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**UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

**THE DROP OUT EXPERIENCE OF BASIC SCHOOL CHILDREN IN RURAL  
GHANA: IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION POLICY**

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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

June 2011

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other university degree.

Signature

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ADRA</b>	Adventist Development Relief Agency
<b>BECE</b>	Basic Education Certificate Examination
<b>BEL</b>	Basic Education Level
<b>BSCR</b>	Basic School Completion Rates
<b>BSCR</b>	Basic School Completion Rates
<b>CBRDP</b>	Community Based Rural Development Project
<b>ComSS</b>	Community and School Studies
<b>CREATE</b>	Consortium for Research on Educational Access Transitions and Equity
<b>CRIQPEG</b>	Centre for Research on Improving Quality of Primary Education in Ghana
<b>CSS</b>	Children's School Supplies
<b>CWIQ</b>	Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire
<b>DA</b>	District Assembly
<b>DCE</b>	District Chief Executive
<b>DPCU</b>	District Planning Coordinating Unit
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FABS</b>	Food and Agriculture Budgetary Support
<b>FCUBE</b>	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
<b>GER</b>	Gross Enrolment Ratio
<b>GDHS</b>	Ghana Demographic and Health Survey
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GER</b>	Gross Enrolment Rate
<b>GNCC</b>	Ghana National Commission on Children
<b>GoG</b>	Government of Ghana
<b>GPRS</b>	Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy
<b>GSS,</b>	Ghana Statistical Service
<b>JHS</b>	Junior High School
<b>JSS</b>	Junior Secondary School
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>MEO</b>	Municipal Education Office
<b>MICS</b>	Ghana Multi Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MOESS,</b>	Ministry of Education Science and Sports
<b>MOEYS</b>	Ministry of Education Youth and Sports
<b>MTDP</b>	Medium Term Development Plan
<b>NCRIBE</b>	National Centre for Research into Basic Education
<b>NER</b>	Net Enrolment Rate
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PAV</b>	Poverty Alleviation Fund
<b>PCR</b>	Primary Completion Rate
<b>PTA</b>	Parent Teacher Association
<b>PIIGF</b>	Productivity Improvement and Income Generating Fund
<b>SCGS</b>	School Capitation Grant Scheme
<b>SEL</b>	Secondary Education Level

<b>SFP</b>	School Feeding Programme
<b>SHS</b>	Senior High School
<b>SIF</b>	Social Investment Fund
<b>SMC</b>	School Management Committee
<b>SSSU</b>	State Supply of School Uniforms
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNDFW</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UBE</b>	Universal Basic Education
<b>UPE</b>	Universal Primary Education
<b>WV</b>	World Vision

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This thesis is dedicated to my wife Patricia and our lovely daughters Danielle and Erica who had to endure my long absence while I pursued this research. I am very grateful for their love, patience, support and motivation while I pursued this research.

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<sup>1</sup> CREATE is a DFID-funded research programme consortia exploring issues of educational access, transitions and equity in South Africa, India, Bangladesh and Ghana.

## **ABSTRACT**

One of the key issues surrounding participation in basic schooling is the phenomenon of school dropout. Dropout is known not as a single event but a process that is not well understood. The rationale for this thesis argues that unless the dropout process is understood, there will be no meaningful intervention to curb it. This study therefore explores the dropout experience of basic school children in Ghana. In the context of this exploratory study, informed by the concerns of achieving education for all children by the year 2015, I sought to gain insight into the processes that lead children to drop out of school, how dropout occurs, the manifestation of dropout and the policy implications of dropout for free compulsory universal basic education in Ghana.

The research inquiry is guided by two main research questions: what are the experiences of dropout children? And how is school dropout manifested? Specifically, the research questions sought to explore children's understanding and interpretation of dropout, how dropout occurred; what conditions within and outside school do children regard as responsible for their dropping out, and what the implications of the findings are for universalising universal basic education in Ghana.

In exploring the experience of dropout children, I tracked 18 children who had initial access to basic education but stopped schooling at some point for their stories. I used multiple methods of data collection, viz. in-depth interviews, observations, photographs and school records.

From the data gathered, the following are the main findings of the study:

Concerning the dropout process, children experience dropout first as temporary—sporadic, event and cohort based on their economic survival needs and later permanently—unsettled and settled as a result of becoming significantly overage and the diminished value of schooling.

Conditions both within school – teacher factor, school practices and processes, and outside – poverty, opportunity cost of schooling, networks among children to encourage dropout by pushing and/or pulling children out of school.

As a process, pupils go through three phases – disadvantage, disaffection and disappearance to become school dropouts.

It is argued that, to prevent pupils from dropping out of school and to encourage children who already dropped out to return to school. Education policy would have to focus more on addressing the peculiar needs of children who show signs of entering the dropout process. Also, it is necessary to differentiate out of school children – dropouts from out of school children –never enrolled when designing and implementing interventions for universalising basic education.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction and Background to the Study**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Education is generally seen as a powerful tool for reducing poverty and achievement of economic growth (Mankiw et al., 1992; Breton, 2004). It empowers people, improves individuals' earning potential, promotes a healthy population, is a major determinant of democracy and helps build a competitive economy (UNESCO, 2007a; World Bank, 2006). Access to education is therefore at the centre of the development agenda for most low income countries. With the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is a right for every child of school going age. The start of the Education for All (EFA) campaign after the World Education Forum in Jomtien in 1990 has seen remarkable progress in getting children in developing countries into basic education. Nonetheless, hundreds of millions of children tend to drop out of school (UNESCO, 2007b). The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2010 reports that, while enrolment rates are rising, millions of children enter primary school only to drop out before completing a full primary cycle and in sub-Saharan Africa, some 28 million pupils drop out of school each year (UNESCO 2010). It has been argued that in much of Africa, the problem of educational access is not entirely about children not enrolling in school but also about starting school and dropping out (Dumas et al., 2004; Hunt 2008; Lewin 2007). Thus the problem shifts from getting children into school to keeping them in school.

Children who terminate schooling before they have finished the curriculum do not develop their potential to their fullest and countries that experience it waste scarce resources.

#### **1.2 Background to the Study**

Access to basic education in Ghana has improved markedly over the years and the gross enrolment rate (GER) is now over 90% (MOESS, 2007). According to official statistics, 85% of school-age children (86.3% of boys and 83.6% of girls)

were enrolled in 2001; and between then and 2010, GER is reported to have reached 95% (MOESS, 2010). While basic school enrolment in Ghana has improved significantly in recent years, one major challenge facing it has been high cases of drop out (MOESS 2010). Although basic education in Ghana's state system is compulsory by law for all children between the ages of 6 and 15 years (UNESCO, 2005), over 20% of school-age Ghanaian children are reported to have either dropped out or never enrolled in school (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah 2009). A report on the state of education in Ghana by Akyeampong et al., (2007) and other studies confirm the reality of dropouts in Ghana's basic school system (GSS, 2003; Hashim, 2004; MOESS, 2007; 2008; 2010; Stephens, 2007). For example, in 2006 the non-completion rates stood at 15% and 35% for primary and junior secondary school<sup>2</sup> (JSS) levels (MOESS 2007). According to Rolleston (2009), analysis of GLSS 1-5 show that over a quarter of primary and about half of JSS pupils in Ghana are unable to complete basic school.

Basic education has been free by law since 1987 but schools have continued to charge maintenance fees, a burden that many believe accounted for numerous cases of children withdrawing from school or dropping out altogether. For example, in a description of the contributory factors to dropout in Ghana's basic education system, the 2003 Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ) reported that direct education costs and other socio-cultural practices are alleged to account for children dropping out of school (GSS 2003).

In 2005, the Government of Ghana (GoG) finally introduced a capitation grant scheme<sup>3</sup> to replace all fees charged by the school. This scheme is reported to have attracted the enrolment of all categories of children who were not previously in school, including those dropping back into the system following a period of withdrawal (MOESS, 2006). This policy notwithstanding, dropout continues to be endemic in many basic schools in Ghana, a phenomenon that

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<sup>2</sup> JSS was the name of lower secondary school in Ghana during the onset of the study in 2007. This name was later changed to junior high school (JHS) in 2009.

<sup>3</sup> This scheme pays USD three per pupil to each school to offset the fees they previously charged.



threatens to compromise the achievement of universal basic education<sup>4</sup> by 2015 (Akyeampong et al., 2007). In particular, it has been reported that the volume of dropout cases varies by age group with the highest rates of basic school dropout known to occur in grades one, four and eight (UNESCO, 2005a).

The recent Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) released in 2008, also reports that dropout rates across all grades in Ghana are similar (4%) except for grade three, which is 5%. Males have higher dropout rates than females in almost all grades. From grades 1 through 6, dropout rates in rural areas stood at 3.9%, 4.1%, 4.6%, 3.4%, 3.6% and 3.9% respectively compared with 3.3%, 3.9%, 5.5%, 4.6%, 3.8% and 4.5% (GSS 2008). There are however wide regional variations in dropout rates. The regions with worse dropout rates are the Upper West, Northern, and Central regions. In the Central region, where this study was located, dropout rates from grades 1 through 6 stood at 7.3%, 8.2%, 10.7%, 8.5%, 8.6% and 6.2% respectively (GSS 2008).

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem and Overarching Research Questions**

In this study, the problem under investigation is the school dropout phenomenon in Ghanaian basic schools. I argue that in order to achieve the target of universal basic education by 2015, education policy should focus more directly on addressing dropout. However, few studies in Ghana have actually elicited the views of the children concerned, particularly in terms of how and why dropout occurs.

According to a dropout study in Ghana by Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah (2009) they cited Akyeampong et al. 2007 as only dwelling only on the causes by listing critical events. Hunt (2008) argues that dropout is not an event but a process which needs to be understood because of its relevance for policy (see also Stephens, 2007; Ampiah and Adu-Yeboah 2009). What dropout studies in Ghana fail to address is the processes that lead to it on the basis of children's accounts and how some dropout children drop-in.

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<sup>4</sup> In Ghana's education system, universal basic education comprises universal primary education and lower secondary school—junior high school (JHS)

Therefore, the present study sought to engage children (aged 7-17 years) who had dropped out of school in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the dropout process using their understanding and interpretation of dropout, their accounts of how they dropped out and the reasons behind. The main argument in the study is that unless the process that leads to dropout is understood and the forms that dropout take are clarified, any policy intervention intended to prevent dropout and/or encourage drop-in is a waste of scarce resources that Ghana cannot afford to squander.

In order to begin to comprehend the dropout process, it was important to listen to the voices of children who had experienced the phenomenon, so that their views might eventually be reflected in policy. Thus, the main focus of the study was to explore the dropout experiences of children by listening to their stories in order to illustrate how dropout occurs contextually. The entire period of research was devoted to two aspects of the issues surrounding dropout. First, the meaning of dropout, its process, and the antecedent conditions leading to dropout (what and how) were examined; and second, the reasons behind (why) children dropped out of school were investigated.

The overarching research questions of this study were: what are the experiences of dropout children? And how is school dropout manifested? (That is, the different types of dropout; the dropout process; and the causes of dropout).

Specifically, the following questions were explored:

1. How do children who drop out of school understand and interpret dropout?
  - 1.1 How does the process that leads children to drop out of school occur?
2. What causal factors within and external to the school environment are responsible for dropout and drop-in?
  - 2.1 Why do some dropout children return to school while others do not?<sup>5</sup>
  - 2.2 How does the school treat dropout children who return to continue their schooling? And

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<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, a pupil who has dropped out of school but has subsequently returned to continue his or her education is sometimes referred to as a 'drop-in'.

2.3 How do such children rate their chances of completing school?

3. What are the implications of the findings for universalising universal basic education in Ghana?

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Listening to the voices of dropout children provides a richer contextual understanding of their aspirations, which marks the beginning of an appreciation of their experiences in relation to schooling. With a clearer contextual understanding of the questions this study sought to explore, we can then start thinking about the answers; solutions that reach beyond the simple reactions to compulsory education legislation, enforcement, and data collection on school attendance particularly access performance indicators.

Moreover, it is hoped that a gap in the literature on the lack of clear understanding of how the dropout process occurs is filled and that the findings of this study will inform the design of appropriate intervention programmes to achieve universal basic education and the goal of EFA in Ghana, and the provision of meaningful access to dropout children who want to return to school. It is also hoped that this study will lead to increased awareness and the adoption of programmes aimed at supporting children on the verge of dropping out; silently excluded dropout children who have returned to school; those children seeking readmission; and those who have not yet striven to return to school.

#### **1.5 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the dropout phenomenon by examining how children experience dropout in order to generate an empirical definition of the phenomenon; the process that leads to it; and the conditions that prompt children to drop out of school, as well as the reasons why some children drop out and later return to school while others do not.

The study pivots on the intensive in-depth interview, which specifically focused on an exploration of the experiences of dropout children in order to capture their

views on dropout, risk factors, trajectories, and critical dropout point. The main advantage of such a qualitative study is the depth of coverage of the contextual experiences of dropouts. These include withdrawing from and returning to school; the points of view of both genders; and a wide range of issues. Such as socio-economic background; grade in which dropout occurs; age at which dropout occurs; and other related daily activities, and how these shape school attendance patterns and reveal the progression in dropout.

### **1.6 Justification for the Study**

After the introduction of the capitation grant, it was reported that the scheme prompted a sharp increase in enrolment of about 17%, bringing many out-of-school children – including dropouts – back into the education system (MOESS, 2006). It was further reported that in one district alone, the increase in enrolment included about 33% of dropout children returning to school (MOESS, 2006 cited in Akyeampong et al., 2007).

Although such encouraging figures are interesting to note, the voices of children who have experienced dropout, and how and why they drop out of school, are missing. Moreover, much is still unknown about dropout children who subsequently return to school. Whether such children tend to remain in school the second time around is a mystery to a large extent; but if they do, whether the conditions that forced them out have changed or not remains unclear. It would also be interesting to learn why some children have not returned to school. In terms of those children who have dropped back in, it is necessary to determine what encourages them to persevere in school, or, on the contrary, to drop out again.

My hypothesis is that dropout is not a single event but a gradual process and the cost of school fees alone may not be the only determinant of dropout; thus, unless the process and other circumstances that led children to drop out of school are identified and understood, policy attempts to address dropout are bound to fail. Once a child drops out of school, he or she may be unlikely to return even under conditions of fee-free education. Those who have returned after the introduction of the capitation grant may still be liable to drop out again

if the conditions that cause dropout and the process leading to it are not well understood and reflected in policy to reform the educational experiences of children in public schools.

My major assumption is that dropouts children may have developed impressions and mental pictures of conditions in school based on their original experiences before dropping out, and they may reflect and compare such experiences with incidents that have occurred afterwards, which, in turn, may shape their educational aspirations. Dropout children may also encourage peers still in school to withdraw as well and join them in pursuing economic needs.

The present study is therefore necessary because it qualitatively explores the dropout phenomenon in context, explaining the causes of dropout and the process leading to it. It is when we understand these issues contextually that we will be able to adopt the best policy to help prevent dropout; as well as to facilitate the integration of children who drop in, and assist them in meaningful participation in universal basic education in Ghana.

Most of the available literature on access, retention and completion in Ghana focuses predominantly on quantitative data (e.g. World Bank, 2004; GSS, 2003; MOESS, 2006). A review of the literature on dropout in the Ghanaian context reveals the dearth of qualitative information on the trajectory of the phenomenon or the challenges of returning to school. According to Hunt (2008), researchers know that low socio-economic status, gender and geographical location, among other things, are factors that probably influence dropout; but less is known about the human narratives of the children affected by it, and it is argued that in Ghana, a great deal is unknown about the problems faced by dropouts returning to school (Ampiah, 2008).

Given the lack of a rich contextual understanding of the phenomena of dropout and drop-in, any new – especially qualitative – contribution to the existing literature will be invaluable and serve as a precursor to policy and programme development targeting dropout children.

It is not enough to simply group dropouts with other out-of-school children in discussions, policies and programmes at the national or international levels if their participation in schooling is to be increased. This is because dropouts do have some school experiences that may have led to drop out which other out-of-school never enrolled children do not have, and such experiences of dropouts are likely to shape their behaviour towards schooling if they should return to school. It is therefore necessary to engage with them in dialogue if their particular needs and circumstances are to be fully understood. Indeed, it would be irresponsible, impossible and a waste of resources to pursue any intervention aimed at facilitating the rehabilitation of dropouts into the education system without first reaching an understanding of how their daily experiences in and out of school shape their aspirations in terms of education, work and economic well-being.

Justifications for giving voice to children can also be made from an educational as well as a sociological point of view (Lloyd, Smith and Tarr, 2000). On the one hand, Davie and Galloway (1996) argue that there are practical benefits of giving children a say in their education. On the other hand:

‘the practical justification for giving children a voice in educational policy making, in monitoring and quality assurance as well as in research is epistemological. The reality experienced by children and young people in educational settings cannot be fully comprehended by inference and assumption. The meanings they attach to their experiences are not necessarily the meanings that their teachers or parents would ascribe; the subcultures that children inhabit in classrooms and schools are not always visible or accessible to adults’ (Lloyd, Smith and Tarr, 2000; p. 61).

This justification for listening to the voice of children on issues regarding their education and the need to understand the dropout phenomenon in context is the basis for this study.

### **1.7 Structure and Overview of the thesis**

This thesis is organised into eight chapters, the details of which are outlined below.

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter is the introduction to the entire thesis and presents the context of the research. It focused on the background to the study, the statement of the research problem and research questions, the purpose of the research and the justification for undertaking the research.

### **Chapter Two: The Ghanaian Scene: Access and Participation in Basic Education**

This chapter provides background information on Ghana. The issues covered in this chapter include the country context, physical characteristics, economy and education. The section on education presents issues on structure of Ghana's education system, basic education policy, participation in basic education and school attendance. It also looks at repetition and school dropout which are linked to poverty and child labour.

### **Chapter Three: Literature review**

Chapter three is focused on the review of the literature related to conceptual issues addressed in this thesis. These include the concept of dropout; the causes of dropout which are looked at from the supply and demand sides. The literature review is also summarized to present a conceptual framework for explaining the cause of dropout.

### **Chapter Four: Research methodology and methods**

Chapter four presents the methodological approach and the methods employed during the research process. First, it discusses the interpretivist ontologies and epistemologies underpinning social research. It covers the theoretical rationale for choosing qualitative approach for researching dropout, the sources contacted for data, the process of data collection and detailed accounts of how the fieldwork was conducted. Finally, issues relating to validity and reliability, and researcher positionality are presented.

### **Chapter Five: Research Area and Context**

Chapter five is focused on the characteristics of the study area, and looks at physical characteristics, local economy, infrastructure and basic education in

the research area. This chapter highlights the bigger picture of trends in enrolment, age of enrolled pupils, repetition and dropout in the study area. It ends with detailed analysis of school attendance patterns in the study area that may be linked to the in-depth analysis of the types of dropout and the reasons behind dropout presented in chapters 6 and 7.

### **Chapter Six: The dimensions and dynamics of school dropout: children's views**

Chapter six, answers research question 1 and presents the first analysis of the data gathered for this study, it covers an analysis of the understanding and interpretation of dropout based on the accounts of children in the study area. The chapter also presents case studies that use the narratives of three children to illustrate how they dropped out of school. It touched on key issues that pushed-pulled children to drop out of school which are analysed in detail in chapter seven.

### **Chapter Seven: Perceptions on the causes of dropout and drop-in**

This chapter answers research question 2 and is the second and final analytical chapter. It examines the causes of school dropout by looking at the reasons behind the dropout cases. It also presents views of dropout children who have returned to school focusing on what their aspirations and motivations are and how they perceive their chances of completing school.

### **Chapter Eight: Theorizes Dropout and the Implications for EFA policy in Ghana**

This is the final chapter of the thesis and theorizes the findings of the research in line with the research questions. This chapter answers research question 3 by drawing conclusions on the major findings of the study and what the implications of these are for universalizing basic education policy in Ghana. Finally the chapter concludes with reflections of the research process and areas for further research.



### **1.8 Contribution of the Thesis**

Although initial access to basic education in Ghana has increased significantly in the last decade, irregular attendance and dropout continues to occur in Ghanaian schools. Research that utilises qualitative biographical detail surrounding irregular attendance; the process that leads to dropout; and dropout in developing countries is limited.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, given the recognition of the imperative to expand education access in developing countries – the realisation of which is all too often impeded by severe resource constraints – more analysis of the qualitative life stories surrounding dropout, and how the interaction of factors work in particular contexts, needs to be linked with the bigger quantitative picture in order to enhance our understanding of dropout further. The thesis thus provides an in-depth analysis of the dropout phenomenon in relation to basic education in Ghana.

Addressing school dropout has been one of the most controversial elements of policy since the introduction of free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE) in Ghana. However, adequate data on the different types of dropout and the processes of dropout founded on the accounts of dropout children is rarely available. Although Ghana has been at the forefront of the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All initiatives with regard to education access, a detailed analysis of the experiences of dropout children is not available.

Moreover, in spite of the recognition of the potential importance the experiences of dropout children have for education policy-making in Ghana, attempts to explore this phenomenon in the national context using the accounts of children who experienced drop out is limited. The thesis therefore provides fresh insight into the dropout process and the types of dropout experienced by children in the context of Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) programme.

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<sup>6</sup> Hunt (2008) notes, for example, that there are relatively few in-depth qualitative accounts of school dropout based on interviews with and the life histories of dropouts.

Finally, the thesis generally contributes to a better understanding of the key events and processes pupils are subject to before dropping out of school; and the implications of these events and processes for policy on education for all children in respect of FCUBE in Ghana.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Ghanaian Scene: Access to and Participation in Basic Education in Ghana**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides country information on Ghana, describing the broader demographic and socio-economic context in which education reforms and participation in basic education are set. Trends in enrolment, retention and completion, as well as the problems of repetition and dropout, are also introduced.

The chapter presents country contextual details, including physical and demographic characteristics; basic education structure and reform; and access to and participation in basic education. The chapter presents some pertinent education issues, such as gender, retention, and rural–urban disparities in enrolment and participation in basic schooling. The next section presents Ghana country context. It takes a cursory look at the macro context and highlight issues related to governments' and donor support programmes that shape educational provision in Ghana.

#### **2.2 The Ghana Country Context** **Macro Context**

Ghana gained independence from Britain on the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 1957, being the first Black African nation to do so. For many years following independence, the country experienced a chequered political history; but in 1992, a stable constitutional democracy was established, and free and fair presidential elections have been held ever since. Its administrative and political capital is Accra, with a population of 1.7 million (GSS, 2002).

Since independence, at the national level, successive governments have pursued – with varying degrees of success – policies, programmes and projects to accelerate the growth of the economy and raise the living standards of the people. Such initiatives are often expressed in the form of development policy frameworks or plans around which national and development partners' efforts are co-ordinated.

The macro arena includes government officials, donor and non-governmental organisations, and educationalists. These agencies form part of the influential space in which policy-making and implementation engage. Ball (1994) argues that the macro context that shapes education policy-making is influenced by tensions between its different (possibly implicit) objectives, that is, the problem of capital accumulation and economic efficiency; the problem of social order; social stability and authority; and technical and managerial problems originating with the State itself. In addition to these considerations, developing countries are burdened with external agency influence and international education development agendas. Donor agency conditionalities attached to programmes often act as constraints to government autonomy in policy-making (Stephens 2007), a factor that clearly shapes the policy implementation process.

Much of Ghana's development agenda has relied heavily on donor support. Owing to the unavailability of financial resources in the mid-1980s, the country turned to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), subsequently launching the Economy Recovery Programme (ERP) in 1983 (Pedley and Taylor, 2009) (see 2.2.3 on the current state of Ghana's economy). Along with the ERP, came a political agenda that was anti-elitist, pro-poor and pro-rural – in short, populist. Radical education reforms were aimed at improving the quality of provision, and creating greater equality in access to primary and secondary education (see 2.3 for details on education reforms). Following the ERP, the country duly joined the heavily indebted poor country (HIPC) initiative and several other donor support programmes.

The Ghanaian government has thus grown increasingly reliant on external agencies for financial support. In particular, the ERP has clearly shaped the features of basic education reform and redefined 'schooling' as a means of achieving national development. The international education development environment has also been a key factor in determining choices made in terms of the sector's development since the 1980s. Next, I highlight Ghana's physical and demographic characteristics.

### **2.2.1 Physical Characteristics**

Ghana is a small coastal country in West Africa covering an area of approximately 238,540 square kilometres. It is bordered by the Republic of Togo to the east, Cote d'Ivoire to the west and Burkina Faso to the north (see figure 5:1).

### **2.2.2 The Population**

According to 2001 projections (GSS 2005), Ghana's population is estimated to be 19.4 million. There are four major tribes in the country: the Akan (44%), the Moshi-Dagomba (16%), the Ewe (13%), and the Ga (8%). There are also numerous other minor ethnic groups. Ghana's population is unevenly distributed over ten administrative regions (see figure 5:1), the southern coastal and forest areas being more densely populated than the northern savannah. Ashanti Region accommodates the largest share of the national population (19.1%), followed by Greater Accra (15.4%), Eastern (11.1%) and Western (10.2%), with the remaining six regions accommodating less than 10% each (GSS 2005). The Upper-West and Upper-East Regions in particular have very low shares of the national population (3.0% and 4.9% respectively) (GSS, 2005).

Ghana has a very youthful population, which is typical of a developing country. Population census data for the year 2000 show that 41.3% of the total population is under 15 years, and the remaining 58.7% is in the 15–64 years age bracket (GSS, 2002). This youthful demographic population suggests that the population growth rate will continue to remain high in the future.

This progressively youthful population will further increase pressure on existing infrastructure and basic services, particularly education and health. The associated demand for education from such a population will require an increase in resources for the provision of basic education infrastructure and logistics, which could exacerbate the already numerous challenges facing the education system. Next, I present the economic context of Ghana.

### **2.2.3 The Economy**

The early years after independence – the period 1960–1964 in particular – saw Ghana experience relatively high economic growth, driven by a favourable export performance and rapid industrialisation linked to import-substitution policies. However, this encouraging start to self-governance gave way to macroeconomic instability, and uneven and unstable growth from 1965 to 1983; due to a fall in cocoa prices and increase in the price of crude oil in the world market. As a result, the foundation of the state became very shaky and the impact of economic shocks in the early 80s brought the country's economy close to collapse. Faced with such a situation, the government embarked on series of initiatives – including a structural adjustment programme – aimed at revitalising growth and addressing poverty reduction.

World Bank (2007), sub-Saharan African country economy assessment ranked Ghana amongst the top sub-Saharan African nations, an achievement that has prompted the country's leadership to seek to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and reach middle-income status by 2015 (ibid).

The structure of the economy has seen marginal changes over the past two decades. Agriculture is still the most important area of economic activity, followed by services, and then industry. Agriculture contributes 34% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (GSS, 2008) and it employs about 50% of the population (GSS, 2002). Within the agriculture sector, crops and livestock are the most important sub-sector, contributing 66% to the sector's growth. Between 2003 and 2008, however, there was a slight decline in the growth rate of the agriculture sector, from 6 to 5%. The service sector, with a growth rate of 10%, is the fastest growing sector of the economy and it contributes one-third of the country's GDP. Wholesale and retail trade is the most important sub-sector, accounting for one-quarter of the sector's growth. The industrial sector contributes a little over one-quarter (26%) to the country's GDP. The construction sub-sector has the greatest impact on the sector's contribution to the GDP as well as sector growth.

The leading export commodities of the country are cocoa, gold, and timber. In recent times, the economy has diversified to include exports of non-traditional commodities such as pineapples, bananas, yams, and cashew nuts. Tourism is fast gaining prominence as a foreign exchange earner.

Over the past decade, the Government of Ghana has embarked on various economic and poverty-reduction programmes with the aim of improving the living conditions of its citizenry.

Although there has been a substantial overall decline in the incidence of poverty, it still has a firm grip on rural areas. Regional socio-economic disparities remain, which are linked to the lack of structural change in the economy (World Bank, 2007). Thus, there are strong urban–rural differentials in poverty indicators, with deprivation levels substantially higher in some rural areas. In total, over 51% of Ghana’s poor live in rural areas.

Poor rural people have limited access to basic social services, safe water, year-round roads, electricity and telephone services. The severity and depth of poverty is highest in the three northern regions (Northern, Upper West and Upper East) and parts of the rural coastal zone in Central Region (GSS, 2000).

Such a situation has serious implications for participation in universal basic education. For example, it is argued that most children who are out of school, those who have dropped out of the education system, and those who have never enrolled come from households and communities with high incidences of poverty (see Chao and Apler, 1997; Canagarajah and Coloumbe 1997; Fentiman, 1999). The next section is focussed on education reforms and access to basic education.

### **2.3 Education: Reforms and Access to Basic Education**

Ghana’s basic education structure and curriculum is rooted in the country’s colonial past. From the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, European missionaries and traders introduced formal education in the form of schools located in garrison towns to

educate mixed race children. By 1882, the colonial government had made its first real efforts to provide education in order to sustain the machinery of colonial rule (GSS 2005). But it was Christian missionaries who did the real work in their belief that education was necessary to the achievement of their evangelical aspirations. The British colonial model of education – its structure, curriculum, examination format, conditions for pupil progression, age considerations, organisation of classes, and school year rhythm – has been maintained in the post-independence period and, a multitude of education reforms notwithstanding, remains embedded in the national system (Akyeampong et al., 2007).

