'It's a Struggle': The Construction of the 'New Student' in Higher Education, *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 18, No. 6, pp. 597-615.
- Letherby, G. (2003), *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*, (Buckingham, Open University Press).
- Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. & Zilber, T. (1998), *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis and Interpretation*, Applied Social Research Methods Series, Vol. 47, (Thousand Oaks, C. A., Sage).
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (2003), Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions and Emerging Confluences, in, N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*, (2nd edition), pp. 253-291, (Thousand Oaks, Sage).
- Lithur, N. O. (2004), Gender, Economic and Political Power: Assessing Gender and Political Power in Ghana, Ghana Association of Arts and Sciences, Proceedings 2004, pp. 63-86, (Accra, Black Mask Ltd).
- Macdonald, C. & Stratta, E. (1998), Academic Work, Gender and Subjectivity: Mature non-standard Entrants in Higher Education, *Studies in the Education of Adults*, Vol. 30, pp. 67-79.
- Macdonald, C. & Stratta, E. (2001), 'From Access to Widening Participation: Responses to the Changing Population in Higher Education in the UK', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 25, 2, pp. 249-258.
- Maguire, M. (1996), In the Prime of their Lives? Older Women in Higher Education, in, L. Morley and V. Walsh (Eds.), *Breaking Boundaries: Women in Higher Education*, (London, Taylor & Francis Ltd).

- Mannathoko, C. (2008), Promoting Education Quality through Gender-Friendly Schools, in, M. Tembon and L. Fort (Eds.), *Girls' Education in the 21st Century: Gender Equality, Empowerment and Economic Growth*, pp. 127-142, (Washington DC, The World Bank).
- Manuh, T. (2004), Gender and Contemporary Challenges in Ghana, in *Gender: Evolving Roles and Perceptions*, Ghana Association of Arts and Sciences, Proceedings 2004, p. 109-137, (Accra, Black Mast Ltd).
- Manuh, T., Gariba, S. & Budu, J. (2007), *Change & Transformation in Ghana's Publicly Funded Universities: A Study of Experiences, Lessons & Opportunities*, (Oxford, James Currey).
- McNeill, P. & Chapman, S. (2005), *Research Methods*, (3rd edition), (New York, Routledge).
- Mendick, H. (2005), 'A beautiful Myth? The Gendering of Being/Doing 'Good at Maths'', *Gender and Education*, 17, 2, pp. 203-219.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998), *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass).
- Middlehurst, R. (2001), University Challenges: Borderless Higher Education, Today and Tomorrow, *Minerva*, 39 (1), 134.
- Ministry of Education, (2000), Education in Ghana, available on www.media.fastclick.net, downloaded on 24 January 2010.
- Moreau, M.-P. & Leathwood, C. (2006), 'Balancing Paid Work and Studies: Working (-Class) Students in Higher Education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 31, 1, pp. 23-42.
- Morley, L. (2005), Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28, 209-221.
- Morley, L., Gunawardena, C., Kwesiga, J., Lihamba, A., Odejide, A., Shackleton, L. & Sorhaindo, A. (2006), *Gender Equity in Commonwealth Higher Education: An Examination of Sustainable Interventions in Selected Commonwealth Universities*, (London, DFID).

- Morley, L. (2007), The X Factor: Employability, Elitism and Equity in Graduate Recruitment in the 21st Century Society, *Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences*, 2, 2, pp. 191-207.
- Morley, L., Leach, F. & Lugg, R. (2009), Democratising Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Opportunity Structures and Social Inequalities, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29, pp. 56–64.
- Morley, L. & Lugg, R. (2009), Mapping Meritocracy: Intersecting Gender, Poverty and Higher Educational Opportunity Structures, *Higher Education Policy*, 22, pp. 37–60.
- Morley, L. & Lussier, K. (2009), Intersecting Poverty and Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania, *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 71–85.
- Morley, L., Leach, F., Lussier, K., Lihamba, A., Mwaipopo, R., Forde, L. & Egbenya, G. (2010), *Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard*, An ESRC/DFID Poverty Reduction Programme Research Project, Draft Research Report.
- Moss, D. (2004), Creating Space for Learning: Conceptualizing Women and Higher Education Through Space and Time, *Gender and Education*, 16, 3, pp. 283 – 302.
- Mulugeta, E. (2004), Swimming against the Tide: Educational Problems and Coping Strategies of Rural Female Students in Ethiopia, *EASSRR*, vol. XX, no. 2, pp. 71-97.
- National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), (2000), *Statistics on Tertiary Education in Ghana*, (Accra, Ministry of Education).
- National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), (2006b), *Statistical Digest of Universities and IPS 2005/2006*, NCTE Ghana Records, (Accra, Ghana).
- Nfah-Abbenyi, J. (1997), *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*, (Indianapolis, Indianapolis University Press).
- Nisbet, J. & Welsh, J. (1972), The Mature Student, *Educational Research*, 14, 3, pp. 204 — 207.