Shortly after independence, Ghana's education system was described as one of the best in Africa (World Bank, 2004). However, with export earnings falling drastically as a result of the downturn in the price of cocoa and high crude oil prices, by the mid-70s, the sector was deteriorating rapidly.<sup>7</sup> This development negatively affected the allocation of public funds to education. This resulted in quality and efficiency of education provision and delivery dropping to its worst yet, and confidence in the education system evaporated.

Consequently, the education sector came under heavy criticism, one such objection being the 17-year pre-tertiary education system,<sup>8</sup> which was branded as unproductive and highly discriminatory in its tendency to exclude the poor.<sup>9</sup> These developments led to the setting up of several commissions of inquiry, which were mandated to investigate the country's education problem. The Dzobo Educational Review Committee was one notable commission that was tasked to determine the causes of the decline and propose recommendations for remedial action.

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<sup>7</sup> GDP allocation devoted to education fell from 6.4% in 1976 to about 1.0% in 1983 and 1.7% in 1985 (World Bank 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Six years of basic education, followed by four years at middle school; five years at secondary school; and two years in the sixth form, before entering tertiary education (known as the 6-4-5-2 system).

<sup>9</sup> The deteriorating education system lacked inputs such as textbooks and furniture, and most classes were held under poor conditions. The majority of trained teachers thus lost motivation and left for more attractive working conditions in neighbouring countries such as Nigeria, which meant that Ghana's education system was increasingly forced to rely on the services of untrained teachers.



### **2.3.1 Education Development and FCUBE Policy**

In line with development theory (see Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964; Todaro and Smith, 2006), based on the economic growth strategies of institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, Ghana may be described as attempting to achieve middle-income status (World Bank 2007). Accordingly, basic education has been positioned as one of the central policy targets for national development. The Ghanaian education system has therefore undergone several stages of restructuring over the past 25 years (Sedgwick, 2000) towards this development goal. The current system of formal education in Ghana was introduced in 1987.

Accordingly, the basic education system now comprises nine years of schooling, which is divided into two phases. The first phase consists of six years at primary school; and the second phase is an intermediate stage at JHS of three years' schooling. The full pre-tertiary system comprises six years of primary education, three years at JHS and three years at senior high school (SHS).

Until the introduction of the current system, formal education comprised six years of primary education followed by five years of secondary education (three years at JSS and two years at SSS). Until the mid-1970s, children who completed six years of primary education could either attend four years of middle school or five years of secondary school, with a small elite having the option to pursue an additional two years of pre-university education. Pupils successful at this level could go on to university or study at one of the many institutions offering vocational, technical or professional training, which were either classified as tertiary (e.g. teacher training college) or non-tertiary.

Nevertheless, reform at the basic education level (BEL) was based on the recommendations of one of the aforementioned commissions. The resultant act was ratified in 1987 and has since been described as one of the most ambitious education reforms in sub-Saharan Africa (Akyeampong, 2004). Indeed, this commencement of the restructuring of the school system was so critical that it was hailed as one of the most important constituents of the national economic recovery plan.

The implementation of the new reform act coincided with the global education and poverty reduction agenda. In 1995, the FCUBE programme was launched to address the shortcomings of the 1987 act, the former aiming to achieve UPE by 2005. With support from the World Bank, The FCUBE programme has made some notable gains, but there are still difficulties in addressing the needs of a significant number of out-of-school children and sustaining gains made in enrolment throughout the basic education cycle (Akyeampong et al., 2007).

Over the past 15 years, several innovations have been implemented in the education sector in an attempt to reach out-of-school children. First, there was FCUBE in 1995; followed by the School Capitation Grant Scheme (SCGS) in 2005, which was an initiative abolishing the payment of all direct school fees; the School Feeding Programme (SFP); and the state supply of school uniforms (SSSU) for basic school children.

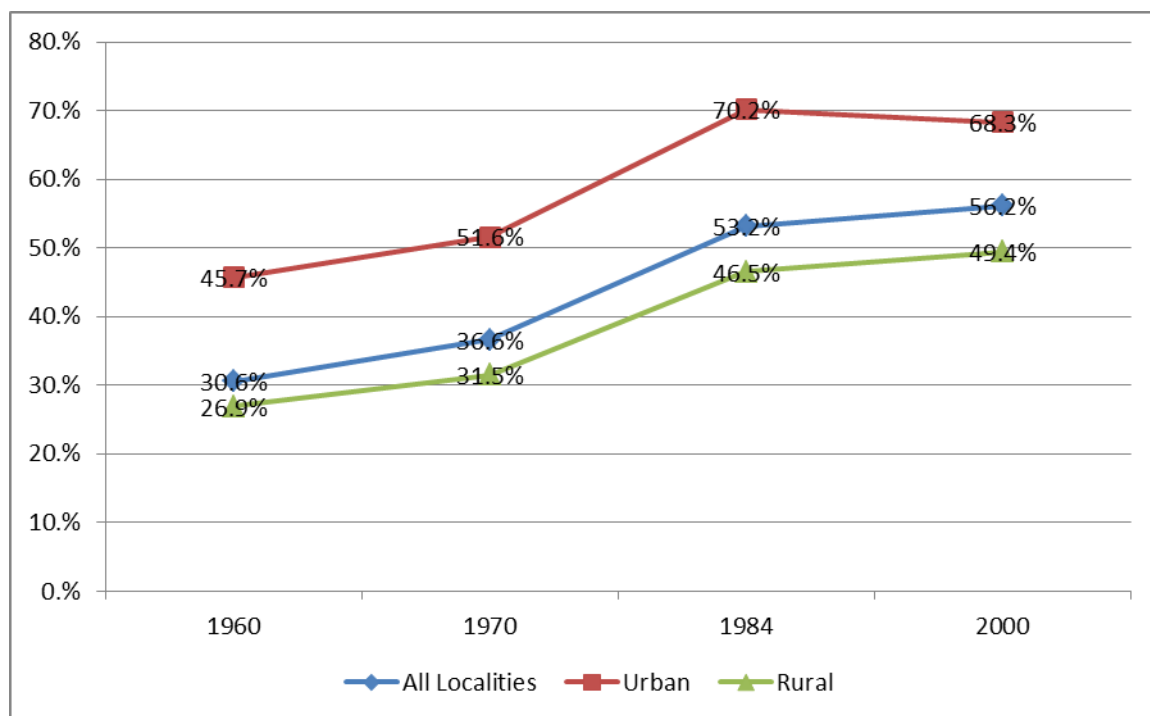
Secondly, at the BEL, pre-school education has officially been incorporated into the system, all primary schools are required to provide nursery school and or kindergarten classes;<sup>10</sup> and the secondary education level (SEL), which had hitherto comprised three years of schooling, was increased to four years of SHS from the 2007/08 academic year.

### **2.3.2 Access to Basic Education: Enrolment, Attendance and Completion Trends**

Enrolment and attendance rates in formal education have increased consistently over the years. School attendance of six-year-olds stood at 30.6% in 1960 but increased steadily over the ensuing 40 years to 56.2% in 2000. However, rural-urban gaps still exist. Figure 2:1 shows that the gap in pupil enrolment between urban and rural areas has not closed much during that period.

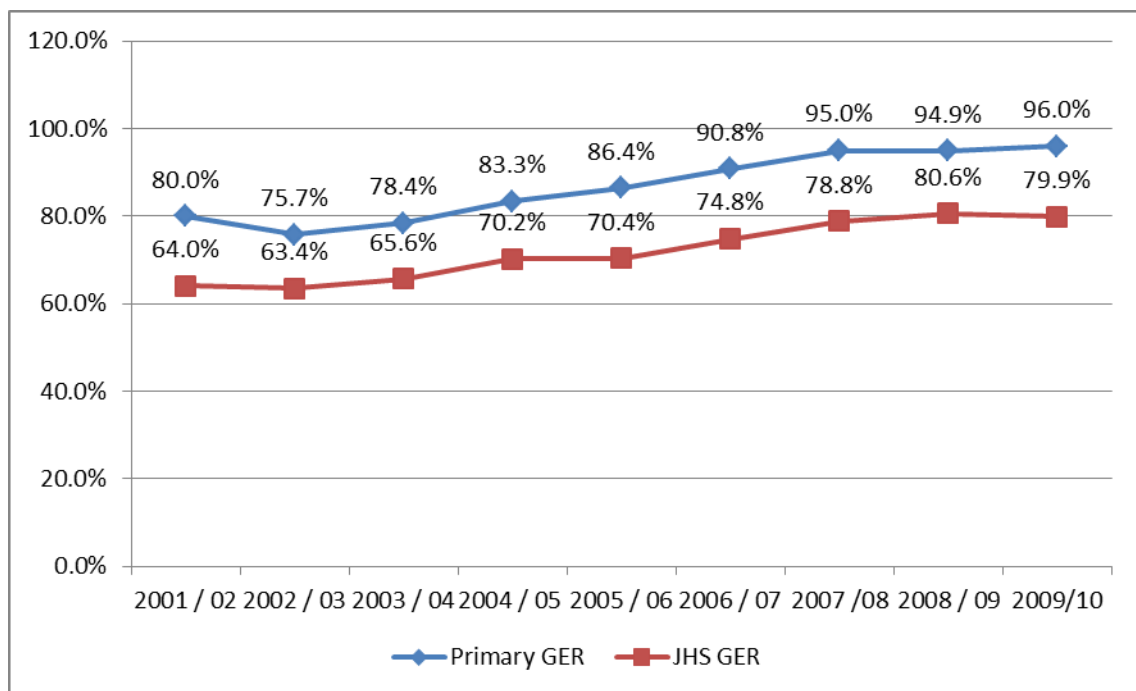
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<sup>10</sup> Growth Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) II stipulates that school attendance should be made obligatory for 11 years for all children that is from age 4 to 15, including 2 years of kindergarten and 3 years of JHS with a genuine secondary school curriculum.

**Figure 2:1 School Enrolment Rates at Age Six by Locality**

Source: GSS 2005.

Between 2001/2 and 2009/10, Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in Ghana increased from 80% to 96% at the primary level and at the junior secondary school level from 64% to 79.9% (see figure 2:2). Generally, basic school enrolment growth has continued its positive trend but not increasing sufficiently to meet the goal of Universal Primary Completion by 2015.

**Figure 2:2 Gross Enrolment Trends between 2001/2 and 2009/10**

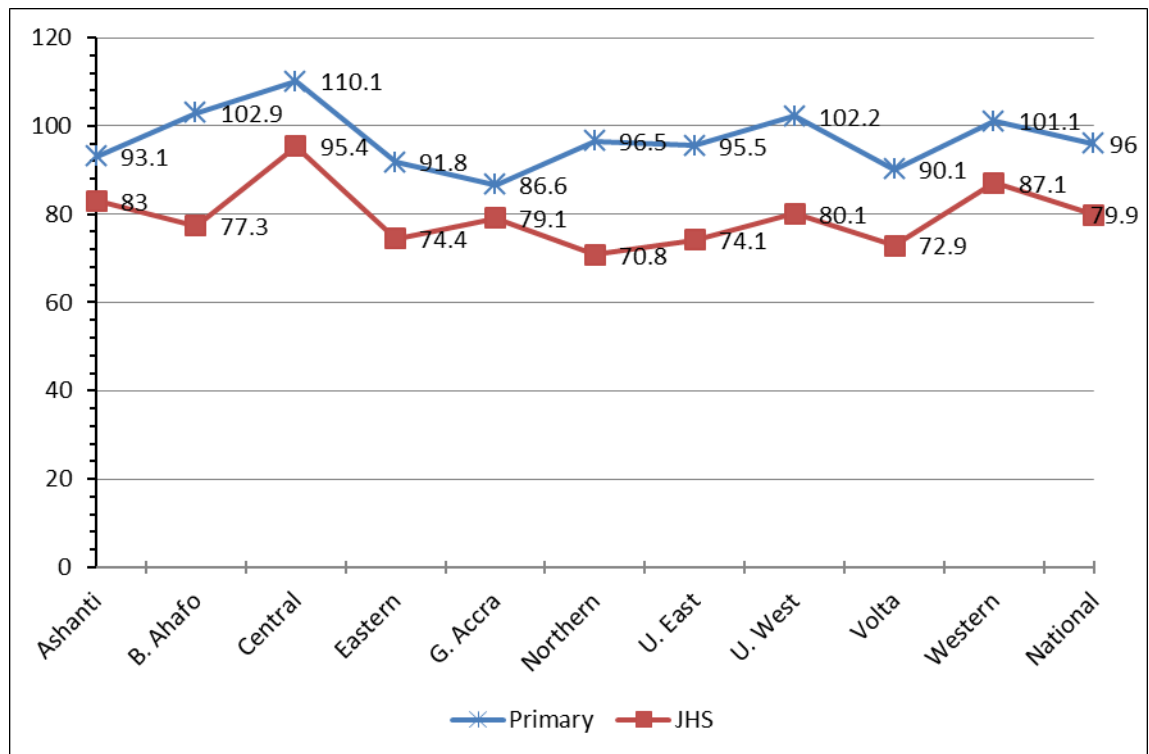
Source: Calculated from Education Management Information System (EMIS) data.

At the primary level, the overall growth between 2001/02 and 2004/5 was 13.0%. In 2003/4, enrolment grew by 3.5%, and in 2004/5 enrolment growth stood at almost 4.1%. The overall growth in enrolment between 2001/2 and 2009/10 resulted in a significant increase in children enrolled over the period. The JHS level also saw continuous increase in enrolment over that period. The continuous increase in GER at both levels particularly in 2004/5 and 2005/6 has been attributed to the introduction of the capitation grants which led to improvement in text book production and distribution and improvement in other policy interventions (MOESS 2007).

Despite the increasing trend in GER, it is reported that analysis by grade show GER decreases at higher levels, pointing to many dropout. For example, in 2003, it is reported that the GER for P1 was 96% that for P4 was 79% and P6 65%. At the JHS level, the GER for JHS 1 was 66% and only 55 for JHS 3 (MoE 2010). Thus, the GER for each grade gives different picture than GER for the entire level (primary, JHS) and highlights the importance of focusing on dropout and retention at higher levels. Moreover, primary GER was 95.2% in 2007/8 and decreased to 94.90% in 2008/9 with the rate of increase decreasing

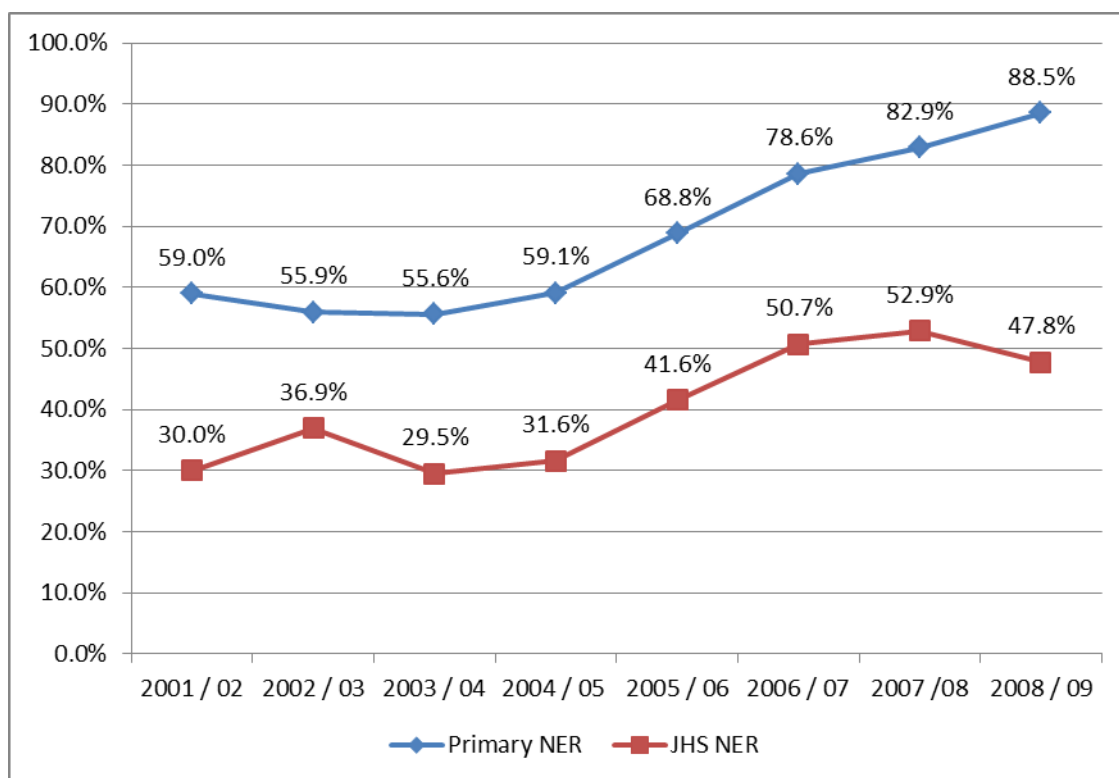
regardless of the capitation grant and school feeding. Figure 2:3 shows that there are still regional disparities in GER at the basic level.

**Figure 2:3 National and Regional Gross Enrolment Rates for 2009/10**



Source: Calculated from EMIS data.

An interesting observation is the significant increase in the net enrolment rates (NER) at the basic level depicting that the right age group are now attending school. At the primary level, the NER has been increasing and was doing so at a very rapid rate between 2004/05 and 2008/9. Between 2006/07 and 2007/08 however, the increase has been much lower. On the other hand, the NER for JHS experienced a significant drop between 2007/8 and 2008/09. This is possibly due to erroneous age reporting.

**Figure 2:4 Net Enrolment Ratio for Primary and JHS between 2001/2 and 2008/9**

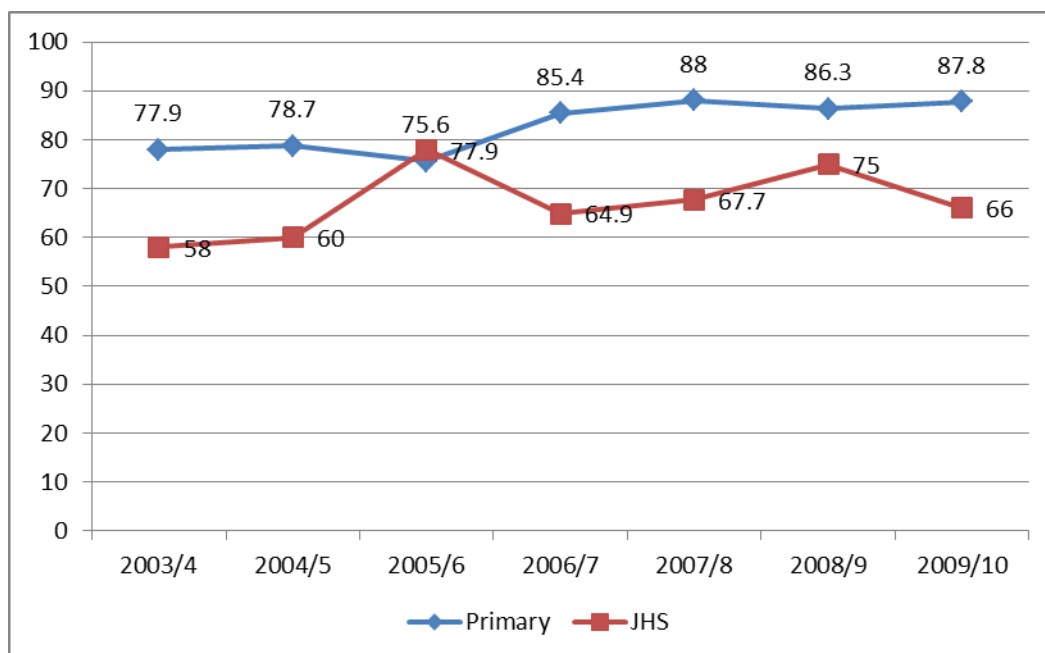
Source: Calculated from EMIS data.

Over all, the Ghana National Education Coalition Campaign (GNECC) (2010) reports that Ghana is performing relatively well in terms of enrolment in basic school, with increases in national gross enrolment rates and net enrolment rates.

### 2.3.3 School Completion, Drop out and Repetition

Figure 2:5 shows that between 2004/5 and 2007/8, basic school completion rates (BSCR) at primary level have been increasing. However, it decreased in 2008/9 and is picking up in 2009/10. At the JHS level, completion increased between 2003/4 and 2005/6 and decreased in 2007/8. Between 2007/8 and 2009/10, completion at the JHS has been unstable.

**Figure 2:5 Trends in Basic School Completion Rate for Primary and JHS between 2003/4 and 2009/10**



Source: Calculated from EMIS data.

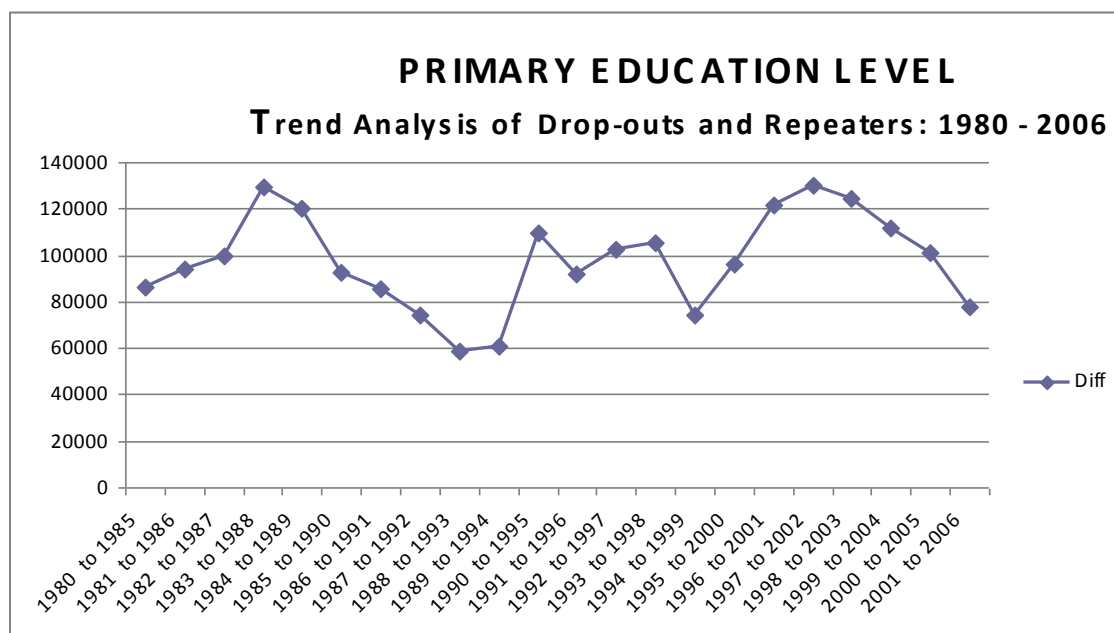
Notwithstanding improvements in GER and NER, completion rates suggest that about 20% of the basic school-age population fails to complete the primary school cycle (GNECC, 2010). Dropout and repetition is common in Ghanaian schools. The next section looks at dropout and repetition.

It is important to mention here that dropout data in Ghana has not been consistent; different institutions report different figures and data are sometimes affected by conditions in the periods in which they were collected.

The ministry of education (MoE) in Ghana uses data collected by EMIS. In the 2007 educational sector review, the report using EMIS data show that between the years 1980 and 2006, drop outs and repeaters in primary schools increased in 1983 through 1988 and increased again around the 1996s to 2002s. Thereafter there was a gradual decrease in dropouts and repeaters nationwide, as shown figure 2.6. These decreases in dropout and repetition have been attributed to the fall of the poverty level from approximately 51.7% in 1991/2 to 39.5% in 1998/9, to 28.5% in 2005/6 (MOESS 2007).

It is interesting to note that, the zigzag nature of the trend in figure 2.6 suggest a lack of consistency and sustainability in policies and strategies meant to address the problem of drop-outs and repeaters. Also, that, dropout data has not been consistently collected and is affected by how dropout rate is calculated<sup>11</sup>. For example, dropout data from EMIS only show children as drop outs after they have not shown up in school for one year, and it is assumed that such children dropout never to return (see OCR Macro 2004; MOESS 2006; 2007; UNESCO/UIS, 2004).

**Figure 2:6 Dropout and Repetition Trends in Primary between 1980 and 2006**



Source: MOESS 2007.

Owing to how dropout rate is calculated, dropout data used in access performance indicators misses out on children who dropout termly as well as others who dropout but return to school at some point.

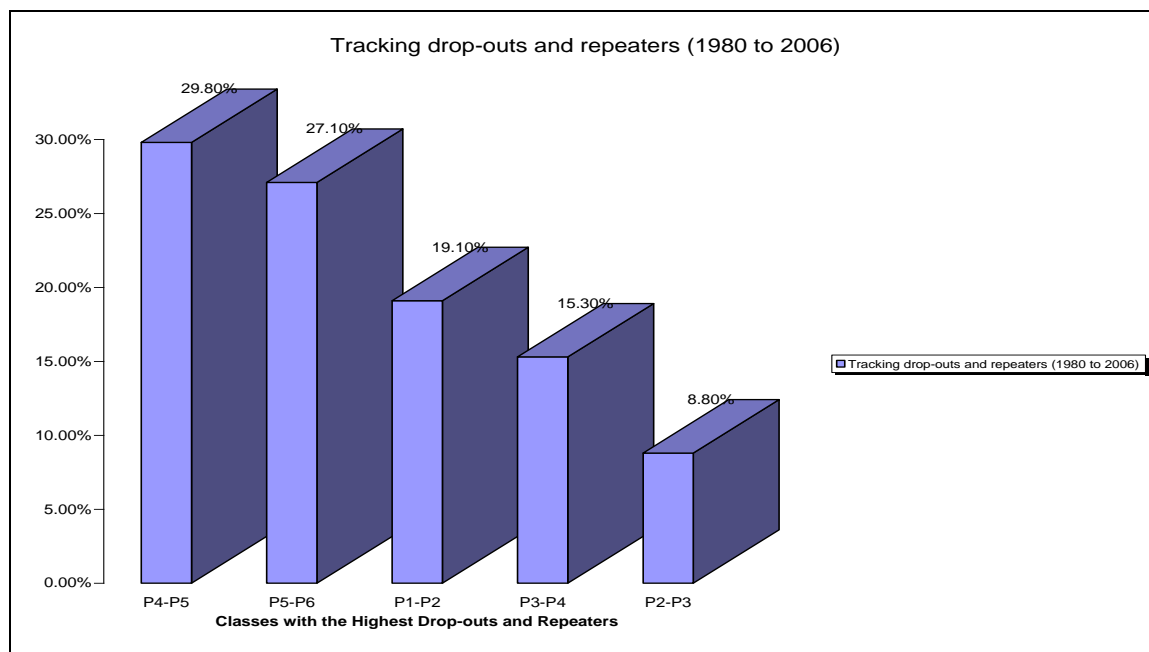
Focusing on dropout by grade, at the primary level, tracking of drop outs and repeaters from 1980 to 2006 (see figure 2:7) showed that drop outs and repeaters when compared was highest in primary 4 and 5 recording 29.80% of the total drop out and repeaters. Primary 2 and 3 recorded the lowest (8.80%).

<sup>11</sup> In this thesis the dropout data from national and international sources appear to be inconsistent.



It appears at primary 4 and 5 there is the tendency for children to start engaging in child labour.

**Figure 2:7 Tracking Dropouts and Repeaters between 1980 and 2006**



Source: MOESS 2007

In an inquiry into the patterns of dropout in Ghana's basic education system, the Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ) Survey (2003) found that in terms of gender, age and location, the proportion of girls who dropped out was found to be higher and increased more with age in comparison to boys. Dropout was higher with regard to all children aged between 12 and 17 years, and dropout was higher in respect of rural pupils than was the case with urban pupils (GSS 2003).

Grade repetition was found to be closely related to school dropout. According to the 2006 MICS, the repetition rate in terms of both sex declines from Basic 1 to Basic 4, rises in Basic 5, and then declines again in Basic 6. The repetition rates are higher for males in Basic 1, 2, and 5. In Basic 1 the repetition rate is 4% for males, compared with 3% for females, but in Basic 6 the repetition rate for females (2%) is higher than that for males (1%). There are small variations by urban-rural residence in almost all classes, except for Basic 1 where rural residents have a higher repetition rate (4%) than their urban counterparts (2%).

Larger differentials were observed by region, especially in Basic 1. While as high as 12% and 13% of pupils in the Upper West and Northern region, respectively, repeat Basic 1, only 1% of pupils repeat Basic 1 in the Eastern and Central regions. In the Greater Accra region, no pupils repeat Basic 4 through Basic 6.

The MICS data on dropouts show that dropout rates were higher than repetition rates in all grades. Dropout rates across grades are similar (4%), except for Basic 3, which is 5%. It is interesting to note that while the 2003 CWIQ shows that more girls than boys dropped out of school, the MICS data shows that males have higher dropout rates than females in almost all grades. In addition, starting from Basic 3 through 6, dropout rates are reported to be higher for pupils in urban areas than those in rural areas. Differentials by gender and location in dropout rates in MICS data compared with CWIQ might be due to methodological issues related to sampling and period of data collection. The emerging trend requires further investigation.

**Table 2:1 Dropout Rate by Gender and Grade for Primary School Children**

Background Characteristics	School Grade					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
DROPOUT RATE						
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	4.2	4.4	4.1	4.3	3.4	4.9
Female	3.1	3.7	5.9	3.5	3.8	3.5
<b>Residence</b>						
Urban	3.3	3.9	5.5	4.6	3.8	4.5
Rural	3.9	4.1	4.6	3.4	3.6	3.9
<b>Region</b>						
Western	5.2	5.0	5.8	5.8	3.5	3.7
Central	7.3	8.2	10.7	8.5	8.6	6.2
Greater Accra	3.1	4.3	5.5	4.6	4.9	5.8
Volta	0.0	0.0	1.4	1.0	3.1	1.6
Eastern	5.0	1.3	4.5	6.7	2.0	3.0
Ashanti	0.0	2.4	2.8	0.6	0.7	0.9
Brong Ahafo	0.8	1.4	2.1	0.7	0.8	5.5
Northern	9.6	10.0	8.7	7.7	8.2	8.4
Upper East	1.6	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Upper West	11.3	13.5	12.9	9.4	8.8	17.3
<b>Total</b>	3.7	4.0	4.9	3.9	3.7	4.2

Source: GSS 2009

It is important to note that the rate of entry into school is different between the North and South as well as the dropout rate. There are wide regional variations in dropout rates. The regions with worse rates are the Upper West, Northern, and Central regions. Almost one-fifth (17%) of grade 6 pupils in the Upper West region drop out of school. Dropout rates are lower for pupils in the Volta, Ashanti, and Upper East regions.

There is a need to find out why there were so many dropouts and repeaters in a particular grade and/or year. While priority attention need to be given to children who do not enrol in schools at all, children with a high risk of dropping out due to irregular attendance, poor academic performance and repetition, and those that complete primary school but do not enter junior secondary school need to be studied contextually.

#### **2.4 Poverty, Child Labour and Schooling**

Poverty conditions of households have generally been mentioned as affecting enrolment and school attendance (Chao and Apler, 1997; Canagarajah and Coloumbe, 1997). MoE (2007) reports that a critical look at public schools in general showed that every district, irrespective of its status, has poor school children. The concept of poverty and definitions of 'the poor' vary in accordance with the perspective and objective of whoever is making the definition. Nevertheless, defining poverty on the basis of accounts of self-characterisation gathered from the poor themselves has become an increasingly useful tool with which one might achieve the aim of including the 'voices of the poor'.

In their research with the poor, Nkum and Ghartey (2000) acknowledge the multidimensionality of poverty to be complex and interwoven, including the material lack of and need for shelter, assets and money; and often characterised by hunger, pain, discomfort, exhaustion, social exclusion, vulnerability, powerlessness, and low self-esteem (Narayan et al., 2000). Poverty is thus a composite of both personal and communal life experiences.

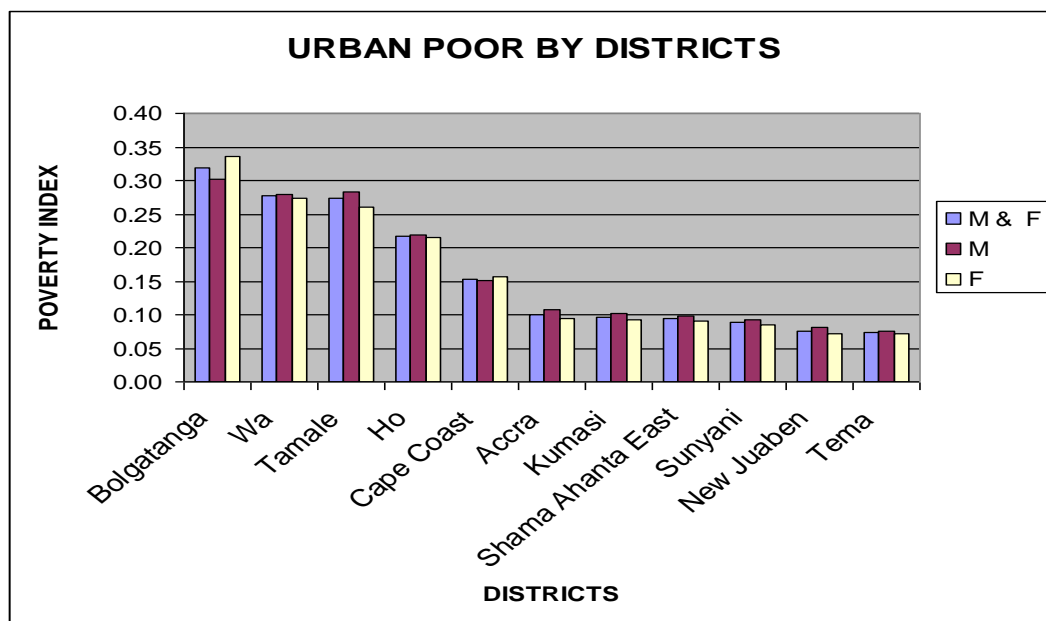
On the personal level, poverty is manifested in the inability to gain access to basic community services, of which education is one.

In Ghana, the wealthiest section of the population is located in the larger urban centres, whereas extreme poverty is concentrated in certain rural communities (the rural savannah). Measurements by Ghana Living Standard Surveys show that poverty rates have been falling in Ghana from approximately 51.7% in 1991/2 to 39.5% in 1998/9, to 28.5 in 2005/6. It has been estimated that approximately close to 5 million people have been lifted out of poverty in just 15 years. Children from poor households are unable participate in education. Those from poor backgrounds who do manage to gain access to schooling, frequently still have to work to support themselves and their families resulting in irregular attendance (GSS 2003).

The GES in 2004 commissioned a research project to measure the extent of the incidence of poverty in urban public schools as a guide to develop a poverty map to bring out all the pockets of deprivation<sup>12</sup> in the country for a focused action. Findings from that project reported that out of the total number of 644,725 boys and girls in the urban public basic schools in the Metropolitan and Municipal Directorates of Education, 94,709 pupils or 14.69% were found to be poor (see figure 2:8). Metropolitan/Municipal areas ranked with the highest poverty index in the report were Bolgatanga, followed by Wa, Tamale and Ho. In Upper East, there were more poor female pupils than poor male pupils. In Wa, Tamale, Ho, Accra, Kumasi, Ahanta East, Sunyani, New Juaben and Tema, the male poor pupils were slightly found to be higher than the female poor pupils. Cape Coast showed slight more female poor pupils than the male poor pupils. What the study suggests is that the poor and needy in the education sector can easily be identified and targeted with poverty packages.

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<sup>12</sup> Pockets of deprived areas/communities in the country; deprived circuits/ schools in the public basic schools; the poorest of the poor pupils/ students in the public institutions in the country

**Figure 2:8 Tracking of Urban Poor by District**

Source: MoE 2007 Education Sector Review Report

The characteristics of the urban poor in public basic schools that informed the studies were pupils who had problems with payment of levies/fees<sup>13</sup>; pupils with problem of acquisition of exercise books; pupils without uniforms; mal-nourished children in schools; pupils without sandals; pupils without school bag to carry their books; children in schools used as child labour; pupils with poor attendance records; truancy; potential drop-outs and drop-outs. Poor pupils in the schools were noted to have exhibited either one, two or more of these characteristics. Other features noted were teenage pregnancy, children from broken homes, irresponsible parenting, and a lack of regular hygiene checks in schools (e.g. deworming, eye screening and prevention of malaria).

The Ghana child labour survey, conducted by the Ghana statistical service (GSS) found that many Ghanaian children between the ages of 5 and 17 years were engaged in economic activities (GSS 2003). Considering the location factor, it may be inferred that a higher proportion of children in rural areas were more likely to be engaged in economic activities than the case with children in urban areas. In Central Region, more than half the children who had a job worked for more than six months a year; such children combined schooling with

<sup>13</sup> This was before the capitation grant scheme was introduced

engagement in their usual economic activities which often results in clashes with school periods.

In terms of the nature of work children do, the GSS survey (ibid) found that some children engaged in agriculture, forestry or fishing; while others worked as hawkers or street vendors, selling iced water, food and other items. In some cases, children engaged in general labouring, such as washing cars; fetching firewood and water; pushing trucks when traction was problematic (males); or working as porters (mainly females). Apart from carrying out economic activities, most children were also found to do housework on a regular basis. The older the child, the more time he or she spent engaged in household chores (ibid) (specific jobs and the amount of time spent doing them are discussed in the next section).

With regard to age and amount of time spent working, the 2006 Ghana Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) conducted by UNICEF classified a younger child as being between the ages of 5 and 11. A child of this age who spends at least one hour per week carrying out an economic activity is regarded as engaging in child labour. A child is classified as an older child if he or she is aged between 12 and 14 years. Older children who spend at least 14 hours per week carrying out an economic activity are also regarded as engaging in child labour (UNICEF et al., 2006).

I found the Ghana MICS age and work classification useful in the present study because it clarifies the dynamics surrounding the amount of work on a regular basis that is likely to disrupt a child's education (chapter 7 discusses the relationship between child labour, irregular school attendance and dropout). However, it should be noted that I extend the upper age limit used in MICS data from 14 to 17 years due to the fact that the majority of school children in the study area were two or more years over age in grade (see figures 5:7 and 5:8). The age range adopted for determining the parameters of childhood is consistent with the UN's definition (see 3.2).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The chapter presented country contextual details, including physical and demographic characteristics; the structure of the basic education and reform; improvements in enrolment and attendance over the years. The chapter suggests that increases in enrolment and attendance attributed over the years to improvements in living conditions notwithstanding, repetition and dropout in particular still remain a problem in terms of achieving a 100% universal completion rate. The chapter shows that although the data on dropout has not been consistently collected and reported, it remains a major challenge. One particular issues about dropout that is important for the study is how it occurs – the processes leading to it. One of the assumptions of this thesis is that, unless we understand the dropout process, we cannot effectively address it.

The next chapter presents a review of literature related to the study. It focuses on issues related to the international agenda on the rights of the child, EFA Goal 2, which is the MDG goal that addresses provision of education as a right. The review also highlights literature on definitions of dropout and makes a case for the need for a contextual definition. Other discussion in the literature review presents what research show as the causes of dropout. Finally, the chapter concludes with a conceptual framework developed from the synthesis of literature review to illustrate the causes of dropout.

## CHAPTER 3

### Literature Review

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the Ghanaian country context, including its physical characteristics, population, economy, and state of the formal education system.

Thus, in this chapter, I review the literature on the causes of school dropout. First, I briefly discuss international policies on children's rights and education, which constitute the framework within which the agenda on EFA and the need to curb dropout rests.

Second, I attempt to define dropout. It is *only* an attempt because the term 'dropout' is quite ambiguous and is defined differently by different organisations, institutions and individuals. Nevertheless, in addressing the issue, I first identify the limitations of analyses in the literature that endeavour to establish a contextual definition of dropout in Ghana. I then review the literature relating to the causes of dropout. Finally, I draw on findings from other studies on the origins of dropout in order to develop a conceptual framework that more accurately explains the causes of school dropout.

#### 3.2 International Policies on Children's Rights and Education

The most influential policy document on children's rights is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Adopted in 1989, this convention clearly spells out the rights of the child; reinforces the fundamental dignity of the child; illuminates and defends the role of the family in children's lives; and seeks to ensure respect for and protection of children (UNICEF, 2005). The CRC is generally held in high esteem and widely complied with.

Article One of the CRC is particularly relevant to the present study, in stating that, "*a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years.*" Articles 28 and 32 also have a direct bearing on this study, as they address



education and child labour respectively. In Article 28, the right of the child to education and compulsory primary (basic) schooling is emphasised. Article 32 addresses the need to protect the child from economic exploitation and the obligation to perform work that is likely to interfere with the child's schooling.

The CRC has been described as gradually expanding beyond its original remit as primarily an international legal instrument for the reorientation of national child welfare and protection, to become a cultural force rooted perhaps more solidly in civil society than in government (Myers, 2001).

Along with many other countries, Ghana has aligned its child welfare legislation with the CRC, the Act on the Right of the Ghanaian Child (ARGC) being a case in point. The relevance of CRC and the ARGC to this study is reflected in Ghana's resolution to achieve the goal of EFA, which addresses MDG 2. As a result, in 1995, Ghana implemented the FCUBE programme in line with its EFA policy.

Local perceptions of the notion of childhood often conflict with international conceptions of the term. It is important to note that contradictions in the understanding of the concept of childhood have implications for the CRC and how children are treated by adults both at home and at school. As mentioned earlier, this study makes a strong case for highlighting children's voices by creating 'spaces' that allow them to tell their stories, an approach that is also in accordance with the stipulations of the CRC. Nevertheless, it should also be borne in mind that cultural beliefs and values associated with the way in which childhood is perceived in Ghanaian societies may influence local attitudes towards the implementation of CRC Article 12. This Article insists that provision should be made by states to ensure that the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express them freely in all matters affecting the child, and the views of the child should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. As such, the child shall be provided the opportunity to be heard in any proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative.

It is important to mention that there are tensions between international conventions such as the CRC's use of the notion of childhood - '*idealised childhoods*' (Zeitlyn, 2010) and local understanding of childhood in Ghana which limits the successful implementation of the CRC (Twum Danso, 2010). It is argued that failure to see childhood as being socially constructed resulted in export and globalisation of Western ideas of childhood without realising effects on notions of childhood in developing countries (James 1993).

The focus on age and maturity in discussion about childhood seems to reflect an understanding of education that is influenced by psychological theories of development, (such as Piagetian theories), which have been very influential in Western contexts. The construction of educational curricula in Ghana since the introduction of formal education by the British has been greatly influenced by this (Dei Ofori-Atta, 2006). Such theories understand learning and child development primarily in terms of individualised cognitive reconstruction, as well as suggesting that such change would happen in a linear fashion at particular stages of a child's life in a universal, invariant way.

Interestingly, such understandings seem unlikely to attend to the different exigencies which shape the identities of those who are ostensibly of school age in the Ghanaian context. It is argued that curricula and educational reforms fail to produce the expected outcomes because they fail to take into account the culture of the society (Dei Ofori-Atta, 2006). Dunne and Ananga (forthcoming) point out that school space in Ghana is homogenized, ignoring the multiplicities of space and identity of learners. They argue that learners' have to navigate adult and child identities daily when they trek from home to school<sup>14</sup> because of tension between cultural notions of childhood and the notion of childhood around which schooling is organised (see Dunne and Ananga, forthcoming).

Ghanaian children are socialised in a manner that ensures that they know their place in society and do not overstep boundaries when interacting with their parents and other adults (Twum Danso, 2010). For example, 'knowing one's

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<sup>14</sup> This study draws on some of the data collected for this thesis

place' is central to the maintenance of the social status quo, and every effort is made to ensure that each child is taught his or her station in life from a very early age. Moreover, in Ghana, the notion of being one's parents' child is frequently perceived as never ending; and includes periods ranging from dependency, parental control and ownership, to obedience and respect without emphasising age (Twum Danso, 2010).

It is therefore interesting to note that the notion of 'child' as used by international organisations such as the UN and Britain which is governed by ideas from psychology, legislation and education, focus on precision of the years of age and stages in development (Zeitlyn, 2010) greatly influence how education is provided in Ghana. Although Ghanaian culture recognises different life stages of child development, the years are not counted with precision (Twum Danso, 2010). Stephens (1998) argues that the models of schooling implemented in Ghana are based on research studies (from Western classrooms) which accord different values not only to the nature of schooling but the role of the child in society. The emphasis on age and maturity in the organisation of school space in Ghanaian schools appears to be creating challenges for both learners and teachers alike. The extent to which tensions between Western and Ghanaian notions of childhood influence the supply and demand of basic education in Ghanaian communities needs to be explored in-depth.

### **3.2.1 The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**

The MDGs have a great bearing on education access for children internationally. In the year 2000, world leaders adopted the MDGs, as a set of goals for nations to target in attempting to solve the majority of problems that were perceived to affect the development of nations and their populations. The MDGs provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many aspects. They also provide a framework for the entire international community to work together towards a common objective – making sure that human development reaches everyone, everywhere. If these goals are achieved, world poverty is expected to be halved, tens of millions of lives are

expected to be saved, and hundreds of millions more people should have the opportunity to benefit from the global economy.

The eight MDGs seek to

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Formulate a global partnership for development

The first two of the eight pledges of the MDGs are most relevant to this study, the first goal being to “*eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*,” and the second to “*achieve universal primary [basic] education*.” The UN set the year 2015 as the deadline for the achievement of all eight goals (UNESCO, 1996).

### **3.2.2 Goal Two: Education for All**

Education for All (EFA) is an international initiative first launched in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 to bring the benefits of education to “*every citizen in every society*” (UNESCO 1996). In order to realise this aim, a broad coalition of national governments, civil society groups, and development agencies such as UNESCO and the World Bank committed to achieving six specific education goals, that is, to

1. Expand and improve comprehensive early years care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children
2. Ensure that by 2015, all children – particularly girls, those in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities – have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality

3. Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes
4. Achieve a 50% improvement in adult literacy by 2015 – especially for women – and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults
5. Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, by focusing on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality
6. Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure the excellence of all, such that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all; especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

EFA goals 1 and 2 are directly linked to the MDGs. Although MDGs 2 and 3 refer only to universal primary education and gender parity respectively, the World Bank recognises that achieving these goals requires commitment to the full EFA agenda (World Bank 2007).

In particular, the efforts of the international community to achieve EFA goal 2, and UNESCO's call upon the world to adopt policies and practices that would ensure "*universal access to and completion of primary [basic] education by the year 2015... and to pursue improvement in learning achievement such that... the appropriate age cohort attain[s] a defined level of necessary learning achievements*" (UNESCO, 1996) prompted countries such as Ghana to pursue education policies that would achieve this goal.

In line with this, the GoG set out to achieve universal basic education by the year 2015, with a focus on two key issues in the World Declaration on EFA. First, Article One, which aims at meeting basic learning needs, stating that, "*Every person – child and youth – shall benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.*" (UNESCO 2000)

Second, Article Three addresses the universalisation of access and the promotion of equity (which again, are highly significant to this study), stipulating that:

*All children and youth... must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education... and to remove every obstacle that hampers active participation (ibid).*

However, these aspirations are not without historical precedent. Indeed, the GoG has made efforts to provide basic education for all since independence. The 1961 Education Act, which aimed at providing free, compulsory primary education, was but the first. In the mid-1980s, Ghana embarked on a steady course of education reform aimed at achieving improved equity and efficiency. In 1987, the Education Reform was introduced, which resulted in the total restructuring of the entire pre-tertiary education system (Sutherland-Addy, 1997; Akyeampong et. al, 2007).

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees the right to free and compulsory basic education for all its citizens. Article Twenty five Section One of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, states that *“All persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realization of that right – (a) basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all”*

In 2005, the introduction of the capitation grant scheme transferred funds to schools, which abolished all direct school fees. This move is reported to have led to substantial improvements in enrolments in basic school. The details of these improvements are in chapter 2.

Yet, although BSCR between 2003/4 and 2009/10 also improved from 77.9% to about 87.8% at the primary level, and at the JHS level, from 58% to 66%, more than 20% of basic school-age children still do not complete the primary education cycle. This observation reveals that many pupils enrolled in basic

school drop out before completion. The present study therefore seeks to explore the experiences of such children in order to understand dropout.

My search of Ministry of Education (MOE) documents revealed a dearth of information in official papers on any benchmark for the identification of the various forms of unexcused non-attendance that constituted dropout, and little documentation that clearly identified the characteristics of school-age children who enrolled but did not complete their basic education. While some documents refer to children who gain initial access but subsequently stop attending as cases of seasonal withdrawal, other papers refer to them as school dropouts. The following literature review is therefore devoted to highlighting the various definitions of dropout and identified causes of the phenomenon based on previous empirical studies. The next section considers how the available literature attempts to define dropout.

### **3.3 Dropout: The Problem of Definition**

The notion of dropout is a most elusive and complex issue to define. A child might stop attending school, but only for a brief time before resuming his or her education, which to begin with makes any attempt at coining a suitable term based on duration of withdrawal generally difficult.

The school dropout phenomenon is perceived to be a gradual process that is set in motion by a range of factors (Akyeampong et al., 2007; Hunt, 2008). In defining dropout, UNESCO (2005a) proposes the description “*early school-leaving*,” going on to argue that this means exiting the formal education system without completing the cycle or programme that was started.

Some commentators, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), focus on identity, suggesting that a dropout is a pupil who leaves a specific level of the education system without first achieving the appropriate qualification (OECD, 2002). Similarly, Marrow (1987) defines a dropout thus:

*... any student previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absences, who has not satisfied local standards for graduation, and for whom no official request has been received signifying enrolment in another state-licensed educational institution (ibid).*

Although Marrow's definition appears to be more satisfactory as it goes further in setting conditions that must first be met before a pupil qualifies as a dropout, its universal application to different contexts may pose serious problems and might not reflect the true picture of the phenomenon. For example, if the "*fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absences*" rule were to be taken as the sole determinant of dropout status, several Ghanaian pupils and a vast majority of pupils in the study area whose attendance was tracked (see 5.4.1) would qualify.

Moreover, in the Ghanaian context, there are instances in which pupils migrate to other communities, where they gain admission to private or public schools without necessarily obtaining any official leave to do so. This suggests that if Marrow's definition is universally applied, such pupils have technically dropped out whereas in reality, they are still pursuing their education. If such caveats are to be overcome, it may be more appropriate to consider a context-specific and grounded definition.

The importance of focusing on context-specific definition in discussing the dropout phenomenon is evident in the literature produced by organisations, institutions and individuals. In studies on the monitoring of school dropouts in Albania, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Mongolia, Slovakia and Tajikistan, context-specific definitions are employed (Dedze et al., 2005; ESP, 2007).

In Latvia, dropout is defined in two ways: a) "*a child who [has] dropped out of the education process [i.e. a pupil who has not completed basic education and no longer attends school];*" and b) "*children on the verge of dropping out [i.e. pupils who have not attended school for six months and thus are unable to meet the demands set for basic education]*" (Dedze et al., op.cit).



In the case of Slovakia, the definition only includes those pupils who have not completed basic education (ESP, op. cit.), without necessarily incorporating those on the verge of dropping out, as is the case with Latvia.

The Albanian context captures dropout as “*a student who leaves school before its completion, for any reason other than death, without being enrolled in another school or institution*” (ibid). In Mongolia, the term ‘dropout’ is used to refer to a child who ‘quits’ school after attending a period of formal education.

Some of these definitions only point to the ‘quitting’ of school or death of the pupil as constituting dropout, failing to take into account other considerations, such as whether withdrawal is temporary or permanent; the phenomenon of dropping in again; cases in which a pupil attends school but is silently excluded<sup>15</sup>; and other instances in which the pupil is physically present in school but may not be learning anything, thus could have ‘dropped out’ mentally. All these issues need to be captured contextually and in detail if the complexities around the phenomenon are to be understood.

In the Ghanaian context, the literature defines a dropout as a child who has not completed the nine years of basic education (Fentiman, 1999). Yet, as mentioned earlier, defining dropout in this way may be concealing the possibility of the child returning to school, especially if he or she is still of official school age.

According to Akyeampong et al. (2007), a dropout is a child who has enrolled in school but is no longer currently attending, although it is possible that such a child may re-enter the education system at some stage (ibid).

This study sought to improve on the existing definition of dropout by highlighting a definition grounded in the accounts of children who experienced dropout. I define dropout operationally in two ways. First, a dropout is any younger or older school age pupil whose attendance in the immediate past term was less

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<sup>15</sup> CREATE zone 3 (see Appendix 9)

than 40% and he/she is not attending school when data collection for this study began. Secondly, any school age pupil who stopped schooling for more one term without excuse from teachers is a dropout. These definitions guided the initial stages of the studies. The changes in this operational definition of dropout founded on the evidence from dropout children's understanding and interpretation of dropout that emerged is presented in chapter 6.

The next sections are devoted to a review of the literature that addresses the question of why children drop out of school, some parts of sections (3.4) draw on the contribution of Hunt (2008).

### **3.4 The Influence of Demand and Supply Factors on Dropout: Push out-Pull out**

Although there is a growing body of research on the role of the individual and influence of household conditions on children's schooling in Africa, there have been relatively few empirical studies focusing on school dropout (Fuller et al., 1995; Fuller & Liang 1999; Lloyd et al., 2000). Understanding why children drop out of school is the key to addressing this major education problem; yet, identifying the causes of dropout is extremely difficult because the phenomenon is influenced by a range of proximal and distal factors.

A literature search on the causes of dropout prompted my exploration of reasons why children dropout of school and, my subsequent inquiry being based on the research questions and assumptions.

Empirical research into the dropout phenomenon has identified a number of demand and supply factors in the child's family background, the community in which the school is located, and the school itself that can be utilised as predictors of dropout. In a study of dropout in northern Ghana, the complexity of the causes of the phenomenon is illustrated by factors mentioned as reasons for dropout from school (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Stephens, 2007).

Research into the causes of dropout focuses on the influence of a series of interrelated supply and demand factors that interact in a complex way to spur children to drop out of school. I draw on these perspectives in conceptualising dropout as an outcome of factors and contextual conditions setting a process in motion that pushes and/or pulls children until they eventually drop out of school.

Overall, the several causal demand and supply factors of dropout are related to the family background the child; the community in which the school is located; the school and conditions within the school environment. The causes of dropout are contextual, since they are variously located in the family, community and the school. The influence of the child's attributes – his or her values, attitudes and behaviour patterns in terms of education are dictated by contextual variables.

The issues that are related to the causes of dropout, which are discussed include; socio-economic background, cost of schooling: direct and indirect, social capital and dropout: the influence of household structure, child labour/work; and quality of education; education resources, conditions within the school: policies processes and practices, and academic performance.

In the following sections, I present views from demand and supply perspectives respectively that reflect an emphasis on context as a key determinant of dropout. I regard the demand and supply dynamics of dropout as the key to a conceptualisation that can explain the cause of the phenomenon. I subsequently employ it to construct a conceptual framework (see Figure 3.1) that illustrates how dropout causes and the dropout process may be viewed. I discuss the extent to which the framework can be employed to explain dropout as the outcome of a process set in motion by the range of push and/or pull factors that provoked school children in the study area to terminate their schooling.

In spite of the fact that demand and supply factors that interact in a complex fashion to incite children to drop out of school often function simultaneously, I

attempt to explore them separately, although there is necessarily a degree of overlap between them. The next section discusses the demand factors.

### **3.4.1 The influence of Demand Factors: Socio-economic background of children**

#### **3.4.1.1 Household Poverty**

With regards to the influence of children's backgrounds on access to education, much of the empirical research has focused on the structural characteristics of families, such as socio-economic status and family structure. Research has consistently found that socio-economic status - income predicts school achievement and dropout behaviour of children (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Ekstrom et al., 1986; McNeal, 1999; Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Pong & Ju, 2000). Also, the family arrangement type from which the child is coming is found to influence access. For instance children from single-parent and step families are found to be more likely to drop out of school than children from two-parent families (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Goldschmidt & Want 1999; Teachman et al., 1996).

The effect of parental income is generally thought to support human capital theory. Human capital theory argues that, parents make choices about how much resource to invest in their children based on their objectives, resources, and constraints which, in turn, affect their children's tastes for education (Haveman and Wolfe, 1994). Where parental income is lacking or low, parents are unable to provide resources to support their children's education. There is relationship between poverty and school disruption (Hunter and May, 2003; Colclough et al., 2000) Colclough et al. (2000) found in his study that:

*Amongst those out-of-school, the mean wealth index for school drop-outs was generally higher than for those who had never enrolled... Children at school were, on average, from better-off households than those who had dropped out, who were, in turn, from richer backgrounds than school-age children who had never enrolled (ibid: 16).*

In most cases, poor households have a lower demand for schooling than richer households; moreover, the costs of schooling to the poor are more difficult to meet than for richer households (Colclough et al., 2000).

In its analysis of poverty in Ghana, Ghana poverty reduction strategy (GPRS) 1 captures it as existing in three dimensions – income or consumption poverty, lack of access to basic services, and as an impediment to human development. All three dimensions are considered to negatively affect the demand for education by people from poor households, a situation that results in low levels of participation in education.

Poverty is considered to be a major factor in the impediment of enrolment and retention in Ghanaian schools (Akyeampong et al., 2007; Canagarajah & Colombe, 1997; Chao & Apler, 1998; GSS, 2003).

In Ghana, most out-of-school children – both those who have never enrolled and those who have dropped out – come from economically deprived households. According to a Ghana child labour survey report, child workers claimed to be working to raise the money to go to school (GSS, 2003).

Household poverty may be regarded as affecting dropout by its resonating effects that trigger most other factors that are responsible for dropping from school. In exploring the conditions outside school that influence dropout, this study sought to highlight how poverty shapes school attendance and dropout in the study area. The next section looks at how the cost of schooling —direct and indirect, affects schooling.