- Nnaemeka, O. (1998), Introduction: 'Reading the Rainbow', in, O. Nnaemeka (Ed.), *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power: From Africa to the Diaspora*, (Trenton, NJ, Africa World Press).
- Nukunya, G. K. (1992b), *Tradition and Change: The Case of the Family*, (Accra, Ghana Universities Press).
- Okolie, A. C. (2003), Producing Knowledge for Sustainable Development in Africa: Implications for Higher Education, *Higher Education* 46, pp 235-260.
- Patton, M. (1990), *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*, (2nd Edition), (London, Sage).
- Patton, M. Q. (2002), *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, (3rd Edition), (London, Sage).
- Peet, R. & Hartwick, E. (1999), *Theories of Development*, (London, Guilford).
- Peil, M. (1995), Ghanaian Education as seen from an Accra Suburb, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 15, 3, pp. 209-305.
- Prah, M. (2002), Gender Issues in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions: Women Academics and Administrators at Cape Coast University, *Ghana Studies*, Vol. 5, pp. 1-53, available at <http://www.scientific-african.org/scholars/mprah/files>, accessed on 10 January 2010.
- Pryor, J. & Ampiah, J. G. (2003), *Understandings of Education in an African Village: The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies*, (London, DFID).
- Quarcoopome, A. & Ahadzie, W. (1981), *Girls' and Women's Access to Education in Rural Areas*, (Accra, NCWD).
- Reay, D. (2003), 'A Risky Business? Mature Working-class Women Students and Access to Higher Education, *Gender and Education*, 15, 3, pp. 301-317.
- Reay, D., David, M.E. & Ball, S.J. (2005), *Degrees of Choice: Class, Race and Gender*, (Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham Books).
- Republic of Ghana, (2004), Millennium Development Goals, (Accra, Ghana).
- Ressel, L. B., Gualda, D. M. R. & Gonzales, R. M. B. (2002), Focus Group as a Method of Data Collection in Nursing Research: An Experiential Report,

- International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1, 2, Article 5, accessed on 20th July 2006 from <http://www.uaberta.ca/~ijqm>.
- Richardson, J.T.E. & King, E. (1998), Adult Students in Higher Education: Burden or Boon? *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 69, No. 1, pp. 65-88.
- Robertson, S. (2009), 'Market Multilateralism, the World Bank Group and the Asymmetries of Globalising Higher Education: Toward a Critical Political Economy Analysis', a paper presented at the ESRC Seminar Series – 'Imagining Universities of the Future', University of Sussex, 24 February.
- Rodd, M. and Bartholomew, H. (2006), 'Invisible and Special: Young Women's Experiences as Undergraduate Mathematics Students', *Gender and Education*, 18, 1, pp. 35 – 50.
- Rogers, B. (1980), *The Domestication of Woman*, (London, Tavistock Publications).
- Rolleston, C. (2009), The Determination of Exclusion: Evidence from the Ghana Living Standards Surveys 1991-2006, *Comparative Education*, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 197-218.
- Sandoval, C. S. (1991), U.S. World feminist: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World, *Genders*, 10, pp. 1-24.
- Sarup, M. (1996), *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press).
- Schuetze, H. G. & Slowey, M. (2002), Participation and Exclusion: A Comparative Analysis of Non-traditional Students and Lifelong Learners in Higher Education, *Higher Education*, 44, pp. 309–327.
- Sedgwick, R. (2000), *Education in Ghana*, available at <http://www.wes.org/ewenr/00march/practical.htm>, accessed on 2nd January 2009.
- Shabaya, J. & Konadu-Agyemang, K. (2004), Unequal access, Unequal Participation: Some Spatial and Socio-economic Dimensions of the Gender Gap in Education in Africa with Special Reference to Ghana, Zimbabwe and Kenya, *Compare*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 395-424.