#### **3.4.1.2 Fees and Indirect Costs of Schooling**

In the literature on determinants of school participation, the influence of household poverty is found to affect enrolment and attendance particularly because of direct and indirect costs of schooling (e.g. Dachi & Garrett, 2003; Fentiman et al., 1999; Rose and Al Samarrai, 2001). According to Huisman and

Smits, (2009), the costs of schooling including the direct costs of books, school fees, uniforms and travel costs as well as the indirect - opportunity costs of the children not being able to help at home, in the household or at the family business, or to earn money in the labour market are found to influence dropout (see also Admassie, 2003; Basu, 1999; Brock and Cammish, 1997; Brown & Park, 2002; Colclough et al., 2000; Hunter and May, 2003; Liu, 2004; Mukudi, 2004; Rose and Al Samarrai, 2001; World Bank, 2002). As mentioned earlier, the cost of school fees was found to be the reason why poor households withdraw their children from school (Canagarajan and Coloumbe 1997; Colclough et al., 2000; Chao and Apler 1998; Fentiman et al., 1999).

Although payment of school fees may not be the main reason behind dropping out in some educational systems because school do not charge children any fees (Ghana is one), Hunt (2008) pointed out that, poor households sometimes withdraw their children from school as part of their coping strategy, often in order to work, save on indirect costs or to free up other household members to work (Huisman and Smits, 2009; Boyle et al., 2002; de Janvry et al., 2006; Jacoby & Skoufias, 1997; Gubert & Robilliard, 2006; Ersado, 2005).

There is therefore a relationship between household poverty and dropout. Coleman (1988) and Hunter and May (2003) however argued that financial capital (parental income) is insufficient to explain the connection between family background and non-attendance and dropout. The next section looks at social capital - structure and arrangement in the household and dropout.

#### **3.4.1.3 Household Structure and Dropout**

Household structure – social capital, which is interpreted as the roles played by families in promoting children schooling (Epstein 1990; Suichu & Willims 1996) and manifests in the relationships parents and other families have with their children, is known to influence access to school (Coleman 1988). McNeal, (1999) and Teachman et al., (1996) argue that where children and their parents have a strong relationships, the tendency of children dropping out of school is reduced. Parenting styles in particular are found to have important influence on

children's participation in schooling and dropout (Baumrid, 1991; Dombusch, et al., 1987; Steinberg, et al., 1992). In households where parents monitor and regulate their children's activities, provide emotional support, encourage independent decision-making as well as become involved in their schooling, children are less likely to drop out of school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Rumberger et al., 1990; Rumberger 1995).

The household composition, arrangement, interaction and support therefore play crucial roles in retention and school completion. Structures in the home play very key roles that encouraged and promote children's participation in schooling or conspire against it. Hunt, (2008) and Huisman and Smits, (2009), show that household composition and structure – demographic structure, education, health, and income of members, etc. – shape access and retention (Al Samarrai and Peasgood, 1998) in many ways.

According to Huisman and Smits, (2009) the demographic structure of the household influences educational attainment and they went on to argue that competition for the scarce educational resources among sons and daughters and older and younger siblings might reduce the chance of individual children to stay in school. In most developing countries, studies have shown that older siblings bear the cost of high fertility rather than by the parents (Huisman and Smits, 2009). Younger children in such families have more opportunities to stay in school, because older siblings assist with household chores or contribute to the household income. For example, Canagarajah & Coulombe, (1997) found that the presence of younger children in a household increases the chance that older girls may not enrol or withdraw from school in Ghana, and the presence of female adults within the household increased the probability of girls schooling and not working (Canagarajah & Coulombe, 1997; Glick and Sahn 2000). To confirm this, Nekatibeb (2002) found in Amhara and Oromia states in Ethiopia that household size and compositions interact with other factors to shape access and retention of female pupils' participation in primary education.

It is also reported that in household where one of the child's parent is away, the probability that that child might drop out of school is high, considering that the child will be saddled with the work which the unavailable parent would have done. Also, in situations where children live with foster parents, they may overburden with duties in the household (Fafchamps & Wahba, 2006). According to Grant and Hallman, 2006 living with biological mothers reduces the likelihood of children drop out of school when compared with living with someone else apart from the biological mother.

Also, parents' level of education plays critical roles in enrolment and retention. Studies (see UNESCO, 2005; Buchmann & Brakewood, 2000; Colclough et al., 2000; Tansel, 2002; Ersado, 2005) show that children whose parents are well educated are enrolled in school early and they do not dropout (Huisman et al., 2009). It is argued that parents who are educated want their children to either reach their level of education or better (Breen & Goldthorpe, 1997). For example, where mothers have successfully completed their education and have understood the value of education, they are aware that it is within the reach of girls to also complete schooling (Huisman and Smits 2009). With regards to girls' enrolment and retention, studies show that the education level of the mother might be especially important (see Ainsworth et al., 2005; Duyear, 2003; Emerson & Portela Souza, 2007; Fuller et al., 1995; Grant and Hallman, 2006).

The health status of household members is another determinant of school enrolment, attendance and dropping out (Hunt 2008). Poor health condition of household members does affect the regular school attendance of children. For example, studies it is known that in most developing countries, when a family member becomes sick, the girl child in particular is compelled to stop schooling to take care of the sick relative to the detriment of her schooling (see Case and Ardington, 2004; Cheterfield and Enge, 2000; Hunt, 2008; Kadzamira and Rose 2001).



#### **3.4.1.4 Child Labour/Work and Dropping out**

In addition to the influence of social capital - household structure in respect of dropout, poverty, location, gender and age often interact with seasonal obligations and child labour to influence access to education and withdrawal (Hunt 2008). Studies have found that there is a trade-off between child labour and child schooling (see Kanbargi and Kulkarni, 1999; Psacharopoulos, 1997; Patrinos and Psacharopoulos 1997; Ravallion and Wodon, 2000; Ray, 2004; Heady, 2003; Rosati and Rossi, 2006; Gunnarsson, et.al. 2006). It is however important to note that while the evidence on the link between household poverty and child labour as a cause of dropout may be described as a weak one (see Hunter and May, 2003), the literature points out the harmful effects of child labour on learning outcomes of children (Ray 2006) which sometimes results in dropout.

Hunt, (2008) highlight the links between poverty and child labour and show how it results in children being pulled and or pushed out of school to work in the labour markets (see also Admassie 2003; Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997; Duryea, 2003; Ersado, 2005; Huisman et al., 2009). Research shows that households in developing countries adjust the school attendance and labour force participation of their children to absorb the impact of negative shocks (Guarcello et al., 2003; Jacoby and Skoufias, 1997). For instance, in rural India parents facing an unexpected decline in crop income withdraw their children from school (Jacoby and Skoufias 1997). Beegle et al. (2006) reported that crop shock leads to a significant increase in child labour and to a decrease in school enrolment and attendance. Guarcello et al., (2003) not only highlight how households in Guatemala adjust the activity status of children in response to idiosyncratic shocks and natural disasters but also reports that the effects of such shocks on children's activities are often enduring, as children who are sent to work are subsequently less likely to return to school.

While Hunt (2008) shows that children's work - type has implications for initial and sustained access to schooling, (see also Ersado, 2005), some studies like Canagarajah and Coulombe's work in Ghana reported weak negative

correlation between school and labour participation rates (Canagarajah and Coulombe 2001). It is reported that when domestic work is included as a child's work, the connection between child labour/work and schooling is weak and this is not surprising because most children are registered as working due to the broad definition of child labour/work. However, only a fraction of children defined as labourers have to work so much that it really impairs their school performance and well-being (Canagarajah and Coulombe 2001).

It should be noted that the operational definitions used to identify a child worker differs in many contexts and research studies. As such, studies are unable highlight the distribution of the children's labour burden clearly. Studies (Ersado, 2005; Rose and Al Samarrai, 2001; Reynolds, 1991; Wenger, 1988) indicate that the distribution of children's burden may be skewed in several directions with sometimes striking gender differences.

In terms of gender, Hunt, (2008) pointed out that research shows that in some cultures, the girl child may drop out of school to because of demands on them to look after their siblings (e.g. Brock & Cammish, 1997; Nicaise, Tonguthai and Fripont 2000). Studies of single communities have also found that older children, primarily girls, do a large share of infant and toddler childcare that take them out of school than boys (Andvig et al., 2001).

For instance, Reynolds (1991) reported that while the girls spent 65 percent of their waking hours on labour, the boys in the same age group only worked 25 percent of their time in a poor rural community in Zimbabwe. Wenger (1988) also noted in a similar study in Kenya that for children in the 8–11 age group, girls spent 51 percent of the time working, while the boys in the same age group only worked 26 percent.

Also, Lloyd and Brandon (1994) study of fertility and schooling in Ghana shows that each additional younger sibling significantly increases the probability that an elder girl will drop out of school which is not the case for boys. It is however important to note that, the negative influence of gender roles on schooling is not limited only to the girl child.

Some studies (see Cardoso and Verner, 2007; Brock & Cammish, 1997; Hunter & May, 2003; Ravallion and Wodon, 1999) also show that in certain contexts, child labour interferes with boys schooling rather than that of girls. Rose and Al Samarrai (2001) mention that in Ethiopia, boys are likely to be the first to enrol in school, but during periods of economic crisis, they may also be the first to withdraw to engage in waged employment.

The opportunity cost of a child's time often increases with age, and as a child grows older, the probability of dropping out of school increases (Admassie, 2003; Blunch & Verner, 2007; Canagarajah & Coulombe, 2001; Ersado, 2005). A study of education access in Ghana between 1994 and 1996, in two circuits in the South (Ziope and Amankwa) and one in the North (Fumbisi), reveals that child labour is the main reason that older pupils drop out of school (Fentiman et al., 1999). Hashim, (2005) reports the migratory habits of older children (aged 13 and above) from poor rural communities in northern Ghana who journey to wealthier localities in the south in search of employment. The influence of child labour on school attendance and dropout may be regarded as opportunity cost in the calculus of decision making on schooling.

It has also been argued that, child labour may allow improved access to education, since children are able to make earn money to pay the direct cost of their schooling (ILO/IPEC, 2004). For example, it was found that relatively large numbers of children migrate independently to the cocoa growing areas of Ghana to work, and that some of these children migrate in order to further their education, either moving to be able to attend school or to be trained in a vocation, or migrating for work to get the money needed to attend school (Hashim 2003; GSS 2003).

Nevertheless, the fact remains that in the majority of cases, child labour affects regular school attendance and usually leads to dropout. Colclough et al. (2000) put thus:

*In Ethiopia, many children, who enrol in September, at the beginning of the school year, leave by November because demands on their labour during harvest time are so great. In some cases, they re-enrol the following year in grade one but, again, are unable to complete the year (ibid).*

Whatever the form child labour takes, it builds pressure on the children's schooling time. Hunt, 2008 argues that children become irregular in school attendance when children combine schooling with work, (see also Brock & Cammish 1997, Ersado, 2005; Guarcello et al., 2005). In some cases, child labour is found to lead to incidents of lateness at school (Guarcello et al., 2005). For example, when seasonal farm activities clash with school hours, children who are engaged in such activities terminate their schooling during to work (Hunt 2008). Such withdrawal – dropout may be 'temporary' (Hunt, 2008), but often it leads to a more permanent departure from school (see Brock & Cammish, 1997; PROBE, 1999; Hunt 2008).

Migrating to work in other communities and demands of the labour market influences schooling decisions and dropout patterns (Hunt 2008). For example, where rural–urban migration exist, school children often terminate their schooling in order to migrate and find work that gives them income (Hashim 2005; Hunt 2008). Also, the current local labour market situation sometimes indicates the future rewards of schooling and this sometimes influences parents and children's schooling decisions. Studies show that in areas where most available jobs do not require much education as may be the case for areas where the dominant employment sector is agriculture, children dropping out of school is likely to be common (Colclough et al., 2000; Buchmann & Brakewood, 2000; Hashim, 2005; Tansel, 2002).

The influence of child labour and other demand side factors on dropout notwithstanding is it is argued that the school has the potential to implement protective mechanisms that increase attendance levels and prevent pupils from dropping out (UNESCO, 2007). The next section examines the influence of the supply factors and the school environment itself on dropout.

### **3.4.2 The Influence of Supply Factors: Conditions within School**

It is widely acknowledged that the school exerts a powerful influence on children's achievements, including dropout rate. In a study in Ghana, a wide variety of school-related causes of dropout were cited. Specifically, factors such as teacher attitude; grade repetition; corporal punishment; difficulty in learning; and grade overage are posited as the reasons behind dropout (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009).

It is argued that both the quantity and quality of educational facilities available influence educational participation, and this is true for specific groups like the poor and girls (Handa, 2002; Vasconcellos, 1997; Colclough et al., 2000; Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Michaelowa, 2001; Ersado, 2005). The case for quantity seems obvious. Where there are no schools or in schools where teachers are not available, children may not attend school (Huisman and Smits, 2009).

Also, distance to school plays an important and critical role in enrolment and retention. It is reported that longer distances to areas where schools are located are associated with lower school attainments for children (Tansel, 2002). Also, in cases in which primary schools are more than the available lower secondary schools in the locality, and or with the available lower secondary school is further away (Fentiman et al., 1999), parents may be unwilling to allow their small children to travel the long distance to school (Juneja, 2001; UNICEF, 2000). In terms of sex, the effects of distance to school on enrolment and retention is severe for girls, because parents are concerned for their daughters' safety, particularly as they approach puberty (Huisman and Smits, 2009; UNICEF 2000). Distance to school was found to have a strong negative impact on demand for schooling in Madagascar (Glick & Sahn, 2006), Ethiopia and Guinea (Colclough et al., 2000). The quality of education is another factor that influences enrolment and dropout.

### **3.4.2.1 Quality of Education: Processes and Practices**

Some factors within the school have been found to interact with other factors outside to cause children to drop out, although in some cases, a positive or negative experience at school can be the main determinant of whether a child stays in school or withdraws respectively (Akyeampong et al 2007; Hunt, 2008).

The quality of education is one such important factor that influences access and dropout. It determines to what extent children benefit from going to school. Where parents realize that their children gain less from low quality education, they tend to take children out of school (Colclough et al., 2000; Buchmann & Brakewood, 2000). According to Fuller et al. (1995) in situations where the quality of the school is considered as better, mothers ensure that their daughters do not easily dropout of school.

It has been argued that for some Ghanaian children non-attendance at school or dropout may be better considered in terms of a rational choice. For example, where school quality and relevance is judged to be poor despite being available and affordable or where children's current earnings are judged to be high in relation to the net benefits of schooling (Rolleston, 2009; Pryor and Ampiah, 2003), non-attendance or dropout may be common.

The way the education system is organized in a country also influences school dropout. In some countries, the duration of primary education for example is seen as particularly important factor to explain drop out (Karakasoglu, 2007). For example, in countries where duration of primary education is short, parents may permit their children to drop out of school after completing a level of education. The duration of primary education system in Turkey has been extended from six to eight years to prevent children dropping out of primary and not making the transition to lower secondary (Karakasoglu, 2007).

### **3.4.2.2 Education Resources**

Education facilities are linked to quality in terms of human resources and in-school resources. Studies suggest that resources influence school dropout rates (Chimombo et al., 2005; Ghuman and Lloyd 2007; Hunt 2008; UNICEF 2000). For example, pupil-teacher ratios were found to have a significant effect on school dropout rates (McNeal, 1997; Rumberger and Thomas, 2000). Also, where school children perceive teacher quality to be higher, dropout rates was found to be lower (Rumberger & Thomas, 2000).

### **3.4.2.3 Conditions within the School: Policies, Processes and Practices**

The academic and social climate of schools — as measured by school attendance rates and children perceptions of a fair discipline policy as well as the resource and structural characteristics of schools may interact to influence school dropout rates (see Bryk & Thum, 1989; Rumberger, 1995; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000).

Issues about quality of education, education resources may interact with some policies and practices within the school to influence dropout. Literature on school dropouts suggests that schools affect children withdrawal in two ways (see Finn, 1989; Wehlage et al., 1989; Bowditch, 1993; Fine, 1991; and Riehl, 1999). First indirectly, through the general policies and practices designed to promote the overall effectiveness of the school. These policies and practices, along with characteristics of the school, may contribute to withdrawal by affecting conditions that keep children engaged in school. This perspective is consistent with theories of school dropout which view conflict between children and school authorities as indicating withdrawal (see Finn, 1989; Wehlage et al., 1989).

Secondly, schools directly, cause children to dropout through explicit policies and conscious decisions that force children to withdraw from school. School regulations about how pupils who attain low grades, have poor attendance, misbehave, or are overage in grade are handled in the school system (Skiba &

Peterson, 1999) are related to school dropout. Children's dropping out of school as a result of these is school-initiated, and is at variance with those issues that are children-initiated. This view regards a school's own agency, rather than just that of the children, in producing dropouts. In describing this process, Riehl (1999) used the metaphor 'discharge': "children drop out of school, schools discharge children" (Riehl, 1999, p. 231). Case studies have shown how schools contribute to children's dropping out of school by systematically excluding and discharging "troublemakers" and children who school authorities consider as problematic (Bowditch, 1993; Fine, 1991 and Riehl, 1999).

Safety of the school environment is another factor that influences dropout. Parents do express concerns about schools that create unsafe environment for children. For example, in Malawi, Miske, et al., (1998) found that male teachers sexually harassed girls and this often results in dropout. According to Bergmann (1996), when parents in Burkina Faso, Mali and Tanzania were asked about reasons they might withdraw their children from schools, they mentioned the lack of discipline, violence of teachers towards pupils – corporal punishment, and the risk of pregnancy due to the male teachers' behaviour (UNICEF 2000). The use of corporal punishment in schools (Verwimp, 1999) does affect the quality of the learning environment since learning cannot take place when the basic needs of survival and self-protection are threatened (UNICEF, 2000)

Issues of bullying from fellow pupils in schools may also exacerbate the precarious situation of children already suffering from harsh treatment by authorities, inciting them to drop out. In some studies (e.g. see Human Rights Watch, 2001; Leach et al., 2003) gender violence in school has also been related with low education access, although the phenomenon has not been directly linked to dropout. Gendered observations related to dropout are usually context and culture specific. For example, while girls' schooling is disrupted as a result of the influences of context and cultural practices such as fosterage (see Stephens 2007), the schooling of boys may be held up just as much on account



of socio-economic/cultural practices (see section 7.2.3. and 7.3). Often, these gendered observations may be occurring more in developing country contexts.

There is also substantial argument (see Bryk et al., 1993; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987) on the extent to which size, location and public or private ownership of schools influence school performance and dropout. The debate has been limited to only the structural feature—public and private schools (see Bryk et al., 1993; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). For example, some studies have found that dropout rates from private schools are lower than dropout rates from public schools (see Bryk & Thum, 1989; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Evans & Schwab, 1995; Neal, 1997; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000; Sander & Krautman, 1995). Interestingly, studies also found that when children from private schools are under performing and are on the verge of dropout, they first transfer to public schools instead before dropping out (see Lee & Burkam, 1992; Rumberger & Thomas, 2000). This suggests that school dropout rates in private and public schools may not statistically differ.

#### **3.4.2.4 Academic Performance**

Poor academic results are associated with higher levels of grade repetition and dropout, and with lower progression ratios to higher levels of the education system (Colclough et al., 2000). For example, parents regard academic achievement as closely related to the opportunity for social promotion and employment. This anticipated outcome is highly valued by families because the future employment possibilities that result from education seem to be a primary factor in the demand for primary education (Bergmann, 1996). A study in China, Guinea, India and Mexico found out that parents lack of faith in school as an instrument for social promotion led to decisions to keep their children out of school (Carron & Chau, 1996). Parents attach more importance to educational outcomes as a measure of school quality (Gaziel, 1996).

In many contexts, household expectations of education quality affect decision-making around schooling access and retention (Hunt 2008). Based on their research in rural Ghana, Pryor and Ampiah (2003) found that in situations

where parents think the quality of the local school was too low, they are unwilling to invest their resources to send their children to school.

### **3.4.3 The Interaction between Children, School Processes and Dropout**

#### **3.4.3.1 Overage in Grade and Dropout**

Another important determinant of school completion is the age of the pupil at the time of enrolment. Pupils who enrolled when they are over aged are predisposed to drop out of school (Ersado, 2005). According to Hunt (2008), in instances where a child starts schooling later than the official entry age, they are not very likely to complete the basic school cycle (see also Colclough et al., 2000; Grant & Hallman, 2006; Nekatibeb, 2002). Enrolling a child late may be as a result of the child's poor health or nutritional status (Pridmore 2007); gender (Glewwe & Jacoby, 1995); household poverty conditions (Canagarajan and Coloumbe 1997); or, in certain cases, distance to school (Brock & Cammish, 1997; Fentiman et al., 1999; Tansel, 2002) or a combination of all.

Late enrolment creates the phenomenon of overage in grade, a situation in which pupils may find schooling unappealing owing to the pressure of feeling inferior to younger classmates. In addition, an unfriendly classroom environment is sometimes created by the teacher's attitude to overage pupils. These two conditions, together with the use of a curriculum that is not designed for teaching pupils of varying ages, can conspire to push children out of school.

For children from poor backgrounds, the older they are in school, the greater the pressure on them to engage in socio-economic activities (Ersado, 2005); and this together with an unappealing school environment pushes pupils to drop out of school. Being from a poor background, overage and unmotivated at school, pupils who gain access to a viable market for their labour are attracted to drop out and earn a living.

An overage pupil from a low-income household often starts working to make some money to support the family income (GSS, 2003), and this results in

irregular attendance. As children work, they initially interrupt their education when they withdraw temporarily and/or stay away from school on a seasonal basis (Hunt 2008). This may be an indication that the pupil is losing interest in schooling and on the path to long-term dropout. Studies have shown that in Ghana, by the age of 13, children from economically poorer households in the North have dropped out of school and migrate to the Southern areas where there is a viable labour market, such as Accra or Kumasi (Hashim, 2005).

#### **3.4.3.2 Poor Health and Dropout**

Deprived circumstances and – the sometimes related – poor physical condition of children have been positively correlated with late enrolment, irregular attendance and dropout. For example, children's health and nutritional status is one such condition, which, according to Pridmore (2007), has a marked impact on a pupils' learning ability and staying to complete school.

Hunt (2008) highlights the negative effects of poor health - anaemia, malnutrition, stunted growth on schooling of children resulting in delayed enrolment (see also Fentiman, Hall & Bundy, 2000; Glewwe & Jacoby, 1995; GNCC, 2000; Pridmore, 2007). Hunt (2008) pointed out that in most cases, intermittent attendance is a precursor of dropout (see Grant & Hallman, 2006; PROBE, 1999). Irregular attendance may be linked with the poor health of children (Batbaatar et al., 2006; Boyle et al., 2003; Colclough et al., 1999).

From the literature review on the cause of dropout, the factors and conditions that were found to be linked with school dropout include; demand factors – socio-economic background of children, and supply factors – conditions related to the school. These factors may be interacting with each other and at the same time with conditions within and outside the school context. Thus household poverty, and demands for child labour/work as well as the availability of education resources, quality of education, practices and processes such as repetition, readmission, may be interacting with the child's characteristics – age, gender, health and the perceived benefit of school completion to result in

dropout. I found these issues very useful in developing a framework for conceptualising the cause of dropout and the process that leads to it. Key ideas and insights from the literature that I found relevant to this study include issues in children's household and community contexts as well as school context that directly and indirectly influence children to drop out of school. In the next section, I use these key ideas and insights to develop a conceptual model for exploring dropout.

### **3.4 Exploring Dropout Process: A Conceptual Model**

Understanding why pupils drop out of school is the key to addressing this major educational problem. However, identifying the single cause of drop out is extremely difficult to do because, it is influenced by a collection of proximal and distal factors related to both the individual school child and to the family, school, and community settings in which the child lives. The complexity of the causes of dropout is illustrated by the variety of reasons mentioned in the literature.

The literature shows many factors, events and conditions in a pupils' life that contributed to dropout. While some are directly related to the school, others not related. In a research seeks to explore the process of dropout and to highlight the connection between the causal factor(s) and the final critical factor(s) that led pupils to drop out of school, I found the demand and supply factors mentioned in the literature very useful.

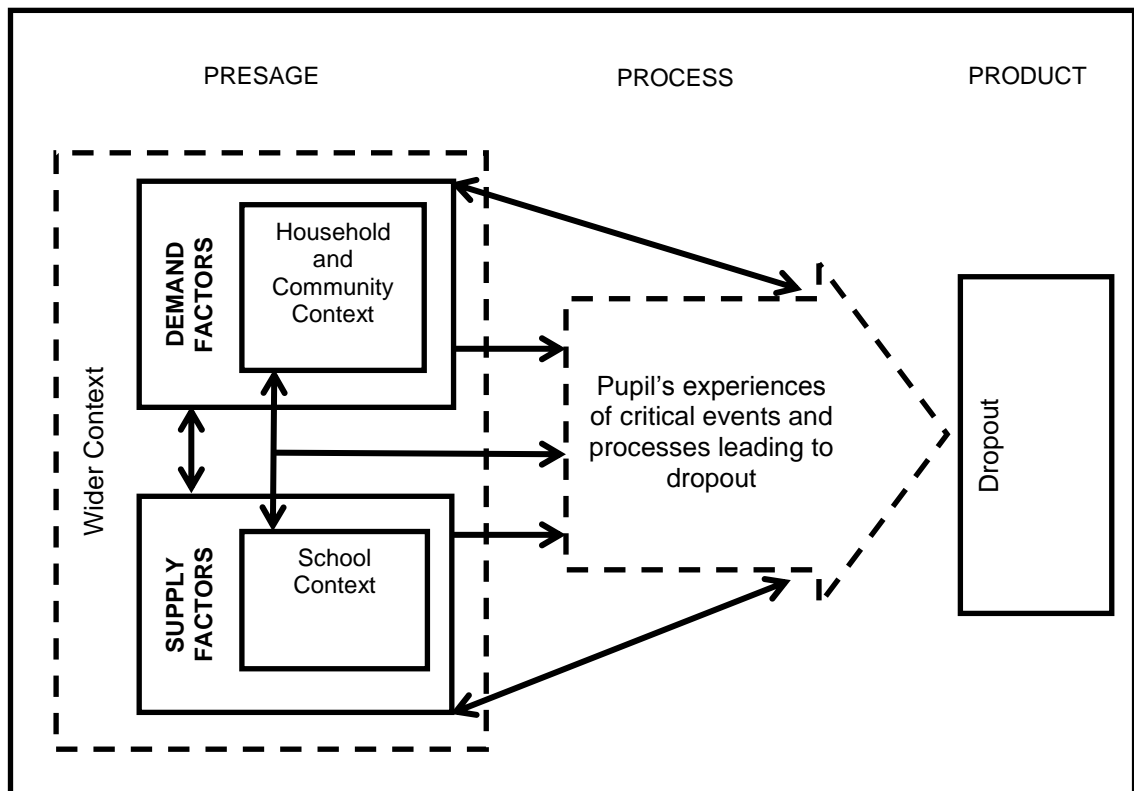
I regard them as frameworks for conceptualising causes of dropout and processes leading to it. The framework acknowledges that drop out represents the critical aspect of the final stage in a dynamic and cumulative process of inter-related practices and processes within and outside school.

A useful way of illustrating the dropout causes – how they spring from both demand and supply related factors, how they are also interlinked at the same time with contextual conditions and how they produce dropout – is to conceptualise dropout as a product of a 'production' function. This function is set in motion by the interactions several factors. I use this idea of production

function and to develop a three tiered conceptual framework for understanding dropout. The framework is useful and, indeed, necessary for understanding the why, how and what of dropout. Figure 3.1 depicts the graphical illustration of the conceptual framework. This is followed by an elaboration of it.

Figure 3.1 is a modified version of Big (1989), which considers the different aspects of the dropout phenomenon in relation to its causes, processes and outcomes.

**Figure 3:1 Presage, Process and Product Applied to Dropout (adapted from Big, 1989 model of 3Ps)**



Source: Adapted from Big, 1989.

### Presage phase

In this model, my overall hypothesis about presage factors – causes of dropout is that, dropout is an outcome that resulted from interactions of supply and demand factors with conditions both within and outside school contexts. Factors affecting supply and demand are largely influenced by the wider political and

economic context. For example, the supply of schools is shaped by government education policy. Moreover, developments in the macroeconomic environment are reflected in livelihoods at the local level, which in turn affects the demand for education on the part of communities and households. In the diagram, the vertical arrow pointing at the boxes labelled 'demand' and 'supply' indicates the interaction of these factors.

Demand factors represent socio-economic conditions in children's backgrounds, and direct and indirect costs of schooling. Supply factors represent the availability of school facility, distance to school, the quality of education, and availability of education resources including books, materials and even teachers.

The box labelled household and community context represents processes and practices outside school, set by demand factors that influenced schooling. They include the poverty conditions of pupils' households, the structure and arrangement in households, community's values and beliefs of about children's schooling, work and economic well-being. The box labelled school context represents the processes and practices within school that are set by supply factors which concurrently influenced schooling. They include teachers attitude to work, the approach to teaching, conditions for repeating pupils and forms of discipline.

The vertical arrow line pointing at the boxes illustrating contexts – household and community, and school indicate the interaction between contexts and demand and supply factors. Thus, the cause of dropout is not simply a fixed attribute that is limited to supply or demand factors alone; rather, it is a function of each, as well as further interactions with certain conditions both within and outside school.

### **Process phase**

Interactions of presage factors – demand and supply with conditions both within and outside school, produce a process which pupils enter. The horizontal arrows originating in the boxes in the presage phase factors show the effects of

interactions of factors that lead to dropout. For example, a pupil may stop attending school entirely as a result of the influences from demand and supply as well as conditions in both contexts.

In the model, this phase may be regarded as the 'process' phase. The process phase is illustrated by the broken arrow box in the middle pointing at dropout box. Pupils may enter the process phase when certain critical factor(s) conspire against retention. For example factors that act as stimulus to stop schooling may take the form of a push and or pull.

The 'push', may be indicated by the varieties of demand and supply factors and processes and practices both within and outside the school. Push factors may include, direct and indirect costs, teacher related issues, poor performing pupils, and teaching methods among others.

The 'pull' may also be indicated by demand and supply factors and processes and practices that attract pupils to stop schooling. Attractions to stop schooling may be the high wages from child labour, a buoyant labour market to hire children, pupils' perceived success of other children not in school, and expectation of households from children about work and economic well-being.

The process phase marks the beginning of pupils' departure from school to become school dropouts. As indicated by the arrow illustrating the process phase, pupils who enter this phase easily cross the threshold from being enrolled and become dropout children.

### **Product phase**

The 'product' phase in the model shows dropout as the outcome of the interactions of the presage factors. First the interactions between the demand and supply factors and conditions both within and outside school contexts – presage factors creates a process, secondly, as pupils enter this process phase, they are easily pushed or pulled to terminate their schooling.

In summary, the three phases of the presage-process-product model when combined provides a conceptual framework for exploring dropout. It highlights the complex interactions between the factors and conditions that produce a particular process along which children cross the threshold from being enrolled pupils to out of school children – dropouts. The process phase of the model is very important in this study because, it indicates the particular aspect of dropout that this study sought to explore. To understand the worldviews about the dropout process, an exploration of the experiences of children who dropped out of school would be useful.

The argument here is if we are to prevent pupils from dropping out of school and encourage those children who have already dropped out to return to school, a clearer understanding of dropout processes in context in particular is required. In a study of girls and basic education in northern Ghana, it is argued that children who are *at risk* of dropping out and those who have dropped out must be identified (Stephens 2007).

Any study that aims to unravel the dropout process must therefore highlight its stages and the point at which a child may be regarded as being ‘at risk’ of dropout. This model was therefore a useful framework for conceptualising dropout in a study that sought to explore contextually this phenomenon and the process leading to it. Moreover, the framework provided direction for the development of themes that guided the formulation of interview questions in the data-gathering process.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter considered the international policies in which the agenda on EFA and the need to curb dropout are anchored. Next, I reviewed definitions of dropout from the literature; and subsequently introduced the concept of demand and supply conditions to explain why dropout occurs. The chapter concluded with a conceptual framework built on an explanation of the causes of dropout based on the literature.



The next chapter discusses the methodology and methods I used in exploring the dropout experiences of children in Ghana. The chapter highlights the epistemological and ontological considerations that underpin the study, and lists the justifications for my choice of methods.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Methodology and Methods**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research methodology of the study. It evaluates the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of qualitative and quantitative research, and asserts the rationale behind the adoption of a qualitative approach. This is followed by a section highlighting the research design; the methods and procedures used during data collection; and the manner in which findings are analysed and reported. The chapter finally considers issues relating to positionality and ends with a conclusion.

#### **4.2 Methodological Considerations in Researching Dropout: Ontology and Epistemology**

Ontology is concerned with the nature or essence of things. Thus ontological assumptions about social reality will focus on issues around being human within the world and on whether a person sees social reality, or aspects of the social world, as external, independent, given objectively real or, as socially construction, subjectively experiences and the result of human thought as expressed through language (Wellington et, al. 2005). Epistemology is the theory of knowledge and is concerned with how we know (ibid). It denotes what is regarded as appropriate knowledge about the social world and what may be regarded as the appropriate ways of inquiry and alternative methods of investigation it (Bryman 2004)

Ontological and epistemological issues merge in the sense that the latter concerns how human actors may go about inquiring into and making sense of the former. Ontological and epistemological questions concern what is commonly referred to as the individual's worldview. Ontological and epistemological assumptions about reality are closely linked with the methodological approach pursued and the methods employed in collecting data, as well as the sources from which the data are gained (Mason, 2002).

To the interpretivist, reality is a complex social construction of meanings, values and lived experience (Cohen et al., 2000; Grix, 2004). He or she tries to make sense of the world, recognising that his or her sense-making activities occur within the framework of his or her life-world and the particular goals he or she sets. Knowledge is therefore built through a social construction of the world.

The very nature of interpretivist research means that the researcher him or herself in effect becomes a measurement instrument: the researcher interprets or measures the phenomena he or she observes. This sense-making activity is clearly affected by and affects his or her life-world. In this regard, the interpretive researcher understands that research actions affect the research object under study. The interpretive researcher also understands that the research object in turn affects him or her. The researcher and the object of research are thus interdependent.

The interpretivist therefore tends to employ research methods and data collection techniques that allow the research subject to interpret his or her own experience of the world. The interpretivist thus employs the case study, ethnographic study, phenomenographic study, and ethnomethodological study as his or her preferred research methods. Accordingly, data-gathering techniques include observation, interviews, documents and audio-visual materials that generate information mostly in the form of words (Creswell, 2003).

In terms of methodology, an interpretivist assumption rests on qualitative research (Bryman, 2001). The qualitative researcher adopts a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in a context-specific setting, a “real world setting and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2001: 39). In other words, the qualitative researcher operates from an interpretivist point of view, employing methods of data collection that are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which the data are being produced (Grix, 2004).

Qualitative research is “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 17). It is a mode of research that produces findings from real-world settings, wherein the “phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally” (Patton, 2001: 39). Moreover, the qualitative researcher is interested in illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997).

The qualitative researcher usually pursues “in-depth investigations of phenomena and use[s] observation, interviewing, archival and other documentary analysis or ethnographic study” (Ragin, 1994: 91). Although qualitative research does not rely on numerical data, it draws on it where necessary. With the aim of discerning patterns, trends and relationships between variables, the qualitative researcher seeks information about events, institutions or geographical locations (Grix, 2004).

The conduct of qualitative research tends to revolve around the case study and social context. As noted by Holloway (1997: 80), “qualitative research involves the interpretation of data whereby the researcher analyses cases in their social and cultural context over a specific period of time and may develop theories that emphasise tracing processes and sequences of events in specific settings” (Grix, 2004).

With regard to research involving children, Greig and Taylor (1999) argue that the interpretivist scientist seeks to understand the social world from the point of view of the children living in it. They note by way of explanation that the interpretivist attempts to make sense of how children understand their experiences, and this affects the way they relate towards others (ibid).

At one level of the interpretation of research involving children, there is the qualitative aim of discovering or entering the subjective experiences and perspectives of the child. I thus argue that qualitative research focuses on unique situations and phenomena that permit profound description and interpretation with a view to explaining the object of the study.

In choosing an approach to the conduct of a study, it is best to be guided by the nature of the research question, the participants and the kind of findings one hopes for. Considering the nature of the research questions this study sought to answer and the protagonists generating the bulk of the data, I found the adoption of a largely qualitative approach to exploring the dropout phenomenon to be useful.

#### **4.2.1 Theoretical Orientation and Rationale for Qualitative Design**

The objective of this study is outlined in chapter 1: it was designed to explore the dropout experience of children who terminate basic schooling. In order to unearth the ways in which children understand and interpret the phenomenon of dropout, how it is experienced, and the processes involved, it necessary to learn something of children's individual experiences.

Accordingly, the qualitative approach is considered invaluable to this study because of its commitment to seeing the social world and the events that take place in it through the eyes of the research participant; its provision for gathering detailed accounts of actions that occur in the setting being explored; and the ready evidence of change and flux it is able to provide (Bryman, 2004).

In qualitative research, knowledge claims made by the inquirer are based on constructivist perspectives, and focus on multiple interpretations of individual experiences and socially and historically constructed points of view; with the intention of developing theory, pattern or advocacy/participatory perspectives – political, issue-oriented, collaborative, change-oriented – or both (Creswell, 2003).

In view of the aim of this study, which seeks to explore the dropout experiences of children and their stories, I argue a case for qualitative research because of its exploratory nature. Exploratory studies focus on issues and populations about which little is been written about so researchers need to listen to participants in order to construct an understanding based on their ideas (Creswell, 2003).

The available literature on education access, retention and completion in Ghana focuses predominantly on quantitative characteristics (e.g. World Bank, 2004; GSS, 2003; MOESS, 2006). Indeed, a review of the literature on the dropout phenomenon in Ghana revealed the dearth of qualitative information on its trajectory based on the experiences of dropout children.

According to Ampiah (2008), little is known about how the daily activities of children in Ghana influence their schooling behaviour; or about the challenges faced by dropout children when they return to school. Moreover, in a review of international literature, Hunt (2008) argues that researchers are well aware that factors such as low socio-economic status, gender and geographical location are probable determinants of dropout, but that less is known about the qualitative stories of the people affected by such factors.

These views justify the need to adopt a qualitative approach to unravelling the stories surrounding the dropout process in Ghana. Indeed, any new qualitative contribution to the existing literature on the dropout phenomenon is invaluable and could serve as a precursor to policy and programme development targeting dropout children.

In discussions, policies and programmes at national and international levels aimed at increasing children's access to education, it is insufficient to intervene in an attempt to prevent dropout and encourage drop-in without necessarily engaging affected children in a dialogue aimed at understanding their particular needs, circumstances and experiences.

Some researchers have also argued for a more qualitative approach to the study of particular phenomena that are unique to the specific conditions of developing countries. For example, according to Akyeamong and Murphy (1997), the education problems of such nations are varied, interconnected and often contextual. The authors argue that most education strategies and innovations have been implemented without fully understanding how school-related contexts interact with other contexts external to the school. In order to

reach a better understanding of the realities involved, they propose the essential adoption of adaptable and flexible research tools (ibid).

However, one side effect of the use of such incisive tools is a reduction in the desired outcomes. Thus, in order that researchers are able to fully understand the realities surrounding such education issues as the dropout phenomenon, there is a need to delve below the surface of the problem to reveal how education-related phenomena or practice is experienced (ibid).

In terms of GoG efforts to implement a fee-free universal basic education policy to ensure that no child is left behind at this level, a study focusing on an exploration of the dropout process can potentially demystify the phenomenon and shed some light on the stage of the education cycle at which dropout typically occurs.

Understanding how and why dropout occurs in spite of the implementation of a fee-free education policy is a way of evaluating the points at which policy and practice meet (Vulliamy, 1990), and provides an opportunity for research to address the gaps that are usually to be found between policy directives and actual practice (Adams & Chen, 1981).

Thus, there is a pressing need to explore the stages of a process that culminates in the contextual occurrence of both dropout and drop-in, and the manner in which pupils experience these events. Such a requirement necessitates the adoption of a research approach and the employment of methods that are equal to the provision of answers and insights into the information needs of the study and the issues it raises (Burgess, 1985). My own philosophical inclination towards qualitative inquiry that reflects a diverse stance has been naturally influenced by these observations.

The qualitative approach was chosen for this study based on the fact that a single, short quantitative approach to studying dropout would not probe below the surface issues. The investigation was therefore designed as a kind of 'mini-longitudinal study'. In practice, longitudinal designs focus on mapping change

(Bryman, 2004), that is, in the present study, dropout children's aspirations towards education, work and economic well-being. This design gave me the opportunity to re-interview children in the second phase of the fieldwork whom I had encountered during the first phase.

#### **4.2.2 Case Study Design and Ethnographic Methods**

This study sought to provide answers to the question of the nature of the experiences of dropout children – their understanding and interpretation of dropout; what the dropout process is; and the factors that children believe conspire to negatively influence retention and progress within the education system. During data collection, I dubbed the qualitative approach I employed a 'mini-ethnographic and case study' – a type of ethnographic study. It is a bounded study of school dropout, and thus adopted ethnographic methods and employed a range of techniques, including interviews; biographical life histories; observation; and the tracking of the critical events in children's lives that influenced their schooling.

In the research methods literature on the case study, a 'case' may be theoretical, or empirical or both; it may be a relatively bounded object or a process; and it may be generic and universal or specific in some way (Ragin and Becker, 1992; Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009), the case study design is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly drawn (Yin, 2009, p. 18). I therefore conceived my case study to be nested. It also resonated at three levels: first, the phenomenon of school dropout as a case – it being a social phenomenon specific in time and place; second, the geographical location of the study is another case; and finally, 'case' at particularistic level – the individual experiences of dropout children.

In other words, I refer to the design of my research framework as a case study because it entails detailed and intensive analysis of a single case – the phenomenon of school dropout located in a particular municipality; and, at the



same time, multiple cases – a collection of histories of the individual experiences of 18 dropout children.

The study of multiple cases (*individual experiences of dropout children*) presented in this thesis entailed an exploration of the processes, activities and critical events surrounding dropout and drop-in in order to determine whether individual cases have wider implications (Denscombe, 2007) in terms of gaining an understanding of realities at a grassroots level. In conducting an in-depth inquiry into the dropout phenomenon, the detailed study of multiple cases was intended to allow for comparative analysis (Bryman, 2004); and in exploring multiple cases, it was possible to use the deep and variable experiences of my subjects (the children) to develop a comprehensive understanding of dropout and its contextual dimensions. This reflects the importance of valuing complexity and context in attempting to reach and understanding a case; both of which are central to the focus of inquiry in this thesis.

The adoption of ethnographic methods allowed me to study the broad culture-sharing behaviour of both individuals and a discrete group – dropout children – in a natural setting over a period of time. That is their attitudes and aspirations towards schooling work and economic well-being. I collected data by means of a flexible research process, which typically progressed in response to the lived realities that were encountered in the field setting (Creswell, 2003).

Narratives of children who had recently dropped out of school some of who later re-enrolled were listened to. These stories were also assessed with a view to presenting experiences in a way that was faithful to the original (Denscombe, 2007). I therefore attempted to understand things from the point of the children involved, to “*grasp the native’s point of view*” (Denscombe, 2007); another aspect of context that the short-term quantitative study is unable to take into account.

Using ethnographic methods was useful in terms of seeing things through the eyes of my main research participants – children. This helped me to understand things in the way that the children understood them; in a manner that paid adequate attention to their understanding of what it meant to be a dropout, and how and why dropout and drop-in occurred.

In exploring children's experiences at home, in the community and at school, I also sought the views of parents and teachers by engaging them in collaborative dialogue. This helped to capture a holistic picture (Denscombe, 2007) of dropout and drop-in.

### **4.3 Plan and Conduct of the Study**

#### **4.3.1 Selection of Cases**

The two schools (Narkwa and Kyeakor) from which I gathered data on dropout children are among the 38 schools in Mfantseman Municipality. These two schools are among the nine of those sampled in the municipality in which CREATE data on schooling (as analysed in chapter 5) was collected (see 5.3.1 and 5.4.1). I used opportunistic, snowball and accidental sampling for the selection of the children who participated in this study. I located prospective participants in the community; and whenever I met a child of school age in town during school hours, I inquired whether he or she currently, had ever, or had never attended school.

In identifying child participants, I relied heavily on teachers who had taught in the schools under study for between four and ten years, and pupils – dropouts in particular – who had returned to school. For example, three dropout children who had subsequently dropped back in became my initial points of contact in leading me to other dropout children.

I bore in mind that teachers knew school children very well, and that pupils often kept in regular contact with former classmates who had stopped attending school. The assistance of both groups proved most useful in the initial

identification of dropout children. Additionally, sometimes dropouts I had identified led me to others who had also withdrawn from school.

For example, I initially spent considerable time at the beach each day, trying to talk to some of the children who were by now helping in the construction of canoes.<sup>16</sup> One of the dropouts I asked about other such children showed me where one boy was building a canoe. I remember the former saying, “*Woe w’agyaɛ school akye*” [this child hasn’t been to school for a long time].

Parents of children participating in the study were also purposefully approached, dependent on availability, interest and willingness to be interviewed. The head teachers of both selected school were engaged for their views on dropout. Long-term teachers and others who taught classes in which drop-in children had re-enrolled were also contacted subject to their interest and willingness to contribute to my research. Finally, I had informal discussions with education directors at the district level in order to gain information concerning their awareness of dropout and government policy on the phenomenon.

In all, 18 children who had dropped out of various grades were identified and engaged in the in-depth research process. In selecting them, I tried to satisfy equal representation of age and gender parity, but this was met with difficulty. First, most children who dropped out travelled to unknown destinations, and only those who showed interest in participating were included in the study. Second, my initial intention to engage children between 6 and 15 years<sup>17</sup> had to be modified to include those up to 17 years of age, owing to the fact that most children in the study area enrolled overage in grade (see figures 5:7 and 5:8). Nevertheless, selection of dropout children for participation continued until the data I was getting began repeating itself when the eighteenth child was engaged. The children who participated in this study outnumber the number of parents and teachers who I engaged because the study was designed to listen to the voices of dropout children more than their parents and teachers.

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<sup>16</sup> Such canoes were usually used to paddle to Half Assini for the fishing season, which lasted from the beginning of June until October.

<sup>17</sup> The official lower and upper age for basic school children in Ghana.

**Table 4:1 Number of Research Participants by Case Study Area**

<b>Case Study Area</b>	<b>No. of Children</b>	<b>No. of Teachers/ School Heads</b>	<b>No. of Parents</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Narkwa</b>	11	3	3	17
<b>Kyeakor</b>	7	3	3	13
<b>Total</b>	18	6	6	30

*Source: Field data.*

#### **4.3.2 Development of Interview Protocol**

Developing the interview protocol is a crucial aspect of any study. An in-depth interview approach was adopted mainly for the purpose of gathering data in participants' own words in order to gain insights into the manner in which dropout is experienced. In-depth interview questions based on issues identified from the research questions were partly shaped by my earlier involvement with out-of-school children, parents and teachers during the ComSS data collection, and also from the literature on dropout. The development of the interview protocol was also shaped by pilot testing and through consultation with other researchers and informants (Glesne, 1995).

#### **4.3.3 Negotiating Access to Dropouts**

In conducting a qualitative study of this nature, ethical concerns such as how access is gained are critical, and the richness of the data collected ultimately depends largely on the extent of access and range of sources. In the course of engaging participants during data collection, I paid great attention to respecting and preserving the interests, rights and independence of participants, and gave consideration to ensuring that their best interests and welfare were safeguarded at all times (Butler, 2002), especially in ensuring that the natural setting was not disturbed.

It was necessary that the parents or guardians of children from whom data was collected, the children themselves, and their teachers were all aware that the research was of some value to the participants; and that they were assured of

its integrity, so that the data collected could be described as originating from co-operation, consent and assent during interview situations.

In negotiating access at Narkwa, I took advantage of my earlier contact with the community when I had participated in the data collection for the CommSS. However, to guarantee a cordial resumption of relations, previous access and consent notwithstanding, informed consent/assent and co-operation was again sought for the present study.

Commenting on the importance of access in conducting research, Dunne et al. (2005) point out that negotiating informed consent is not always straightforward. Accordingly, I repeatedly negotiated access and consent throughout the research process as and when the need arose.

Custodians of the community, such as chiefs, community elders and heads of institutions, from whom access had been negotiated during the CommSS, were again repeatedly made aware of this round of research throughout the data collection period. I also held discussions with research participants on ways in which participation might affect them when research data were disseminated, for example, when photographs were taken.

#### **4.3.3.1 Seeking Informed Consent as a Process: Parents and Children**

In any study such as this that positions children as major participants, it is crucial to determine who the relevant significant adults are and the extent of their obligations to the children. In the literature on research with minors, many studies concentrate on observing and intervening with children within familiar or non-familiar settings; but few investigations actually pose their research questions directly to children. In this respect, Sayeed and Guerin (2000:2) note that *“Research is largely based on observations of players (children) and non-players (adults), as the players are not generally expected to be able to describe what they are/were doing while they are/were engaging in play.”*

Nevertheless, research that involves children should not be conducted unless the consent of parents, guardians, or educators as appropriate is secured. It is equally important to be aware of the manner in which children give their own consent. In approaching these respective groups, I also recognised the fact that consent was not a one-off action that was performed at the beginning of the fieldwork (Flewitt, 2005). This implies that informed consent/assent must be seen as an on-going process if it is to create spaces for information sharing, choice in whether to participate, and the ability to deal with the complexities of doing so (Dunne et al., 2005).

#### **4.3.3.2 Parents and Significant Others**

In Narkwa, I approached the chief of the town and informed him of my intended study, and he notified the community of my presence. This was straightforward because most pupils, teachers and some parents already knew me from the earlier study.

My approach was necessarily different in Kyeakor, where most children travelled to school from the surrounding villages. I had an initial meeting with the teachers at the school and later one of them volunteered to take me to all the villages where the pupils lived so that I could meet their parents or guardians.

Even though identifying dropouts proved to be problematic, working around issues of consent was best facilitated through individual meetings with parents to share information on criteria for selecting their child to participate in the study and what this would entail for him or her. Indeed, the head and some of the teachers at the school advised me to engage with parents on an individual basis instead of sending out consent forms, which I found quite practicable on account of the small number of children engaged and also the fact that these parents could not read.

However, meeting parents or guardians individually was difficult because of their busy lives; they often left home early in the morning and returned very late

and very tired. Nevertheless, this situation was overcome by meeting with them on Sundays, when they were often at home.

It is important to note that ethical issues concerning the signing of consent forms should be navigated with the context of the study in mind. For example, where participants are unable to read or write, consent forms cannot be used. The researcher then has to find a way of obtaining permission that reflects the spirit of the official form. Moreover, in the Ghanaian context, it is sometimes the case that an illiterate person will become suspicious when asked to append his or her signature to a document that he or she cannot read, owing to the belief that this might be used as evidence in any dispute over the contract that has been entered into. In this study, parents and teachers asked me to take their word that they were willing to participate or otherwise rather than sign a consent form.

This raises questions about how ethical requirements constructed in a Western context can be applied to a less-developed context in which issues around consent may be interpreted very differently. How does one validate consent in a context in which verbal assent carries just as much weight – if not more – as written consent? The implications of different cultural contexts and practices clearly need to be taken into account when considering what constitutes consent under University of Sussex research regulations.

Refusal of child participation was not a major problem, except in the case of one foster parent who was suspicious of research as a purely academic exercise. He felt that since it was his duty to ensure that his children attended school regularly, he had somehow failed in his responsibility towards this particular child; and any information gathered about the child's behaviour and what he or she did when not in school would be used to prosecute him (the foster parent).

Additionally, some parents considered that enough data had already been collected from the community and it would be a waste of time engaging the children again. Some parents also doubted that their children had any worthwhile knowledge to share for the purposes of research. Nevertheless,

others were impressed by the fact that I had chosen to study dropouts in their community for my doctorate and readily consented to their children's participation.

At the schools, teachers who had spent more than four years teaching in the community suggested possible ways of identifying children for inclusion in the study. I explained the nature of my research and ethical issues around voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw in the local dialect to participants. Because most parents or guardians could not read and write, I gave them the option of telling me if they agreed to their child's participation or not. As noted earlier, there was only one refusal of child participation.

The willingness of parents to allow their children to participate may be attributed to the fact that most parents felt that the dropout phenomenon was generally an issue over which they had no control themselves, and they saw my work as a possible means of motivating their children to attend school regularly. In both communities, parents and teachers believed that participation in the study would bring about social change. It is possible that this type of thinking motivated consent.

In both Narkwa and Kyeakor, the notion of informed consent as a process proved to be a valuable means of gaining access and building relationships. Each planned visit to a given home was characterised by a kind of check-in procedure, whereby consent was sought for that day's particular activity.

In Narkwa, the return of the fishing canoes disrupted the routine. In the case of Kyeakor (where most children lived out of town), attempting to make appointments could be a difficult and frustrating procedure. The teachers who acted as my informants also pointed out that market days were times when parents and children were very busy and preoccupied. This information helped me to be sensitive to participants' daily routines when planning research activities.



Access was renegotiated and consent sought when I followed some children who had migrated to a western region of the country. Initially, I thought it would be difficult to locate them in such a comparatively large town as the district capital. However, my fears were dispelled when upon arrival, I ran into one of the pupils at the main lorry station. I asked her where I could find the other children who had accompanied her, and she said that all I had to do was go to the beach the following morning and they would all be there.

In negotiating access in this community, I met with the district chief executive<sup>18</sup> (DCE), who delegated one of his staff to introduce me to the leaders of the fishing community and informed them of my presence and my research. In this community, I had the opportunity to meet with some of the children's biological parents, who did not reside in the two communities in which the children went to school. Most community members – especially the parents of the children I was following – showed a good deal of interest in my research, expressing the hope that it might help their children return to school. However, a few individuals were very suspicious of my presence. One of them commented that no doubt I was investigating them in order to report instances of child labour in the area; but added that I should remember that these children chose to work of their own volition.

#### **4.3.3.3 Children's Assent**

Basing my approach on the notion of childhood as context-bound and children as social actors meant that I could not make any of the natural assumptions about age-appropriate communication that adults traditionally claimed to be aware of and understand. The concept of agreement suggested a way forward: since children were minors and thus unable to give their consent, the term 'assent' was used. According to Cocks (2006), assent is the gaining of children's agreement within clearly defined situations in the research process; it is necessary that young children exercise their choice in participation through the receipt of information consistent with their ways of knowing.

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<sup>18</sup> A DCE is comparable to a mayor.

In order to treat children fairly in their present circumstances, it was important that I designed the period of the study – 11 months to allow myself sufficient time to become sensitised to the ways in which they gave their assent and the factors that influenced such a process.

As a native-speaking educator who had taught at the lower and upper primary as well as the JHS level for close to six years, I was somewhat familiar with the ways in which children communicated their views in various situations. It was evident that they not only used spoken language to show assent and dissent but also nonverbal gestures. Accordingly, I was able to make sense of the messages children conveyed through eye contact, facial expression, posture and general behaviour in certain situations.

In order to sharpen my observation of communicative situations, I reflect over some questions: What were the communicative cues used by children to show that they understood? What was the dominant visual message? How was the body positioned? Bearing in mind cultural particularities, how were gestures and eye contact used to show understanding; or, otherwise, assent or dissent? Was there an intentional effort to promote personal ideas? Was there an intentional effort to reject others' ideas? How was rejection of ideas handled? How was unwanted presence handled? Such questions proved very useful in understanding how children communicated.

Observation deepened my understanding of the factors that needed to be taken into consideration when seeking assent for researcher presence and research activities. It was evident that the time of day, nature of the activity and space in which the request was made all had an impact on children's decision to participate. In creating acceptable researcher presence for voluntary participation, it was evident that the children grew in confidence in terms of either consenting to or withdrawing from participation.

Most children viewed me as an adult who had less authority than their parents, teachers or other adults in the community. Therefore, they felt at ease to ask questions about participation. There was also an incident in which a child

expressed outright rejection of a research activity by complaining in a hoarse whisper, “*We are tired of being asked questions.*” In another incident, a child who had earlier given her assent turned around and ran away as soon as she saw me approaching her house on two occasions.

My knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication was particularly helpful in deciding whether a planned meeting might usefully be pursued. During the data collection period, child dissent was noted from children’s proximity behaviour, lack of willingness to speak, and the way in which they avoided me in favour of their own activities when we had planned a meeting. However, I made great effort to respect children’s decisions, even in the frustrating context of having to meet deadlines and returning from the field without much significant data.

#### **4.3.3.4 Disabling Power Relations**

Of particular interest and importance to this study of children is the way in which I dealt with and resolved imbalances of power. On ethical grounds, I was concerned about how to behave with children, so I adopted multiple roles. As an adult conducting research with children, I was aware that I could never act like a child (Mayall, 2000); therefore, I accepted the difference between the children and myself and, in order to overcome this difference, positioned myself as an ‘acceptable incompetent’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

In most circumstances, I played the role of a friend, especially when I went for a walk at the beach with some children while we waited for the return of the fishing canoes. The children used this time to tell me about what they did when they were not in school. This method was very effective in Narkwa, where the major economic activity was fishing.

In Kyeakor, where some pupils came from villages six kilometres from the main town, I usually met children on Friday and Saturday evenings. This was the part of the week reserved for organising funerals in the town. At such times, most of the children were free and both those who lived in the town and those who

came from the outlying villages usually met in the town centre to listen and dance to music played at the funeral sites. The children agreed that that these times were convenient for them and meeting on these days became a routine. Consequently, I frequently used this opportunity to engage in informal discussions that eventually led to children sharing their experiences with me.

#### **4.4 Fieldwork Process and Data Collection**

The fieldwork was conducted in two stages. The first stage took place between May and September 2008 – Phase I; and the second stage took place between October 2009 and April 2010 – Phase II (thus, both phases lasted for 11 months).

The second phase of fieldwork was undertaken to address issues that had emerged from the analysis of the first round of data collection. This second stage was also used to validate the findings. During this period, children were presented with summaries of the emerging findings and asked to comment on them.

Moreover, being a kind of longitudinal study, the second phase gave me the opportunity to ascertain whether children who had re-enrolled by the time I concluded the first round of data collection were still going to school or not; and to discover the pupils' attitudes towards schooling after a year, and find out how the school was responding to their learning needs.

##### **4.4.1 Data Collection**

Considering the nature of the research questions, the type of data required for the analysis, and prevailing conditions in the research area, I realised as mentioned earlier that the best way of collecting adequate data for the study would be the qualitative approach. This was because the data required was qualitative in nature and could best be obtained through the in-depth interview.

Additionally, aspects of the data were physically observable and could be gathered through direct field observation. There were also school records that

could yield useful data for the study. I therefore became convinced of the usefulness of combining data from different sources in order to gather all the information I needed for the inquiry.