- Shacklock, G. & Thorp, L. (2006), Life History and Narrative Approaches, in, B. Somekh and C. Lewin, (Eds.), *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*, (London, Sage).
- Shah, A. (2010), Structural Adjustment—a Major Cause of Poverty, *Global Issues*, Updated: 20 Feb. 2010. Accessed: 03 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.globalissues.org/article/3/structural-adjustment-a-major-cause-of-poverty>>
- Simonite, V. (1997), 'Academic Achievement of Mature Students on a Modular Degree Course', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 21, 2, pp. 241-249.
- Singh, M. (2001), Re-inserting the 'Public Good' into Higher Education Transformation, paper presented at the SRHE Conference Globalisation and Higher Education: Views from the South, March, 2001, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Smithers, A. & Griffin, A. (1986a), The Progress of Mature Students, Joint Matriculation Board, Manchester.
- Stake, R. E. (2005), Qualitative Case Studies, in, N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (3rd Edition), (Thousand Oaks, Sage).
- Stephens, D. (2000), Girls and Basic Education in Ghana: A Cultural Enquiry. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20, pp. 29–47.
- Stromquist, N. (1998), Agents in Women's Education: Some Trends in the African Context, in, M. Bloch, J. A. Beoku-Betts and B. R. Tabachnik, (Eds.), *Women and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Power, Opportunities and Constraints*, (Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers).
- Tamboukou, M., & Ball, S. (2002), Nomadic Subjects: Young Black Women in Britain, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 23, 3, pp. 267-284.
- Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), (2008), Widening Participation in Higher Education: a Commentary by the Teaching and

Learning Research Programme, available on www.tlrp.org, accessed on 22 January 2010.

Teaching and Learning Research Briefing, (2008), Older People and Lifelong Learning: choices and experiences, October 2008, Number 58, pp. 1-4, available on www.tlrp.org, accessed on 22 January 2010.

Tett, L. (2000), 'I'm Working Class and Proud of It' – Gendered Experiences of Non-Traditional Participants in Higher Education', *Gender and Education*, 12, 2, pp. 183 – 194.

The Coalition of Women's Manifesto for Ghana, (2004), *The Women's Manifesto for Ghana*, (Accra, Combent Impressions).

Toure, A., Barry, M. C. & Diallo, P. (2003), The Two Faces of African Feminism, *CODESRIA*, Bulletin No. 1, pp. 2–3.

UNESCO, (1988), *University Rationalization Study*, Volume II, Final Report, available at <http://www.unesco.org/education/eduprog/erd/english/egesa/do>.

UNESCO, (1997a), *Declaration and Action Plan on Higher Education in Africa African Regional Consultation Preparatory to the World Conference on Higher Education*, Dakar, UNESCO.

UNESCO, (1997b), *International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997)*, available at http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/doc/isced_1997.htm, accessed on 24 January 2010.

UNESCO, (1998a), *Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action*, Paris, UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, accessible on HYPERLINK "http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=41978&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html" http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=41978&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html, retrieved on 2nd Aug 07.

UNESCO, (1998b), *Towards an Agenda for Higher Education: Challenges and Tasks for the 21st Century Viewed in the Light of the Regional Conference*, UNESCO, Paris.

UNESCO, (2006), *Global Education Digest 2006: Comparing Education Statistics Across the world*, (Montreal, UNESCO Institute of Statistics).

UNESCO, (2009a), *World Conference on Higher Education: the New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development*, COMMUNIQUE, 5 – 8 July 2009, (Paris, UNESCO).

UNESCO, (2009b), *Global Education Digest 2009: Comparing Education Statistics across the World*, Montreal, UNESCO Institute of Statistics, available at http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/pdf/WCHE_2009/FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE%20WCHE%202009.pdf.

UNICEF, (2007), *At a Glance: Ghana Statistics*. Available at www.unicef.org/infobycountry/, Accessed 12 April 2007.

United Nations, (1995), *Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace*, 4-15 September 1995, Beijing, China, Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing>, Accessed on 19th January 2010.

University of Cape Coast (UCC), (1974), Admission , Entrance Examination File.

University of Cape Coast (UCC), (2006), University of Cape Coast Diary 2006-7.

University of Cape Coast (UCC), (2010), Interview with the Deputy Registrar in Charge of Admissions.

US Library of Congress (2007), *Ghana - The Education System*, <http://www.country-studies.com/Ghana/education.html>, accessed on November 15, 2007.

Weiner, G. (1994), *Feminisms in Education: an Introduction*, (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Wheeler, S. and Birtle, J. (1993), *A Handbook for Personal Tutors*, (Buckingham, Open University Press).