Morrow and Richards (1996 cited in John, 2003) warn of over-reliance on one type of data source, especially when conducting research with children (John, op. cit). Therefore, the present study employs in-depth interviews, field observation and documentary analysis. I draw on the strengths of these different methods of data collection to improve the overall validity of the data.

The children engaged for the study were interviewed and observed; and significant others, such as parents, school heads, and teachers, were also interviewed. Both primary and secondary sources were utilised during data collection. Primary data include interview transcripts, photographs<sup>19</sup> and field notes; and secondary data include school records that I collected personally and CREATE school tracking data which was collected by Centre for Research on Improving Quality of Primary Education in Ghana (CRIQPEG) and National Centre for Research into Basic Education<sup>20</sup> (NCRIBE).

Research participants – children in particular – engaged in the process of data collection were heterogeneous in terms of age, gender and grade at which they dropped out of as well as returned to school. They also had disparate cultural but similar socio-economic backgrounds, and came from various geographical locations, ethnicities and religious affiliations, although the majority were residents of two albeit discrete rural communities located in a single municipality (see figure 5:1).

The somewhat different circumstances of children's home lives; interaction and support; values; and perceptions of education enhances the analysis of the diversity of factors that combine to create the notion of 'community'. Children are located in the context of significant others and events whose interactive

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<sup>19</sup> The photographs include those taken by the children and myself.

<sup>20</sup> I was among NCRIBE team of researchers who collected the first phase of the CREATE data in 2006/7

effects shape school attendance patterns, and the decision whether to drop out temporarily subsequently to return to school later, or not. I therefore collected data through collaboration with children in the school, at home and wherever else they might be found.

In addition to assistance from children in locating dropouts, I also traced school attendance records, which gave me an indication of the number of children who had dropped out. With the help of children and teachers, I identified those whose record showed that they had dropped out, and located, interviewed and observed them.

Teachers were engaged in the school, parents in their homes and significant others in the community. Most interviews were audio-recorded and complemented with notes in my field diary, and, if considered necessary, photographs taken by children.

**Table 4:2 Details of Data Collection**

<b>Target of Investigation</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Purpose</b>
Children	In-depth interview	To discover and describe children's understanding and interpretation of dropout, the stories of how they dropped out, and their reasons for dropping out and dropping in.
Children's activities	Observation/ Interview	To gain an understanding of the daily activities of children that influence decisions on schooling.
School head/ teachers	Interview	To discover and describe perceptions and understanding of dropout, how cases of dropout were identified, and how and why it is thought dropout and drop-in occurs.
Parents	Interview	To discover and describe perceptions and understanding of dropout, the factors responsible for children's attitude towards schooling, and to confirm children's stories of their experiences.
Documentation	Secondary data analysis	To examine trends in children's enrolment and attendance, the intentions being to trace children's attendance patterns, and determine how they exemplify and typify general patterns of attendance in the research area.
School characteristics	Observation	To gain an overview of the school environment and context in which dropout and drop-in occurs, and the practices that shape children's education. To gain primary evidence of school level processes and understand how they shape children's patterns of attendance and dropout.
Classroom interaction	Observation	To examine how teachers relate to pupils in the classroom. To gain primary evidence of how teachers deal with children on the verge of dropout and dropouts who have returned to school.
Community-related activities	Observation	To identify and gain an understanding of the socio-economic activities that influence children's schooling, and how such activities shape children's aspirations in terms of returning to school, employment and economic well-being.
Community characteristics	Observation	To gain an overview of the context in which dropouts are located, and how it influences the children's attitude towards their schooling.

#### **4.4.1.1 Interviewing Methods**

Conducting interviews as part of the study is a useful way of collecting data as it is an introspective technique, which allows respondents to report on themselves, their views, their beliefs, practices, interactions and concerns (Freebody, 2003).

People are more willing to provide information verbally in an interview than if they were asked to write an account of their views or fill out a questionnaire (Robson, 1993). The interview creates an opportunity for participants to react by asking for further clarification of questions they do not understand, and also gives the interviewer the opportunity to seek elaboration of answers if the need arises. Additionally, the Interview guarantees a high level of response because most if not all questions are answered if the interviewee is given sufficient time. Moreover, it is possible to check on the reliability of a response by rephrasing the same question differently and asking it at different stages of the interview (Freebody, 2003).

The interview was therefore employed to obtain data from children and significant others. Such meetings occupied a major part of the fieldwork. The in-depth interview approach to data collection was employed to gather descriptive accounts in participants' own words in order to help elicit insights from them. During the interview process, participants were allowed considerable leeway in pursuing a range of issues they considered relevant to the subject under discussion.

Interviews were conducted in Fante,<sup>21</sup> and later transcribed and translated into English. It should be noted that although I made every effort to render the true meaning of the Fante expressed during interviews when I translated them into English, I acknowledge that there were limitations to this process, as some local vocabulary is nonexistent in English and vice versa. Moreover, it was necessary to render some of what was said in Fante in terms that could be easily

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<sup>21</sup> The Fante language is the native dialect of the study area and is spoken in most parts of the Central Region of Ghana.



understood. Nevertheless, the sense of what was originally expressed was always preserved.

#### **4.4.1.2 Developing the Interview Guide**

The nature of this study necessitates inquiry that focuses more on lived experiences than hypothetical scenarios or abstract concepts (Mason, 2002). I therefore made preparations before meeting with an interviewee by outlining key themes and areas of interest that addressed my principal research questions.

I followed Bryman's (2004) advice on the use of the interview technique for data collection. Of particular importance in Bryman's methodology is developing an interview guide based on the research questions; seeking the participant's permission to be interviewed; arranging a mutually agreeable time and place for the interview; the identification of possible interview themes or subjects; deciding the mode of recording the interview (note-taking, tape-recording or both); and avoiding double-barrelled or multiple-barrelled questions (ibid).

Focusing on my research questions and guided by Bryman's advice, I developed interview guides for each of the different participant groups in order to explore their respective views on the dropout phenomenon. In all cases, the interview guides were semi-structured in order to allow the respondents the freedom to pursue those topics they considered relevant, while also ensuring that my own questions were adequately answered.

Of all the interview guides, the one I designed for the children was the most detailed; being divided into sections that dealt with the various issues raised in the research questions. I also developed interview guides for school authorities and parents. The focus of the interview guides for both teachers and parents related to children's explanations of the causes of dropout; what significant others themselves thought was responsible for dropout and drop-in; and their views on the possibility of children returning to and completing school.

Although some qualitative researchers disagree with the idea of preparing questions in advance, and emphasise the possibility of exploratory and unstructured data collection, Mason (2002) argues that it is actually not entirely possible to gather data in a wholly unstructured way through the qualitative interview, since the decisions and judgments the researcher makes give some form of structure and purpose to the data-generating process.

#### **4.4.1.3 Validity and Reliability of the Interview Guide**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the guides, I developed interview themes and questions based on the research questions. Additionally, I gave the interview guides to two researchers who had used interviews during their own research to review and offer feedback. My supervisors also read them and made helpful comments. I tested the appropriate guide with a couple of children in a pilot study in Winneba in May 2008, which revealed that the questions could be easily understood. A comparison of responses with the research questions revealed that the interview guide was reliable and generated the kind of data I sought.

#### **4.4.2 Methods of Recording Interview Data**

Interviews were recorded with a digital recording machine and complemented with written notes.

In spite of the fact that audio recordings are very useful for capturing all that interviewees say, there are some disadvantages to the technique. The presence of the recording equipment and the knowledge that one's speech is being recorded can affect the interviewee in a way such that he or she may become "*more guarded in what they say, especially when sensitive material is being discussed*" (Vulliamy, 1990: 105).

Furthermore, important characteristics such as facial expressions, gestures and posture obviously cannot be captured with audio recording equipment alone. Additionally, in the event of mechanical or technical problems, valuable information may be lost.

In order to minimise some of these problems, I made note taking an integral part of all interview engagements – whether formal or informal – throughout the fieldwork. Finally, in order to reduce inhibition that might have arisen from awareness of the presence of recording equipment, I used a miniature digital recorder with a built-in microphone, which I kept in my pocket, although I always informed interviewees that I was using it.

#### **4.4.2.1 Recording Children's Interviews**

Interviews with children were the main source of data for the study. Being aware of the challenges involved in interviewing children (Mayall, 2000), I made adequate preparations to maximise the chances of successful encounters. Interviews with children were conducted on an individual basis, but I faced some initial difficulties in my attempts to elicit information about how and why they dropped out of school.

Most dropout children were initially unwilling to respond to my questions. Subsequently, I shifted from a direct line of questioning to informal discussion outside the formal interview setting. This was where the photographs I had asked them to take came in very handy. At leisure times, I took the opportunity to get into conversation with children as we examined their photographs. This proved to be most helpful in shedding more light on their experiences of dropout.

#### **4.4.2.2 Involving Children in the Research: Listening Techniques**

Different ways of collecting data are being developed so that the views of children can be revealed more effectively. In some cases, video and audio techniques have been used to help children express their views (see Sawyer, 1997; MacNaughton, 1999; Forman, 2001). Children's daily activities have also been video and tape-recorded (see Sawyer, 1997); and, in some studies, the recorded events have been played back to the children to obtain their feedback (e.g. MacNaughton, *op. cit.*).

Some studies (e.g. Corsaro, 1993; Nutbrown, 1999) provide evidence that it is possible to include children's voices in research related to child development, well-being and learning. Some studies have also given children 'ownership' of the project by affording them the opportunity to take their own photographs (see Clark and Moss, 2001; Pryor and Ampiah Gharney, 2003; 2004). In the present study, I drew on this last example and gave children disposable cameras to take their own pictures with.

In respect of the manner in which I was to listen to the experiences of children, it became necessary to proceed in such a way that I was able to hear and see what participants were communicating. In all cases, I took broad approach to listening to children.

I found it difficult to use open-ended questions in the initial stages of the study. However, spending time observing children and referring to the literature proved very useful. I adopted an active listening approach, which according to Clark (2004), is a type of listening process that takes into consideration hearing, interpreting and constructing meaning in spoken and other ways. I also tried as much as possible not to position myself as a teacher, which I felt might have conditioned the children's accounts.

Often, I sat on the beach with the children, crouching down or copying their posture when they were speaking to me. I adopted multiple techniques to listen to them: verbal responses such as, 'um! OK!' and 'is that so?' and exclamations like 'ei'; and gestures such as nodding and raising my eyebrows were all very useful in communicating with children.

### **Multiple Techniques for Listening to Children**

To maximise the children's participation, multiple techniques for listening were designed to capture the diverse ways in which they communicated their experiences. I created opportunities for them to actively represent their ideas through discussion and non-verbal communication. The use of stories and photographs as mediums facilitated active participation.

### **Reconstructing Biographical Stories and Life Histories**

Telling stories can help children construct a sense of self; demonstrate that they are part of the culture; allow them to make sense of the world; and help them deal with feelings and form relationships (Engels, 1999). In order to construct an image of their worldview, the use of stories was an obvious choice of vehicle for child participation.

Storytelling was facilitated individually. This was mainly done when we took a walk during the children's free time. They used autobiographical stories to articulate their understanding and interpretation of the concept dropout; their own experiences; the conditions that incited them to withdraw from school; and how they eventually dropped out. These stories also showed how children negotiated the dropout process. In all cases, stories emerged from informal discussions.

A story that is restricted in terms of narrative structure can be challenging. Sometimes, a child was unable to give a coherent account of his or her life history, given that it had no formal beginning, middle or end. Therefore, at times, much of the discussion turned to a purely question and answer format.

I also found it necessary to develop a keen sense of listening and awareness of the many non-verbal cues they used to carry meaning. Some of the accounts children gave of their lives were very moving.

### **Photographs**

In order to reconstruct experiences of time and events, I gave the children disposable cameras to take photographs of anything they considered to affect their schooling. Those who had dropped back in to the education system took pictures of things they liked and disliked about school that influenced their attendance pattern. Children who had not returned also took pictures of activities they and their friends engaged in that dissuaded them from going to

school. These photographs were used during each interview session as prompts for discussion.

Out-of-school activities that children captured on film as things they did that prevented them from going to school were typically scenes of ‘hustling’<sup>22</sup> at the beach; working for ‘hours’ on the farm; bagging cassava; collecting and cracking *amadamfoa*<sup>23</sup> seeds; and fetching palm fruit from the farm (see appendix 8, photographs 1 to 19). Other pictures of things children disliked about school included scenes of pupils carrying sand and stones to school; the poor condition the school canteen was in.

To start the ball rolling, I invited a child to talk about what the photographs he or she had taken meant and how they related to his or her life experiences. I conducted narrative and episodic interviews (Flick, 2006), in that we talked about how the pictures reflected the various issues that shaped school attendance patterns and the decision to withdraw.

One of the challenges of using this technique concerned the difficulty of getting children to take appropriate pictures of the things that influenced their schooling. Initially, most children were only interested in taking pictures of their friends and family, which they could not explain as having any direct link to the issues the study sought to explore. This made the use of photography very expensive, as I had to buy two or three more cameras for some children. Additionally, when I returned the printed pictures, the children became very impatient and could not wait to take turns to talk about their photographs. Sometimes, those who lived close to each other expected me to meet them as a group and interview them all at the same time.

Often, the children got very excited about the pictures and could not wait to take them home, and show them to their parents and friends. It was also not uncommon to see other children curiously waiting at a distance for the

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<sup>22</sup> Hustle is a jargon used in the community to refer to the way children work at the beach for economic survival

<sup>23</sup> Amadamfoa is the local name for *voacanga* seeds. These seeds are believed to have pharmaceutical uses for which they have market value.

opportunity to have a look at the pictures. Thus, in spite of the advantages of the interview technique and the use of photographs for gathering data, it also has some limitations.

#### **4.4.2.3 Interviews with Parents and Teachers**

When interviewing parents and teachers, I informed them of my intention to audio-record our discussions, for which I needed their consent before I could begin. I conducted interviews with parents and other adults in the local dialect, which I later transcribed and translated into English. Interviews with teachers and school heads were conducted solely in English. During interviews with significant others – parents and teachers in particular – I drew attention to views the children had expressed about their experiences of dropout and their reasons for withdrawal from school in order to confirm children's stories.

#### **4.4.3 Interview Data Validation**

To ensure that my interpretation of interview data was considered accurate and credible by those taking part in the study, I strove to achieve data validity. Even though views expressed during interview might be considered credible at the time, researchers need to develop and maintain a critical attitude to participants' claims as a whole.

It is important to check people's accounts. I found that even though children might have told the truth as they perceived it, their stories were frequently contradictory and inconsistent; a factor that should be represented and explored. I therefore took steps to validate my data by meeting with participants – children in particular – again and discussing the transcripts of their previous interviews with them. Changes that emerged from this follow-up discussion were accommodated before the data was analysed. As previously noted, I also compared information obtained from children with their parents' and teachers' versions of events.

Furthermore, validity checks can be made by comparing verbal data with other sources (Miller & Brewer, 2003). I therefore compared interview responses from

children with some of the school records and observations I had made in the field myself. Such crosschecking resulted in an improvement in the validity of data.

#### **4.5 Observation during Fieldwork**

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative observation involves a situation in which the researcher takes field notes on the behaviour and activities of individuals in the research area. Observation is categorised by Miller and Brewer (2003) into ‘unobtrusive observation’ and ‘participant observation’, based on the researcher’s degree of participation; and into ‘covert’ and ‘overt’ observation (ibid: 213).

During qualitative observation, the researcher may be a ‘complete observer’, whereby he or she observes without participation; a ‘participant as observer’, whereby the observational role is secondary to the participatory role; ‘observer as participant’, whereby the role of researcher is known to his or her subjects; or a ‘complete participant’, whereby the researcher conceals his or her role (Creswell, op. cit.: 179).

Although the phenomenon under investigation – school dropout – does not lend itself to direct field observation, antecedent conditions and critical events in the lives of children and activities they have engaged in that have caused dropout to occur are observable.

Therefore, in order to augment the in-depth interviews that addressed the reasons behind dropout and the processes that led to it, I also conducted field observation as part of the data collection exercise. This involved the observation of children’s activities outside school; accordingly, I observed children at home and in the community. I also observed conditions in the school – its practices in general and those in the classroom in particular.

Additionally, I took a series of photographs myself of some school facilities and conditions in communities. Furthermore, during the long school holidays, I



accompanied some children on their seasonal migration to Western Region (see figure 5:1 for map of children's migration routes), gaining firsthand experience of their activities on the journey and after they had arrived at their destination.

The field observations I conducted for this study were largely unobtrusive. Nevertheless, some aspects of my research can be described as participant observation, such as when I joined the children on their migration; they were aware that I was following them and collecting data on their activities. In school, the teachers were also very much aware that I was observing their classroom activities.

In fact, my field observations can be said to involve the various forms of observation mentioned above, both overt and covert (Miller & Brewer, 2004; Creswell, 2009). I used these techniques to compare and augment the information on observable causes of dropout that participants provided in interview.

## **4.6 Data Analysis**

### **4.6.1 Documentary Analysis**

According to Creswell (2009), the researcher may collect qualitative documents as another useful source of data. Miller and Brewer (2004) describe documents as a good place to search for answers, which also provide an effective means of checking primary data gathered through interviews. Moreover, such information can be accessed at a time convenient to the researcher (Creswell, *op.cit.*), and also provides convincing evidence when other techniques fail to resolve a question.

The use of documents to augment other data sources enabled me to crosscheck details of children's attendance obtained in interviews as a form of triangulation, especially when dropout and drop-in occurred. Atkinson and Coffey (cited in Silverman, 2000) also observe that there are many research

questions and research settings that cannot be investigated adequately without the production and use of textual materials.

Thus, documentary sources are vital to this study. Those employed include pupils' school enrolment, attendance and academic performance records. For example, enrolment and attendance records were useful in obtaining data to illustrate trends in enrolment and patterns of attendance and dropout. These documents assisted in building up a comprehensive picture of the children who withdraw from school on temporary and permanent dropout basis, highlighting key concerns and the policy implications of dropout.

#### **4.6.2 Primary Data Analysis: Extracting Analytical Themes**

As I sifted the data, I sometimes became most frustrated, being unsure what I wanted to do with the mountain of information I was amassing (Silverman, 2005). The data collected for this study are largely qualitative in nature, being gathered through in-depth interviews, field observations and documentary sources. The data I analysed therefore included in-depth interview transcripts, samples of children's profiles and dairies, and field notes. Silverman (*ibid*) argues that data analysis is a continuous process, and that the analysis of raw data begins simultaneously with the interview. I found this advice very useful.

Data from all interviews were analysed manually by making summaries of the views of the respondents; supporting them with relevant quotations that captured these views; and augmenting the findings with data from documentary sources and my own field observations.

A thematic approach to data analysis was adopted, which involved developing themes and patterns from the data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Although I investigated anticipated issues that might explain the dropout phenomenon, the analysis was not subordinated to this; and I primarily constructed distinctive descriptors of the major themes emerging from the data. The analysis of data primarily involved an iterative process of reading, reflecting

and coding the interview transcripts, and then drawing out major and recurring themes from it.

The analysis of primary data was based on a thematic approach, critically examining individual accounts and response to questions, categorising responses and finally deriving themes from them.

The result of this process is that the analyses presented in chapters 6 and 7 are organised according to themes derived from the data and research questions that guided the entire investigation. The data drew together the stories of 18 children who had dropped out of school; subsequently, these stories of dropout children were triangulated with the views of significant others – parents and teachers.

#### **4.7 Positionality**

Critical reflection on the respective positionalities of the researcher and the researched is regarded as accepted practice amongst many qualitative researchers. Of particular importance in qualitative research is the researcher's identity in relation to research participants, and his or her background and experience in relation to the research topic; factors that can either enhance or ruin the data gathered and hence the results of the study (Burgess, 1984; Cotterill & Letherby, 1994).

Suspicion of the researcher's intentions in any study may be less pronounced where participants consider the former to be an insider with whom they have similar experiences (Cotterill & Letherby, op.cit.). On the other hand, Burgess (1984) argues that one's familiarity with the context of an investigation can negatively affect the study, since researchers who are familiar with the research context may take certain issues and modes of behaviour for granted and thus fail to subject them to rigorous investigation. Clearly, these divergent views are nevertheless unified in the belief that the effect the researcher's positionality has on the research process is very important.

One important area concerns an individual's identity and positionality. For example, Hill (2005) argues that since children tend to be weaker and smaller than adults in height and build, the physical posture of the researcher working with children is likely to have important consequences for the nature of the research process, the type of data collected, and the responsiveness of the participants.

However, the negative effects of this can be reduced if researchers "*seek to minimize the authority image they convey, for instance ... sitting in a position and level comfortable for the child*" (ibid: 63). It is thus important that the researcher takes notice of the similarities and differences between the participants and him or herself.

On the contrary, Pratt et al. (2007) advise that cultural, social and economic differences can be exploited fruitfully in research: "*Indeed, recognizing this productivity is one means of working with – rather than attempting to overcome – difference.*" Yet, in becoming mindful of the difference, it is also necessary to go beyond such disparity (Jacobs 2000) and recognise positions of 'betweenness' (Nast, 1994: 57).

Accordingly, throughout the fieldwork, I was acutely mindful of the issue of positionality, regarding my attitude in relation to the research participants as a critical factor that could either enhance or hinder the research process. Indeed, I realised the importance of considering the differences as well as the similarities.

First, I was not a school dropout and neither had I ever gone fishing, both of which singled me out from most of the participants. I was therefore different from them, which meant that I would be regarded as an outsider to some extent (Stephens, 1990).

However, in addition to being a researcher, I was also a native-speaking Ghanaian teacher who had practiced at the basic education level for more than six years. My slight physical build and the fact that I was not much taller than some of the children, together with my ability to understand and speak the local

dialect fluently, granted me the position of an insider. This overcame any suspicions people may have had of me when I first approached them.

As a result, most of the participants were very co-operative during the interviews. Many children regarded me as someone who was 'in the know' and perhaps in position to solve their problems. For example, one child beseeched me, "*Please help us by telling the teachers to stop canning us at the least mistake.*"

An adult also advised, "*People like you should help us to get our children back into the classroom.*"

Such perceptions could have actually been the reason for the overenthusiastic manner in which some children and significant others attempted to get involved in the study; a situation that had the potential for both positive and negative effects on the data I was collecting.

Nevertheless, in order to minimise the perplexing effects of positionality, I continuously explained to my participants that I was a student who was learning about the issues under investigation and trying to understand the dropout phenomenon.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the issues related to methodological position that underpinned my approach to data collection for the study. It subsequently shed light on ethical issues that dealt with the ways in which access was negotiated with adults and assent obtained from children. I explained my position as a researcher and how I handled issues of being both an insider and outsider. The next chapter is devoted to a detailed presentation of the context where data was collected and illuminates the general characteristics of pupil's enrolled, enrolment and attendance trends, repetition and dropout.

## CHAPTER 5

### Research Location and Context

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research area and context the study. It presents the geographic location and profile of the study area. This is followed by a section highlighting enrolment and participation in basic education, and school attendance patterns and dropout trends by grade and term in the Mfantseman Municipality. The second section draws on the wider body of CREATE project data to discuss schooling in Mfantseman Municipality, which is linked to the analysis of primary data in chapters 6 and 7. CREATE data was collected independently by researchers at the University of Cape Coast and University of Education, Winneba. Since I shared research sites with the CREATE project, it was possible to draw on its findings to obtain relevant contextual information. I treat the latter as secondary data separate from my own primary source of data, upon which this thesis is principally based.

The analysis of enrolment trends draws on the ComSS data and Mfantseman baseline report on basic schools (both of which are CREATE data) and EMIS data. The analysis of school attendance draws on secondary data – attendance-tracking data collected by CRIQPEG and NCRIBE. The ComSS data analysed here was collected from 9 schools (primary and JHS) in 4 educational Circuits, sampled from a total 38 public basic schools in the 8 educational Circuits in Mfantseman Municipality. In each of the sampled schools, four grades<sup>24</sup> –1, 4, 6 and 7 – were sampled for enrolment and attendance data. The chapter also presents profile information on dropout children who participated in the study, whose accounts are analysed in chapter 6 and 7, and ends with a conclusion.

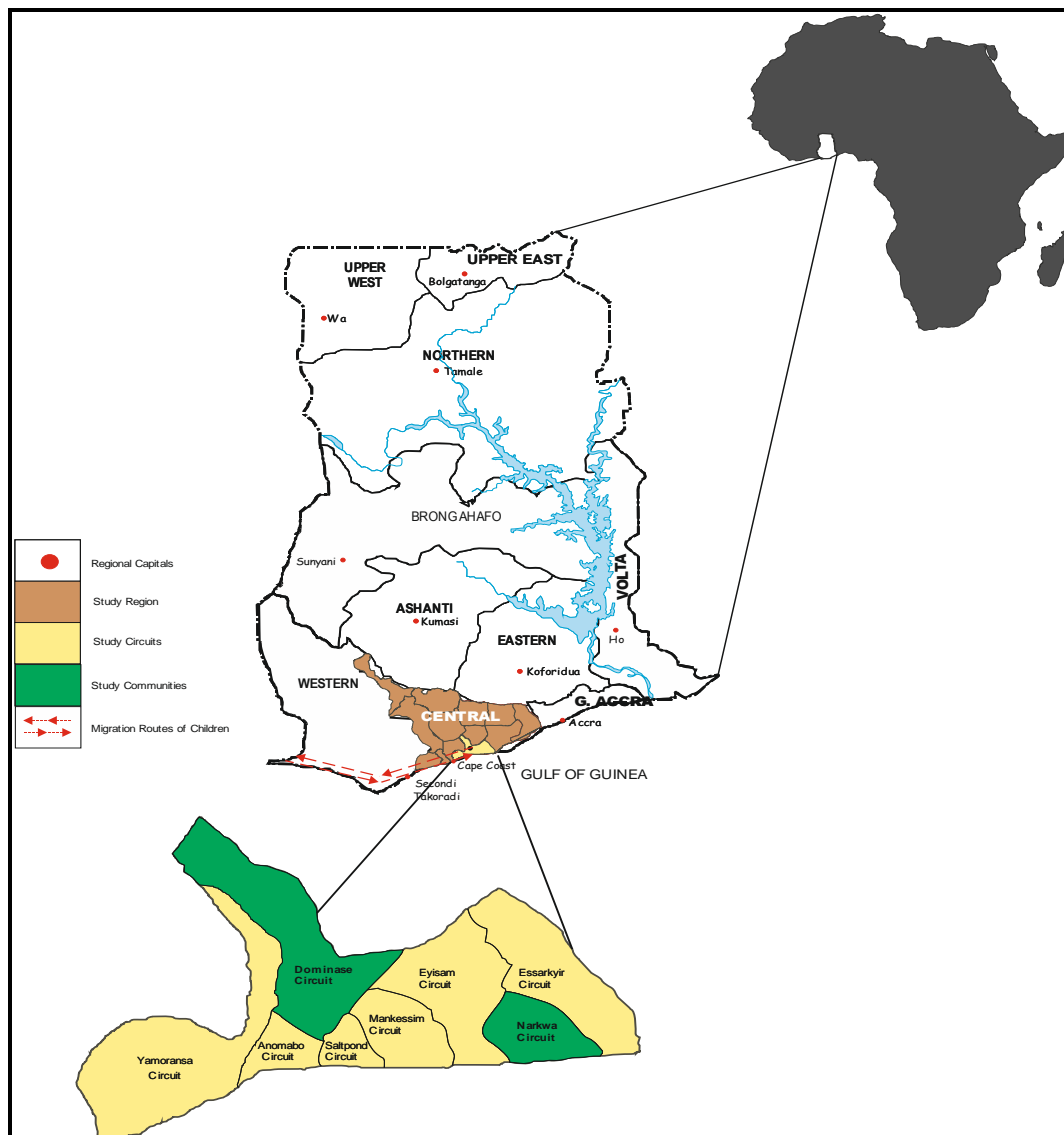
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<sup>24</sup> There are nine grades in Ghana's basic education system: primary basic one to six and lower secondary basic seven to nine.

## 5.2 Research Area

The present study focused on two selected communities in Mfantseman Municipality in the Coastal Region of Ghana. The participants in the study included children who had gained initial access but had subsequently dropped out of school, some teachers and parents. Figure 5.1 shows the location of Ghana, the Central Region and the location of the study sites (indicate in green colour).

**Figure 5:1 Map of Ghana Showing Study Area and Children's Migration Routes**



Source: Adapted from MOESS/GES 2004.

### **5.2.1 Profile of Mfantseman Municipality**

In the following section, I present a profile of Mfantseman Municipality. It begins by addressing the socio-economic context of the area and then moves on to trends in access to and participation in basic education in the municipality. The section on the socio-economic context highlights the district's physical characteristics – land, relief, geology and soil drainage, climate, and vegetation – and the section on its demographic characteristics discusses population, economy and infrastructure. The section on education in Mfantseman focuses on enrolment and attendance trends.

The passage on socio-economic issues in Mfantseman is important in terms of understanding the context within which engagement in basic education takes place. Its intention is also to paint a rich picture of the kind of social, cultural and economic setting in which my research subjects lived their lives. This contextual background which is influenced by macro contexts (see 2.2) is crucial to an understanding of how this environment shaped their socio-cultural identities and affected their education experiences.

#### **5.2.1.1 Physical Characteristics**

##### **Location and Size**

Mfantseman Municipality is located along the Atlantic coastline of the Central Region of Ghana and extends from latitudes 5° 7' to 5° 20' north of the Equator and longitudes 0° 44' to 1° 11' west of the Greenwich meridian; stretches about 21 kilometres along the coastline and about 13 kilometres inland; and constitutes an area of 612 square kilometres.

Mfantseman Municipality is bounded to the west and northwest by Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese Municipality; to the north by Ajumako Enyan Essiam Municipality and Assin South Municipality; to the east by Gomoa Municipality; and to the south by the Gulf of Guinea.

At its longest, the municipality extends for about 28 kilometres, but on average, it stretches for about 19 kilometres inland from Eguase – the most westerly



point – to Otum – the most easterly point. The capital of Mfantseman Municipality is Saltpond.

### **Relief, Geology and Drainage**

Mfantseman Municipality is situated in a basically low-lying area of loose quaternary sand, which is at an elevation of lower than 60 metres above sea level. Its coastline is composed of Cretaceous–Eocene marine sand mixed with thin pebbly sand and some limestone. Mfantseman Municipality is drained by a number of rivers and streams, including the Narkwa and Amisa (Ochi), which flow into the sea; and the Bruka. Other rivers in the area are the Nkasaku, which empties into Atufa Lagoon in Saltpond; and the Aworaba, which drains into Etsi Lagoon in Kormantse. Other lagoons in the area are Eko Lagoon near Anomabo; Egyaa Lagoon at Egyaa; and Kwasinzema Lagoon at Kormantse, into which flow small streams and rivulets.

### **Climate and Vegetation**

With its close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, Mfantseman Municipality has mild temperatures, which range between 24° C and 28° C. It has a relative humidity of about 70%. The area experiences double maximum rainfall, with peaks in May–June and October. Annual total rainfall ranges between 90 centimetres and 110 centimetres in the coastal savannah; and between 110 cm and 160 centimetres in the interior, which is close to the margin of the forest zone. The periods December–February and July to early September are much drier than the rest of the year.

Vegetation consists of a dense scrub tangle and grass that grows to an average height of 4.5 metres. Such flora together with the fauna offers good opportunities for agriculture and fishing. Indeed, the proximity of the sea makes fishing a major activity among the coastal towns and villages of the area, the most notable of which are Biriwa, Saltpond, Otum, Abandze and Kormantse.

### **5.2.1.2 Demographic Characteristics**

#### **Population**

According to the 2000 population and housing census, Mfantseman Municipality has a total population of 152,264 – 69,670 males and 82,594 females (46% and 54% respectively). This constitutes almost 7% of the total population of Central Region. Comparing this figure with the 1984 census and various intermediate extrapolations, the annual population growth rate of the municipality is estimated to be 2.8%. Saltpond, the municipal capital, has a population of 16,212, which is approximately 10.6% of the total.

Mfantseman Municipality, which consists of 168 settlements, has the second highest population density in Central Region after Cape Coast. The most highly populated town is Mankessim, which alone accounts for about 16.7% of the total population and is also an important commercial centre. Other large populated towns in the municipality are Saltpond, Anomabo, Yamoransa, and Otuam.

With regard to distribution of settlements according to size, most may be described as basically rural, although there are isolated towns with populations exceeding 5,000. The average population for all settlements is about 950. Approximately 27.9% of the total population of the municipality lives in urban settlements, while 72.1% falls into the category of rural residence.

### **5.2.1.3 Economic Context**

Farming and fishing constitute the main economic activities of the municipality. Occupational distribution is as follows – fishing: 51%, farming: 30%, and commerce: 19%. Fishing is carried out in coastal communities such as Narkwa, Biriwa, Saltpond, Anomabo, Otuam, Abandze, Kormantse, Egyaa, and Ankaful.

Effective interaction between climate, soil, and rivers and streams makes farming possible throughout virtually the entire municipality, especially in the inland areas of Baifikrom, Akobima, Dominase and others. Crops cultivated

include cocoa, oil palm, coconut, pineapples, oranges, plantains, maize, cassava, and cocoyam.

Trading is also an important economic activity carried out in virtually every area in the municipality, with Mankessim being the major focal point. Other economic activities include cassava and palm oil processing.

### **Poverty in Mfantseman Municipality**

According to the district's (now municipality's) medium-term development plan (MDPT) (see DPCU 2006), the poor of the area constitutes the following:

- Subsistence farmers and fishermen, most of whom are elderly.
- Child Labourers, who are frequently to be seen in the central business districts of Saltpond and Mankessim, and other communities where their labour is in demand. However, there are no official statistics on them.
- The unemployed and underemployed. A large proportion of the municipality's able-bodied persons are not engaged in any gainful employment. The underemployed are mainly those whose businesses are seasonal. They include fishermen, subsistence farmers and those engaged in trades such as dressmaking<sup>25</sup>, hairdressing and petty trading.
- Migrants and unskilled youths (especially women and children). The vulnerable, i.e. women, children, the elderly, physically challenged, etc. who are susceptible to risk and other social shocks such as chieftaincy conflicts and domestic violence.

Thus, the poor of Mfantseman Municipality are located in deprived communities where the basic socio-economic amenities needed for human development are not available.

The causes of poverty in Mfantseman Municipality are identified as the high rate of unemployment owing to a lack of job opportunities, and the inaccessibility of

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<sup>25</sup> In some rural communities in Ghana, some businesses such as dressmaking and hairdressing boom during festive periods. Also, the production of fruits and vegetables are seasonal and this renders related businesses seasonal too.

credit facilities. Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) I and II describe Mfantseman Municipality as having comparatively strong poverty trends. It is estimated that at least 60% of the total population can be termed 'poor' and, therefore, unable to afford certain necessities such as food, shelter, education and health care services (Standard of Living for Communities in Central Region, 1999 cited in DPCU, 2006).

The municipality's medium-term development plan reports that the poor depend on remittances from relatives living outside the municipality; and on the adoption of illegal means natural resources of exploitation, such as the use of prohibited fishing tackle, poisoning of game and wildlife, and farming on marginal land. The plan also identifies child labour and child neglect as being very common in the area; two practices associated with poverty that have serious implications for enrolment and school attendance.

However, attempts have been made by some institutions to reduce poverty in Mfantseman Municipality. For example, the Productivity Improvement and Income Generating Fund (popularly known as the Poverty Alleviation Fund); the Education Fund to help Brilliant but Needy Pupils; the Social Investment Fund (SIF); the Community Based Rural Development Project (CBRDP); a European Union (EU) micro project; Food and Agriculture Budgetary Support (FABS); an Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA)/World Vision/Hunger project; and other non-governmental organisation (NGO) interventions targeted at improving rural income are among some of the poverty reduction efforts in the area.

#### **5.2.1.4 Infrastructure**

The major road servicing Mfantseman Municipality is the Accra–Takoradi highway, which divides the municipality in two. In addition to this major thoroughfare, second and third class roads mainly link Saltpond with coastal settlements.

The water supply for the municipality comes from three sources: Brimso and Baifikrom, which supply communities in the west of the municipality; and

Kwanyaku, which supplies eastern communities. However, most households rarely have a mains water supply for the greater part of the year, mostly depending on boreholes, wells and streams, the latter of which do not flow in the dry season.

Health facilities serving the municipality include a hospital in Saltpond, and four public health centres located at Anomabo, Essuehyia, Otuam and Dominase. There are also few clinics in Nanabin, Narkwa, Biriwa and Kormantse. Other privately operated health care facilities can be found in Mankessim, Abor Junction and Yamoransa.

Saltpond, Ekrawfo, Essarkyir, Anomabo and Mankessim have post offices. However, rural postal agencies have all been discontinued due to the poor patronage of their services.

Mobile phone masts are located in Saltpond, Mankessim and Otuam, which service networks operated by Vodafone Ghana, MTN, tiGo and Kasapa.

Ghana Commercial Bank, Mfantseman Community Bank, Nyankomase Ahenkro Rural Bank, Kakum Rural Bank, and Ekumfiman Rural Bank provide banking services to the municipality. However, most communities are located at a considerable distance from a bank, which tend to be situated in urban areas.

### **5.3 Education in Mfantseman Municipality**

In the 2002/03 academic year, the municipality had 339 schools, which included 144 pre-schools; 136 primary schools; 84 JHS; and 5 senior high schools (see table 5:1). Mankessim had a total of 60 schools, while Yamoransa had 21.

**Table 5:1 Schools in Mfantseman Municipal District by Circuit 2002 and 2006**

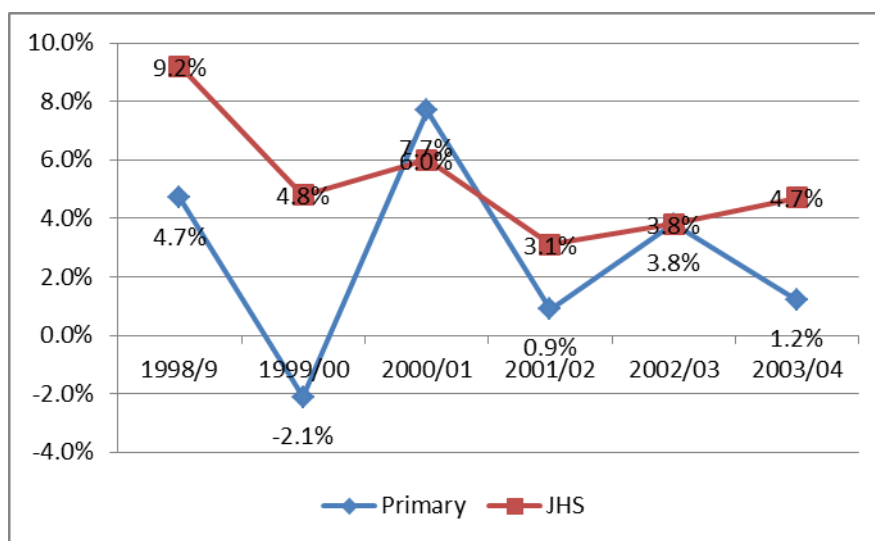
Circuit	2002/03					2005/06					
	Pre-School	Primary	JHS	SHS	Total	Pre-School	Primary	JHS	SHS	Vocational	Total
<b>Saltpond</b>	13	18	15	2	48	12	16	13	2	1	44
<b>Anomabo</b>	19	19	9	1	48	17	18	17	1	1	54
<b>Mankessim</b>	19	23	17	1	60	13	16	15	1	0	45
<b>Dominase</b>	5	9	8	0	22	9	9	7	0	0	25
<b>Narkwa</b>	12	16	9	0	37	9	12	10	0	0	31
<b>Essarkyir</b>	12	16	10	1	39	13	13	11	0	0	37
<b>Yamoransa</b>	7	9	5	0	21	8	8	4	0	0	20
<b>Eyisam</b>	27	26	11	0	64	12	16	10	0	0	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>292</b>

*Sources: 2003 Mfantseman School Mapping Report and Mfantseman Medium Term Development Plan 2006*

In the 2005/06 academic year, the total number of schools in the municipality decreased by 47 to 292. The number of pre-schools, primary schools and SHSs decreased to 93, 108 and 4 respectively. However, JHSs increased from 84 in number to 87, and 2 vocational schools were opened. Clearly, with the number of primary schools in the area outnumbering JHS available, some children in the Municipality will terminate their schooling at primary level. Next, I present enrolment trends in Mfantseman.

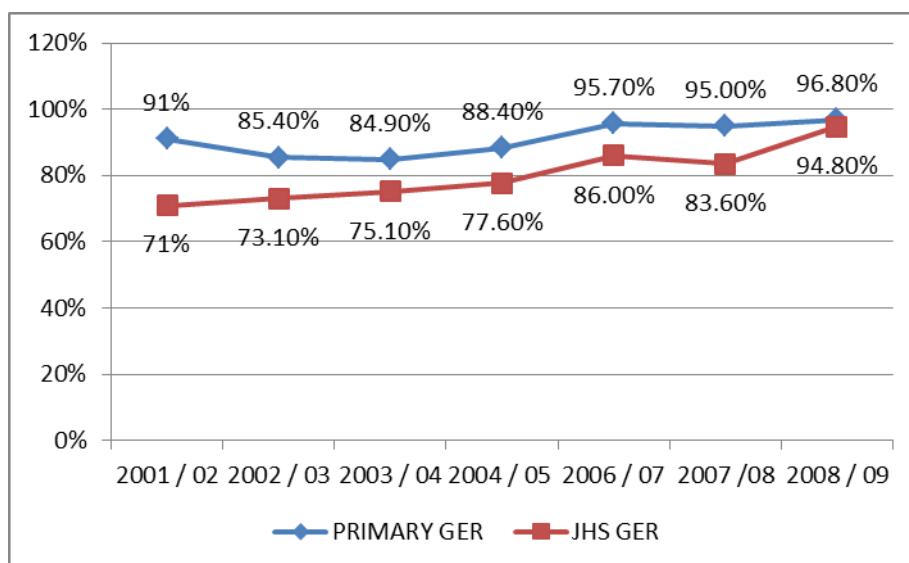
### **5.3.1 Enrolment Trends in Mfantseman**

At the primary level, the total number enrolled for 1997/98 academic year was 21,832, and this increased by 4.6% in 1998/99. However, this value dropped by -2.2% in 1999/2000. The enrolment then increased every year to 2003/2004.

**Figure 5:2 Growth Trends in Primary School Enrolment between 1998/9 and 2003/4**

Source: 2003/4 School Mapping Report by UNICEF/MOESS

Over the 6 year period, the enrolment in primary school in Mfantseman municipal district rose from 21,832 in 1997/98 to 25,564 (17.0%). At the JSS level, enrolment increased from 6,609 in 1997/98 to 9003 in 2003/2004 by 36.2%. The rate of increase was not uniform over the period as indicated in figure 5:2.

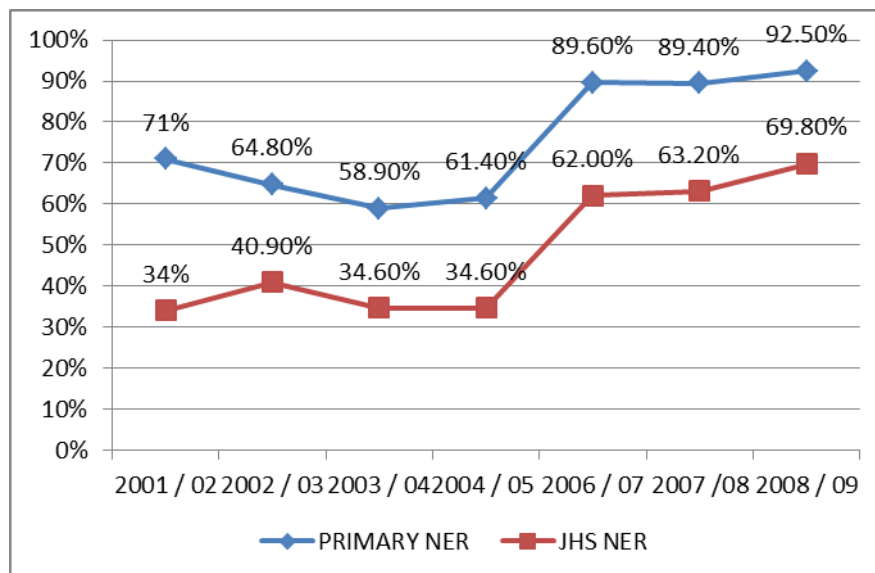
**Figure 5:3 Gross Enrolment Rates for Primary and JHS in Mfantseman between 2001/2 and 2008/9**

Source: Calculated from EMIS Data

Between 2001/2 and 2008/9, GER at the primary and JHS levels in Mfantseman was not uniformly consistent (see figure 5:3). There was also a huge difference in GER and NER at both primary and JHS levels (see 5:4), which indicates that many basic school pupils who should have been in school were staying away. At the JHS level in particular, NER was significantly lower than that at the primary level.

Over the period, however, the gap between GER and NER appears to have narrowed at both primary and JHS levels, which suggests that more children were attending school regularly than had previously been the case.

**Figure 5:4 Trends in Net Enrolment Rates for Primary and JHS between 2001/2 and 2008/9**



Source: Calculated from EMIS Data

In the next section, I present data on enrolment pattern for nine sampled schools at primary and JHS level in the study area. The section draws on the data from the Mfantseman ComSS. The sampled schools are representative of other basic schools in the study area.

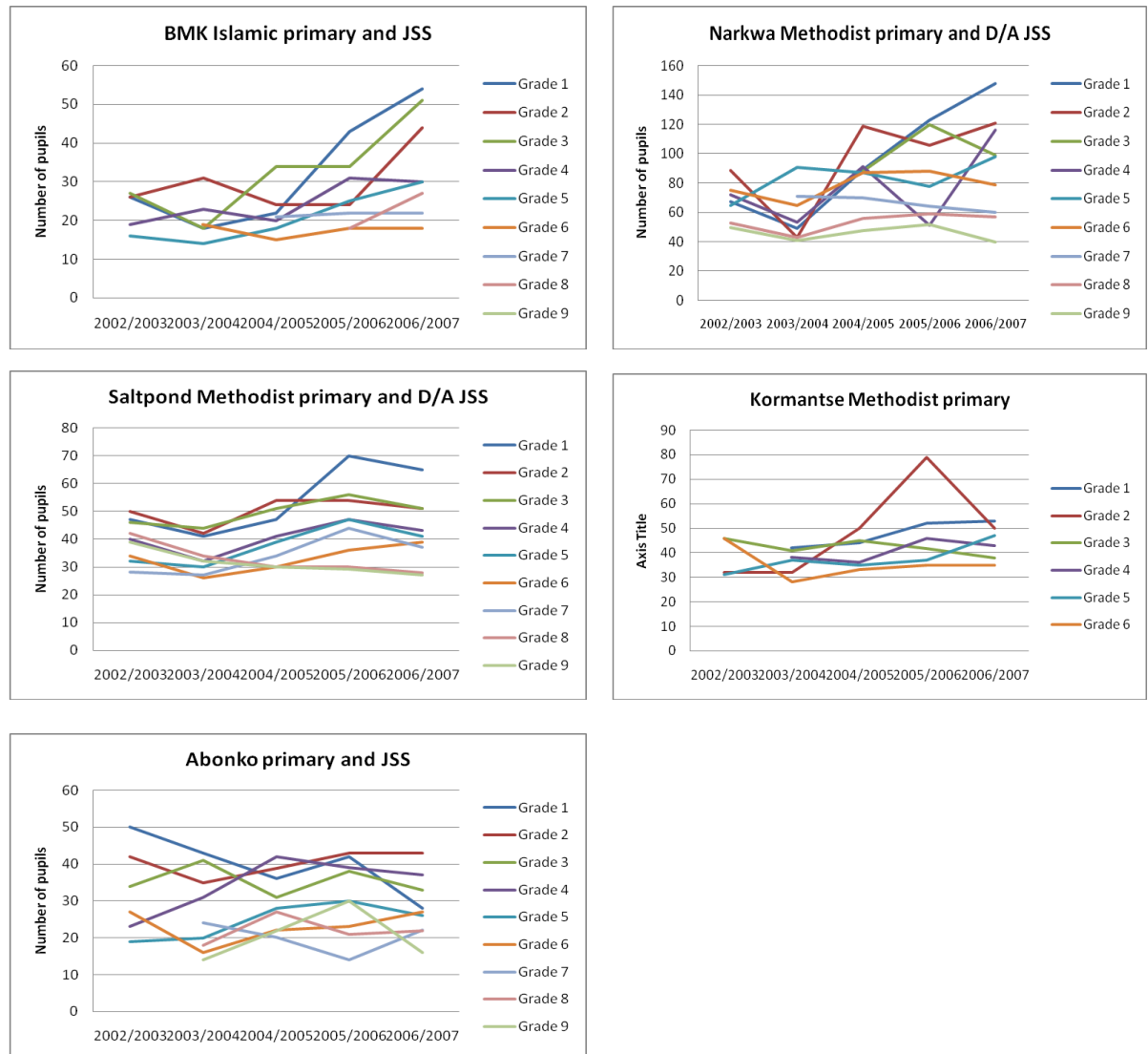
#### **Enrolments between 2002 and 2007 in 9 sampled Schools in Mfantseman**

Figure 5:5 shows the overall enrolment pattern in 5 primary and 4 JHS sample schools from 2002/3 to 2006/7 academic years for basic grades. The enrolment



pattern is shown for both primary and JHS in all schools except for Kormantse where only grades 1-6 is shown because of lack of credible data.

**Figure 5:5 Basic School Enrolment and Progression between 2002 to 2006 in 9 Sampled Schools**



Source: ComSS data.

Figure 5:5 shows that the enrolment trend in all the schools and all grades does not show any consistent pattern over the five-year period. The introduction of the capitation grant in 2005/2006 led to increased enrolment in all the schools but not in all grades. The enrolment pattern between 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 academic years across grades 1-9 generally decreased for Narkwa Methodist and Saltpond Methodist; the other schools showed a mixture of increasing and

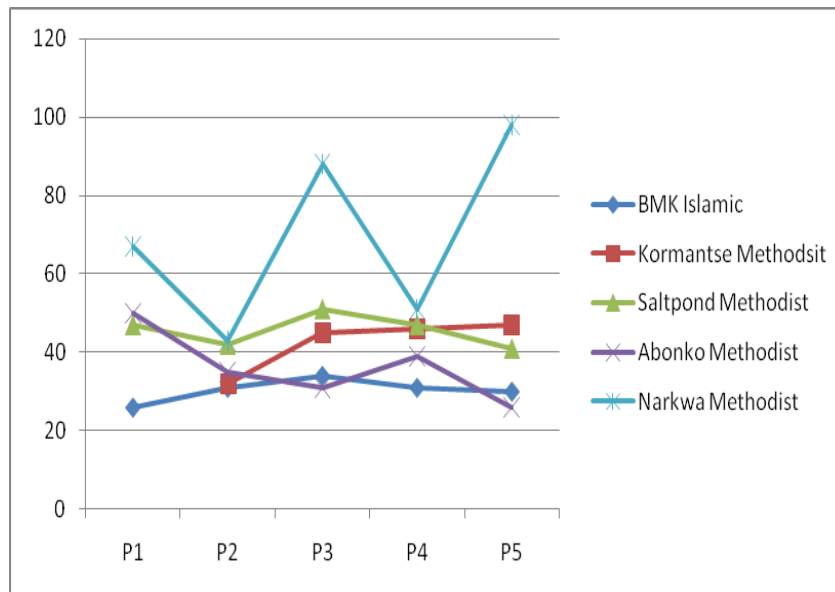
decreasing trends. Between 2003/2004 and 2005/2006 there was a general increase in enrolment in Narkwa Methodist primary and Narkwa district assembly (DA) JHS as well as Saltpond Methodist and Saltpond DA JHS. The rest of the sampled schools showed a mixture of increasing and decreasing enrolment trends. After the introduction of the capitation grant and the abolition of all school fees in 2005/2006, only BMK Nurideen Islamic primary and JHS showed a general increase in enrolment over the five-year period. In fact, Saltpond Methodist primary and DA JHS showed a decrease in enrolment in all grades with the exception of grade 6. The rest of the school showed both increasing and decreasing enrolment trends after the introduction of the capitation grant. The real problem is not limited to increasing enrolment but whether these children attend school regularly and whether they will stay in school to complete.

The general trend in Ghana of a decrease in enrolment when children move from grade 1 to grade 2 is shown in all 4 schools for which complete records were available. Enrolment in Narkwa and Kormantse are higher than the rest of the schools because the two schools run two streams.

### **Progression of School Children**

The schools did not have accurate records of dropout, re-entry, repetition and transfer. The enrolment pattern in these schools is constructed over one year period. The attendance of children in grades 1, 4, 6 and 7 sampled from 9 schools were tracked for one year to provide accurate data on enrolment, attendance and dropout (see figure 5:4).

The overall enrolment pattern in the sampled basic schools is illustrated in Figure 5:6. Figure 5:6 shows progression of grade 1 children (grade 2 in the case of Kormantse Methodist primary) who enrolled in 2002/2003 and progressed to grade 5 in 2006/2007.

**Figure 5:6 Enrolment Trends for Primary 1 in 2002/3 to 5 in 2006/7 of 5 Schools**

Source: ComSS data.

The figure shows that in each school the population of children who enrolled in grade 1 (grade 2 for Kormantse) fluctuated over the years. In the case of Narkwa Methodist Primary School in particular, the progression of children shows a markedly erratic trend that is quite different from the other four schools. The increasing and decreasing figures as children progress in through the grades is due to high cases of dropout and drop-in. In chapter 6 and 7, I analyse the school attendance and dropout experience of 18 children who dropped out of two of the sampled schools to highlight drop out and drop-in and reasons behind dropout.

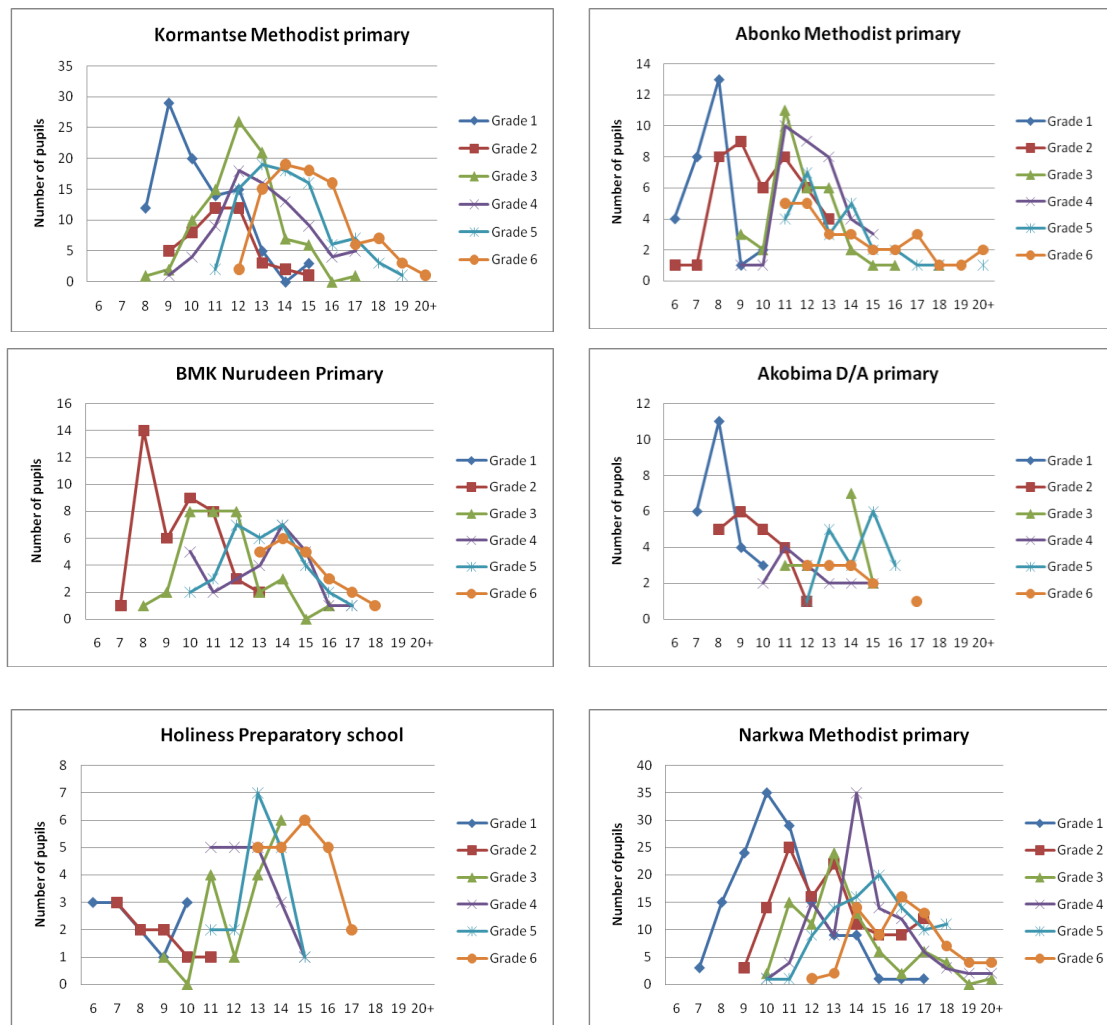
### **Enrolment by Age for 2006/7**

Figure 5:7 shows the 2006/2007 total enrolment by age for grade 1 to grade 6 in six of the sample school. The graphs show that generally, most children did not enter primary school at the official age of 6 years in primary one.

The vast majority of children are overage in all grades. On the average, the age range for grade 1 in all sampled schools is 7 to 10 years except for Narkwa Methodist primary where the ages range from 7 to 17 years, with over 70% of the pupils aged 10 years or above. Similarly, Kormantse Methodist primary also

has age range (8–15) years with about 58% of the children aged 10 years or above in grade 1. There are grade to age overlaps and wide spreads across the primary school cycle as shown in the graph. The picture indicates that children in the study area are beginning school at a late age, repeating grades, and dropping out and dropping into the school system.