Wilson, F. (1997), The Construction of Paradox?: One Case of Mature Students in Higher Education, *Higher Education Quarterly*, Volume 51, No. 4, pp. 347-366.

- Woodley, A. (1984), Age bias, In, D. Warren Piper, (Ed.), *Is higher education fair?* Guildford, UK, Society for Research into Higher Education, pp. 80-103.
- Woodley, A., Wagner, L., Slowey, M., Hamilton, M. and Fulton, O. (1987), *Choosing to Learn: Adults in Higher Education*, *The Society for Research into Higher Education*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes.
- World Bank (2000), *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise*, Washington, World Bank.
- World Bank (2002), *Constructing knowledge societies*, Washington, DC, World Bank.
- World Bank (2007), World Bank Development Indicators, Available at <http://www.devdata.worldbank.org/edstats>, accessed in September 2007.
- World Bank (2009), *Accelerating Catch-Up: Tertiary Education and Growth in Sub Saharan Africa*, Washington, World Bank.

Appendix A: ISCED Levels of Education

(Source: UNESCO, 1997)

- ❖ Level 5B: short-term, more practical-oriented and occupationally specific. Also in this category are non-university tertiary education programmes leading to the award of diplomas and certificates not equivalent to a first university degree, which are obtained after full-time equivalence of two years of study.
- ❖ Level 5A: reflects theory-based programmes that may enable students to attain entry into advanced research qualifications or professions with high skill requirements, studies last for a minimum of full-time equivalence of three years or more. This category includes university undergraduate degrees and master's programmes, which, if qualifications are met, may lead to Level 6.
- ❖ Level 6: tertiary programmes which lead to the award of an advanced research degree or equivalent qualifications. It represents higher studies of three to five years duration, which persons who already possess a first university degree (or equivalent qualification) can obtain by continuing their studies; for example, the Master's degree or the various types of Doctorates. It typically requires the submission of a thesis or a dissertation.

Appendix B: Summary of Life Histories

Name	Age	Location	Parents' occupation		Parents' education		Identity formation (in order of occurrence)	What changed SES (in order of occurrence)
			Mother	Father	Father	Mother		
Naana	30	urban	trader	lecturer	Uni	Middle Sch.	Socialisation (selling, chores); Education; Change of location; Social capital (male/ female friends' motivation for HE).	Education; Change of location.
Koutuma	43	rural	trader	peasant farmer	none	None	Socialisation (chores); Education; Marriage, Change of location.	Marriage; Education; Change of location.
Maimuna	34	urban	ward assistant	retired teacher	Trg College	Middle Sch.	Mother's support for education; Socialisation/Up-bringing (older siblings doing almost all the chores); Marriage; Change of location.	Education; Marriage; Change of location.
Krambaa	46	urban	trader	prison officer	none	None	Socialisation (chores); Education; Change of location; Job; Business ventures; Social capital;	Job; Private business; Change of location.

Note: Parental level of education and type of occupation were used as indicators of participants' socio-economic status (SES). Three job positions (i.e. lecturer, senior officer in a mining company and agricultural officer) were considered to be high income-earning; peasant farming is the only low income-earning job. The others were considered as average.

Appendix B: Summary of Life Histories Contd.

Name	Age	Location	Parents' occupation		Parents' education		Identity formation (in order of occurrence)	What changed SES (in order of occurrence)
			Mother	Father	Father	Mother		
Akua	40	rural	seamstress	miner	Middle Sch	None	Socialisation (selling, chores); Education; Change of location Job; Marriage; Social capital	Education; Job; Change of location.
Maame	35	rural	Peasant farmer	Peasant farmer	Elem. Sch.	None	Socialisation (farming, chores); Education; Change of location; Marriage; Social capital.	Education; Marriage; Change of location.
Fafa	43	urban	Baking/ sewing	Snr. Agric. officer	Master's degree	None	Education; Unskilled work; Childbirth outside marriage; Teacher training through religious affiliation; Teaching; Marriage in a different culture; Change of location; Social capital.	Education; Job; Marriage; Change of location; Religious affiliation.
Adjoa Kom	42	rural	trader	postmaster	Sec. Sch	Prim. Sch.	Education, Socialisation (trading) Change of location Marriage	Trading Education Marriage Change of location

Note: Parental level of education and type of occupation were used as indicators of participants' socio-economic status (SES). Three job positions (i.e. lecturer, senior officer in a mining company and agricultural officer) were considered to be high income-earning; peasant farming is the only low income-earning job. The others were considered as average.