**Figure 5:7 Enrolment Pattern in Primary by Age**



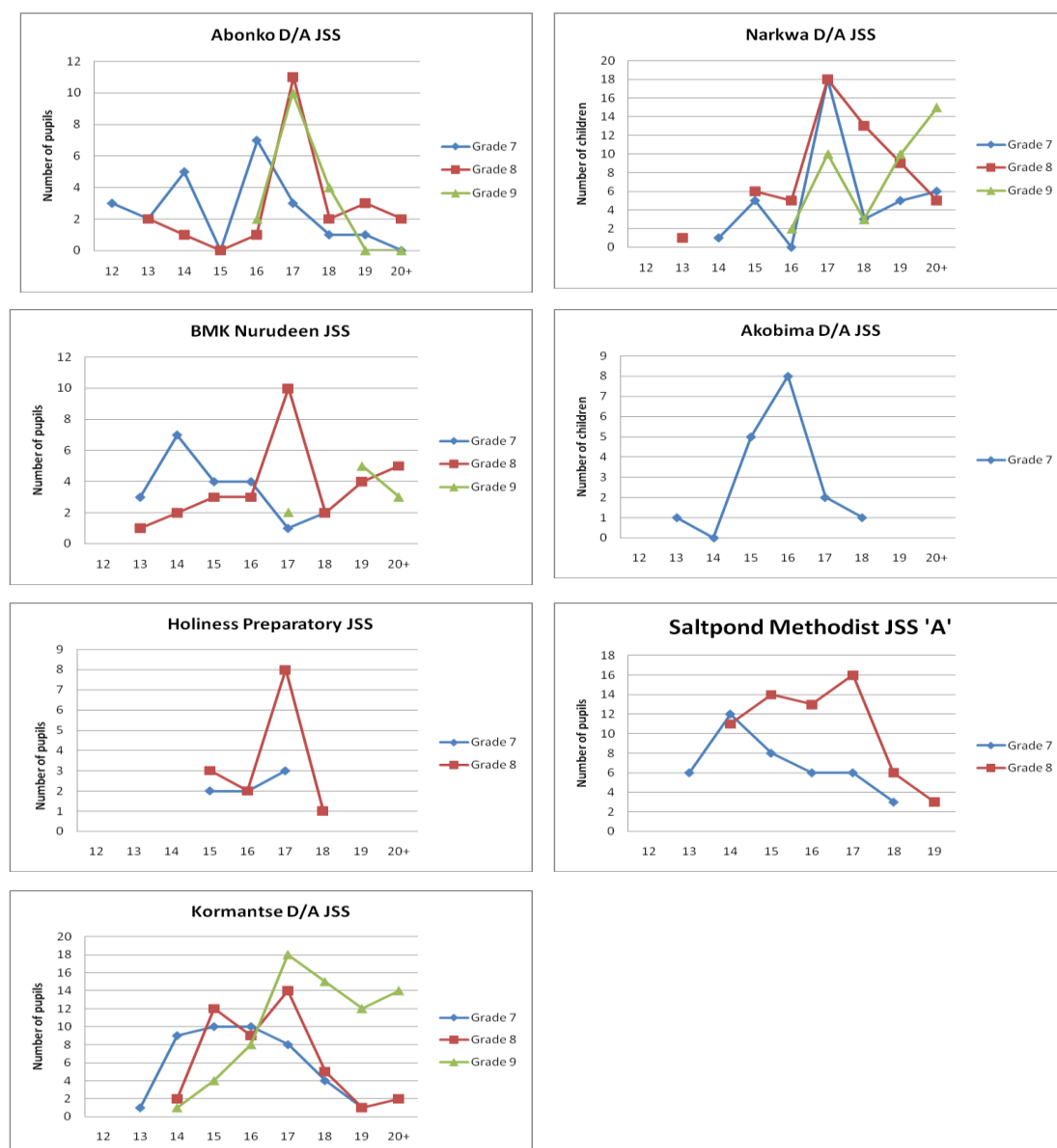
Source: ComSS.

At the JHS level, results of 7 schools show that with the exception of Abonko JHS – in which only 3 children were of the official age (12 years) for grade 7 – none of the children in the other schools entered grade 7 at the official age. Apart from Holiness Preparatory JHS, which had a narrow age range (15–18), all schools had very wide age ranges, that is, age overlaps across grades 7 to

9. Compared with the primary schools, the overall picture at the JHS level shows grade to age overlaps and a wide spread across the cycle.

The wide age range within each grade means that in each grade there are children with different learning abilities, interests, maturity levels and peer relationships. How teachers respond to this challenge may have implications of retention and dropout.

**Figure 5:8 Enrolment Pattern in JHS by AGE**



Source: ComSS data.

The existence of overage pupils appears to be an issue in all the schools. Appendix 1 summarises the reasons teachers in the area gave for the high incidence of overage pupils. Poverty and repetition are among the main reasons behind overage enrolments.

As noted earlier the presence of overage children in class pose a number of challenges for teachers and other children in the class who are not of the same age such as different learning abilities, interests, maturity levels and peer relationships.

Appendix 2 shows a catalogue of problems mentioned by teachers about the presence of overage pupils to teaching. The most common problems cited were indiscipline (bullying of young ones), irregular attendance and poor performance of such over aged children. It is important to note that irregular attendance and poor performance are key indicators of dropout. Over aged children may drop out of school because they might find school uninteresting. Moreover, the demand on their labour and the poverty of their household force them to work for income to support themselves and their families. It appears being over age in grade interacted with other factors to led to dropout.

### **5.3.2 School Dropout in Mfantseman**

Teachers in Mfantseman schools admit that dropout in the area is common (see Ampiah, 2008). However, no consistent data on dropout in the area has been collected. The only available data on drop out in Mfantseman as reported in the school mapping report shows that in 2002/2003 academic year, a total of 522 (2.1%) of the primary school pupils dropped out of which 259 (52.9%) were boys and 261 (47.3%) were girls. At the JHS level, a total of 110 (1.2%) of the pupils dropped out of which 40 (36.3%) were boys and 70 (63.7%) were girls. It is interesting to note that though enrolment rates seem quite high at primary level, clearly they remain a problem at secondary level.

It is interesting to note that data on dropout rates in Mfantseman municipality appears far lower and contradicts the national dropout rates, but the areas is

noted as having children who drop out of school and loiter in the central business district (see DPCU 2006). Mfantseman was selected as one of the CREATE projects' study areas in Ghana because it that has been noted for having poor school enrolment, high cases of school dropout and low standards of educational achievement. In response to the existence of dropout and why children drop out of school in the Mfantseman municipality, the most cited reasons for boys were poverty, poor performance and repetition whilst girls had the additional reason of teenage pregnancy (op. cit). Appendix 3 catalogues reasons teachers gave as causes of dropout in the study area.

Teachers were also reported to have indicated the various signs that in their opinion indicated the likelihood of children dropping out of school. Of the varied reasons mentioned as precursors of dropout (see appendix 4), irregular attendance and poor performance in particular appear to have dominated.

After pupils have dropped out of school, it is reported that the phenomenon of drop-in is also very common in the municipality (Ampiah 2008). However, there are conditions attached to re-entry into school. For example, children are not allowed to re-enter if they have been away from school for more than a year. Conditions that dropout children must satisfy before being accepted for re-entry are summarised in appendix 5.

At Kormantse, one condition was that the names of dropout children were not entered in the register for some time. In some cases, the attendance records of such children were recorded in a supplementary register to be transferred later. How these readmission conditions influenced dropout children's schooling decisions with regard to long-term drop-in or recurrent dropout is analysed in chapters 6 and 7. Next, I present analysis of the attendance patterns of the sampled schools in Mfantseman.

#### **5.4 School Attendance in Mfantseman Municipality**

In this section, I present analysis of school attendance in Mfantseman. I analysed school attendance on the assumption that declining attendance is a

precursor to dropout. So the patterns of attendance that exist may give an indication of the periods in the school calendar as well as the grades pupils' attendance declined. It is important to mention that, attendance records in most of the schools were not available because teachers did not mark the register or closed them appropriately sometimes. Most teachers are reported to have mentioned that school attendance in the study area falls on certain months of the year and some particular days of the week (Ampiah 2008). Decline in attendance is attributed to the influence of socio-economic activities in the area. During fishing and farming seasons, some children help their parents/caregivers and others engage in child labour for money to support themselves. Child labour is needed when fishing and farming activities increase. The rainy season also disrupts classes when children have to walk about 1 km or more to school or where the school structures are not in good conditions. In the next section, I present analysis of attendance patterns of school children.

#### **5.4.1 School Attendance Patterns**

The following section presents the attendance patterns of school children from 16 sampled schools in the Mfantseman Municipality. The small number (18) of cases explored in this study limits its generalisability. Nevertheless, depth of insight gained from interviews analysed in chapters 6 and 7 may be linked to the larger education picture in the study area. The purpose of the attendance analysis in this section is therefore to identify patterns that may be illustrative of the manner of attendance demonstrated by the types of dropout cases analysed in chapter 6.

#### **General Patterns of School Attendance in Mfantseman**

The school attendance patterns of the sample of 6–17-year-olds in the present study are most illuminating, and correspond with previously identified patterns and trends in school attendance.

Days of school attendance by term have been grouped into four categories in order to illustrate a corresponding number of different patterns of attendance. These categories are pattern 1 – stopped attending for the whole term (0 days);



pattern 2 – below average attendance for 1 to 30 days of the term; pattern 3 – average attendance for 31 to 50 days of the term; and pattern 4 – regular attendance for 51 to 70 days of the term.

This categorisation illustrates the different attendance patterns that typify dropout and the varying degrees of school attendance. Of the four categories, children whose attendance ranges between 0 to 30 days (patterns 1 and 2) are of interest to the present study because they are illustrative of the types of dropout discussed in chapter 6. The patterns of attendance is analysed by grade and term to show their interaction and critical points that may require attention to improve attendance.

It is important to mention that some of the data on children's attendance is missing. The reasons for these missing values are known. I was told by one head teacher that, "*attendance records are not properly kept in all schools.*" This was because in cases of grades for which there were no regular class teachers, or when teachers were absent, attendance registers were not always kept up to date. I also gathered that the Municipal Education Office (MEO) did not always supply school registers promptly. Such delays compelled teachers to keep records in a notebook with the intention of transferring them to the register when it arrived. However, sometimes mistakes were made in the transcription of records.

As a result of such shortcomings, there are no complete sets of attendance records for all the children sampled. Thus, the number of children identified as dropouts, and irregular as well as regular attendees could be slightly higher or lower than the data indicates. Nevertheless, the figures in table 5:2 provide us with an overview of school attendance patterns from the available data. As a prelude to a more detailed analysis of the types and causes of dropout in chapters 6 and 7, the figures show the proportions of children manifesting four patterns of school attendance and trends by grade and term.

**Table 5:2 Descriptive Evidence of Trends and Patterns of Attendance and Dropout by terms in Sampled School for 6-17-year-olds (2007/8)**

Attendance Mode	Attend. (days)	Term 1		Term 2		Term 3	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<b>Pattern One</b>	0	35	2.9	25	2.1	14	1.2
<b>Pattern Two</b>	1–30	15	1.3	42	3.5	66	5.5
<b>Pattern Three</b>	31–50	39	3.3	213	17.9	241	20.2
<b>Pattern Four</b>	51–70	675	56.7	462	38.8	440	36.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>764</b>	<b>64.1</b>	<b>742</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>63.9</b>
	No Data	427	35.9	449	37.7	430	36.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>1191</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1191</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1191</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: CREATE field data collected by CRIQPEG.

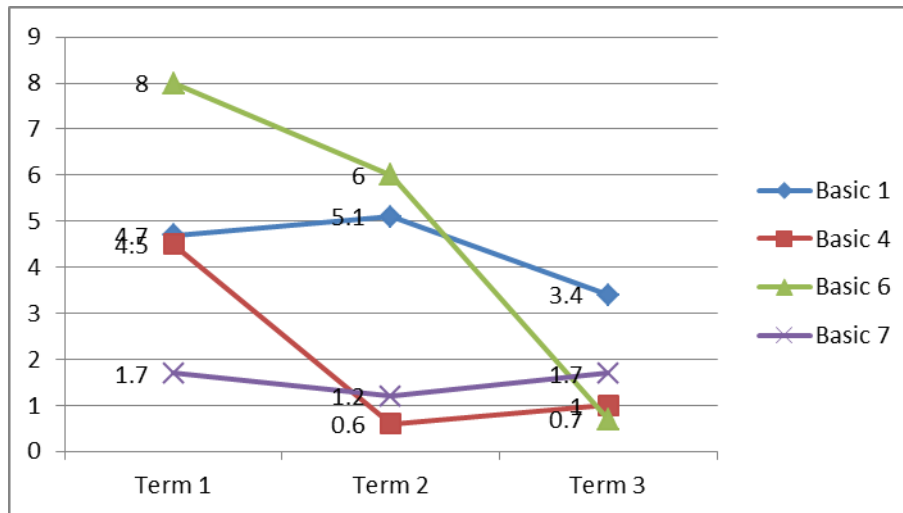
### Pattern One Attendance

One category of children who gain initial access but subsequently stop attending school at some point has been designated as attendance *pattern one*. These children include those who had stopped schooling for periods ranging from one school term<sup>26</sup> to four academic years. Some of these children may drop-in while others may not. Of particular interest to this study are these children who are interested in returning to school and those who are not (see 6.4 for details) Table 5:2 shows that in terms 1 to 3, an average of 2% of children in the sampled schools stopped attending. The trend in attendance by term shows a decrease (2.9% in the first term compared with 2.1% and 1.2%) for the second and third terms respectively in the number of children who stopped schooling.

Dropout trends by grade and term fluctuate rather than remain stable. The figures in Appendix 6 show that 11, 12 and 8 Basic 1 children stopped attending school in the first second and third terms respectively. Basic 4 recorded 9, 1 and 2 cases during the first, second and third terms respectively. In Basic 6, 12 cases occurred in the first term but only 1 case in the third term. The number of cases in Basic 7 remained stable throughout, with 3 in both the first and third terms and 2 in the second term.

<sup>26</sup> the duration of a school term is between 12 and 15 weeks

**Figure 5:9 Percentage of Children Manifesting Pattern One Attendance by Grade and Term**



Source: Calculated from data collected by CRIQPEG.

A ranked comparison of the number of children manifesting pattern one attendance by grade and term shows that in the first term, Basic 6 recorded the highest number of cases of dropout; and Basics 1, 4 and 7 followed in that order. In the second term, Basic 1 had the highest number of cases, followed by Basics 6, 7 and 4. In the third term, the highest number of cases occurred in Basic 1, followed by Basics 7, 4 and 6. Of all four sampled grades, Basic 1 had the highest number of cases of dropout in the academic year.

The figures in table 5:2 show that an average of 2% of children in the sampled schools manifested pattern one attendance. The personal stories behind the manifestation of this pattern of attendance are narrated and discussed in chapter 6 and 7.

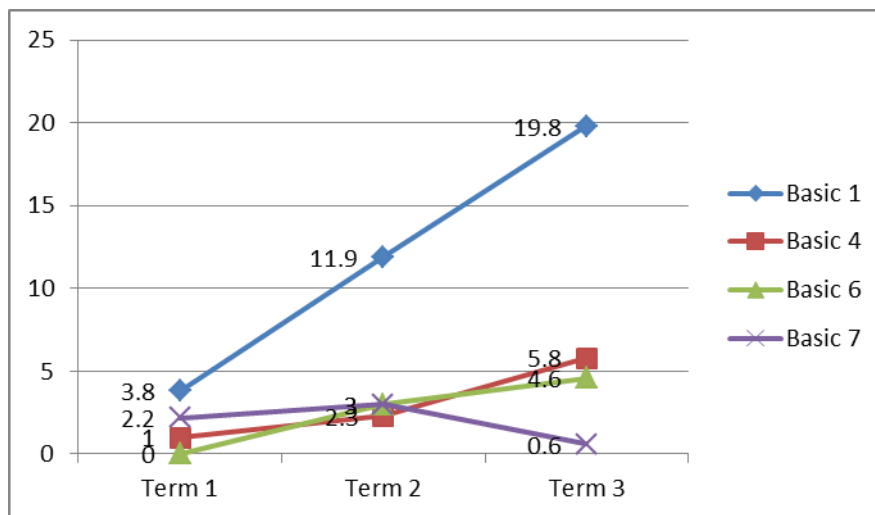
### **Pattern Two Attendance**

A second category of children who attend school for half a term or less has been designated as attendance *pattern two*. Children in this category begin a term but their attendance does not exceed 30 days – half the maximum. While some of them attend school regularly from the beginning of term before withdrawal, others attend intermittently throughout the term. Some attend

school for one or two days or weeks, withdraw for perhaps a week or more, and then resume classes again (see chapter 6 for detailed accounts of cases).

In respect of the children in this category, table 5:2 shows a progressive trend of 1.3%, 3.5% and 5.5% for the first, second and third terms respectively. This indicates that more children drop out of school before the end of year, and as the third term approaches. Attendance rates by grade and term are compared in figure 5:8.

**Figure 5:10 Percentage of Children Manifesting Pattern Two Attendance by Grade and Term**



Source: Calculated from data collected by CRIQPEG.

A comparative analysis of pattern two attendance by grade and term shows that in the first term, Basic 1 recorded 9 cases; followed by Basic 7 with 4 cases; and Basic 4 with 2 cases. During the second term, Basic 1 had the highest number of cases at 28 (compared with 5 cases each in Basic 6 and 7); Basic 4 had the least number of cases at 4. Basic 1 recorded 46 cases in the third term; followed by Basic 4 with 12 cases; Basic 6 with 7 cases; and Basic 7 with 1 case. Of all four grades sampled, Basic 1 is critical, given that it registered more than half of all cases of dropout over the whole academic year.

The progressive trend in cases of withdrawal is more evident when attendance patterns one and two are combined. Thus, the figures in table 5:2 show a

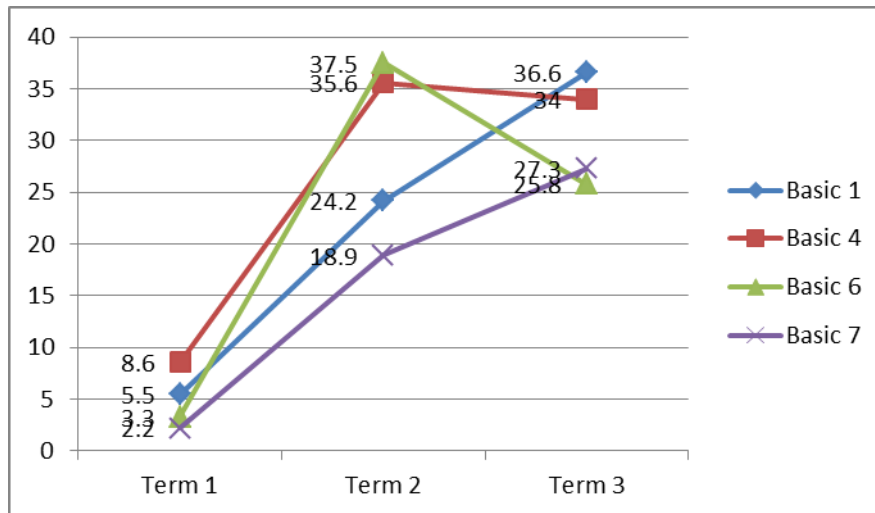
gradual increase from 4.2% in the first term, 5.6% in the second term, to 6.7% in the third term. The increases in cases of irregular school attendance and withdrawal during the second and third terms may be an indication of the clash between seasonal activities—fishing and farming and the school calendar (see figure 7:5). Often the decline in attendance is as a result of child labour and migrations to labour markets outside the community. In particular, children who were attending irregularly during the first term may have stopped attending by the end of the year in order to work.

### **Pattern Three Attendance**

A third category represents children who attend school for up to 50 days per term. They may not be regarded as dropouts but their attendance still falls short of the maximum requirement. This category of children has been designated as attendance *pattern three*. The attendance of pupils manifesting this pattern is relatively above average.

Table 5:2 shows that in the first term, 3.3% of sampled children were in this category. However, a significant increase to 17.9% followed by 20.2% occurred in the second and third terms respectively. Among the children in this category, there were those who attended school for up to 40 days and others who attended for up to 50 days per term. Those whose attendance did not exceed 40 days are of particular interest to the present study because they might have been on the verge of slipping into attendance pattern 2. A comparison of pattern three attendance by grade and term is shown in figure 5:11.

**Figure 5:11 Percentage of Children Manifesting Pattern Three Attendance by Grade and Term**



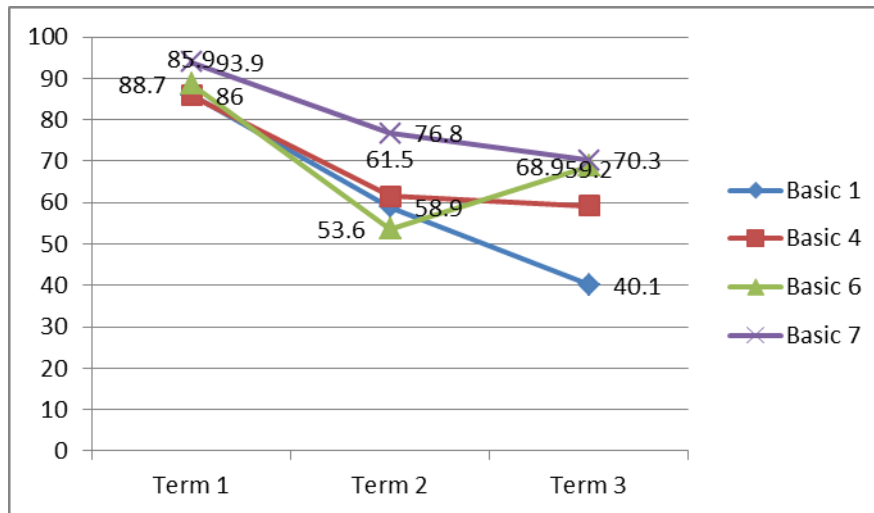
Source: Calculated from data collected by CRIQPEG

In the first term, Basic 4 topped the list with 17 cases; followed by Basic 1 with 13 cases; in Basic 6, there were 5 cases; and Basic 7 had 4 cases. During the second term, 63 cases occurred in Basic 6; followed by Basic 4 with 62 cases; Basic 1 with 57 cases; and Basic 7 had the fewest, with 31 cases. In the third term, Basic 1 recorded the most cases with 85; followed by Basic 4 with 70 cases; Basic 7 with 47 cases; and Basic 6 with 39 cases.

### Pattern Four Attendance

The fourth and final category represents children who attend school regularly, their attendance rate meeting the legal minimum requirement. Pupils in this category may be regarded as having secure enrolment. This category of children has been designated as attendance *pattern four*. Interestingly, of all the pupils for whom attendance records are available only an average 43.96% manifests pattern four attendance throughout the entire academic year.

**Figure 5:12 Percentage of Children Manifesting Pattern Four Attendance by Grade and Term**



Source: Calculated from data collected by CRIQPEG.

A comparative analysis of the manifestation of pattern four attendance by grade and term shows that in respect of the regular attendance of 56.7% (see table 5:2) of pupils in the first term, all four grades registered over 80% attendance. In the first term, Basic 7 recorded the highest attendance (93.9%); followed by Basic 6 (88.7%); and Basics 4 and 1 (86% each). An analysis of grade performance during the first, second and third terms shows that Basic 7 had the highest attendance rates at 93.9%, 76.8% and 70.3% respectively; compared with Basic 1, which had the lowest, at 86%, 58.9% and 40.1% respectively.

In terms of an overview of all attendance patterns, in the second term, of the 742 (62.3%) children for whom attendance records are available, the figures show that 175 (23.5%) did not have secure enrolment; 2.1% were out of school; another 3.53% withdrew by the middle of term; and 17.9% attended school regularly. During this period, regular attendance in Basics 1, 3 and 6, decreased significantly by 27.1%, 24.4%, and 35.1% respectively. Basic 6 had a little over 53.6% of pupils in regular attendance; 6% of pupils did not report to school at all; 3% dropped out by the middle of term; and as much as 37.5% attended school irregularly. Over the same period, Basic 1 registered 58.9% of children attending regularly; leaving 5.1% who did not report to school at all; 11.9% withdrew by the middle of term; and 24.2% attended school irregularly.

Again, in Basic 1, the third term saw only 40.1% of children in regular attendance. Of the remainder, 3.4% did not report to school all term; another 19.8% were in school for a brief period before dropping out in the middle of term; and 36.6% attended school irregularly.

This suggests that fewer than half of the sampled children enrolled in Basic 1 attended school regularly for the whole academic year. Overall, Basic 1 experienced as much as 18.8% of children drifting away from regular attendance. In terms of Basic 4 and Basic 6, regular attendance fluctuated rather than maintaining a unified trend. Nevertheless, as much as 15.3% of Basic 6 pupils improved their attendance, becoming regular attendees.

### **Seasonality of Attendance**

Generally, the evidence from the data on school attendance shows a trend towards decreasing attendance throughout the academic year. This trend indicates that the second and third terms are the periods in the school calendar when children's attendance decreases from regular to either irregular attendance or dropout (see figure 7:2 for details on clashed between seasonal activities and school calendar). The decreasing trend in the proportion of regular attendance indicates the significance of seasonal activities to school attendance patterns.

In summary, attendance patterns one to four as manifested in sampled schools in Mfantseman Municipality shows that in all grades, children's attendance decreases as they approach the third term. This is evident from changing trends in the proportion of children by term and grade. The gradual decrease in regular attendance may be described as the progression towards dropout.

The decreasing attendance trend leading to dropout reveals that dropout is culmination of a process of which irregular attendance is often an early stage. This is because, the children who start attending school irregularly enter the dropout process which if left unattended results in eventual dropout of school permanently. In chapter 6, I discuss how 18 children who dropped out of school



understand and interpret dropout, using their experiences and the stories behind their respective patterns of attendance to illustrate the dropout process. The profiles of the 18 children from the 2 school in the 2 communities where I collected data are presented in table 5:3.

The 18 children who participated in this study spent at least three years in school before dropping out. Their ages ranged from 7 to 17 years. They had dropped out from two of the basic schools that were among the nine sampled schools in the study area. All 18 children who participated in the study had dropped out of primary school over the 2003/4 and 2006/7 academic years. While some of these children who dropped out of school dropped back in to continue their schooling, others did not drop back in at all. The characteristics of these children in terms of age and type of economic activity they engage are typical of other children in the study area. In the next section, I present profiles of the two communities where dropout children live, and two schools from which they dropped out.

## **5.5 Profiles of Study Communities and Schools**

The communities of Narkwa and Kyeakor were selected for this study; one school being selected for research purposes from each locality. The two selected schools, which I have anonymised, are among the schools in the municipality where CREATE data was collected. The selected communities are typical of other rural communities in the municipality. Narkwa has a population of 5,859 (2,721 males and 3,138 females), while Kyeakor has a population of 2,231 (1,023 males and 1,208 females).

Both are faith schools – Christian and Muslim. Although these religions differ markedly, and could potentially play a role in schooling that leads to a diversification of experiences (indeed this was something that I expected to find), this is not evident in my data. A possible reason is that cultural experiences are more influential and embracing in these communities, thus overshadowing religious differences. School attendance in both communities is low. There is widespread child migration to Half Assini, Axim, Fasu and Cote

d'Ivoire. This is a key characteristic of both Narkwa and Kyeakor, whereby pupils leave their respective communities during the major harvest season and do not return until it is over (see figure 6:1). This pattern of movement is a critical factor affecting pupils' access, retention and school progress.

### **Profile of Narkwa Community and School**

Narkwa community is located about 15 kilometres from the municipal capital. It is one of the popular and active fishing towns of the municipality. Narkwa is a low-income community; and its main economic activity is fishing. Most of the inhabitants are fisher folk, who migrate seasonally to Half Assini and other fishing communities along the western coast of the Gulf of Guinea.

During the main fishing season, the men migrate a month before their wives and children, who join them in the migrant communities later. Narkwa may be described as a nomadic community because of such annual seasonal migration. During the major fishing season – May to July – deep sea fishing and smoking the catch, which is transported for sale further afield, is common.

There is a very close network among members of the community, which keeps them informed of fishing and marketing opportunities in the migration destinations. The close-knit nature of this network and information about opportunities for fishing is what attracts children to play truant from school to go fishing.

Narkwa has three schools: one public primary school, which was established by the Methodist Church and is managed by the Methodist Unit; one public DA JHS, which is run by the Metropolitan Education Office; and one private basic school. The public primary school and the DA JSS – which is one of the study basic schools – have enrolments of 800 and 155 pupils respectively. There are eight teachers at the primary school and four at the JHS. Of the eight primary school teachers, four are trained and four are untrained. The school has 2 streams and is housed in a 12-classroom block. However, owing to a shortage of teachers, some classes are combined – 2A and 3A in one class, and 2B and

3B in another class. This arrangement was found to negatively affect teaching and school attendance.

### **Profile of Kyeakor Community and School**

Kyeakor is a predominantly farming community located 20 kilometres from the municipal capital. It is one of the municipality's rural communities. Kyeakor is quite small in comparison to Narkwa, and most of its members live in satellite villages surrounding Kyeakor Township. People go into town at weekends, to attend funeral services and other more enjoyable social activities. The majority of the inhabitants are Muslim migrant farmers who have settled in the area.

There is one public school, one private school and one government-assisted basic school in Kyeakor. The government-assisted school that I selected for this study is an Islamic school that was established in a Mosque with 62 children in 1998. The aim of starting the school was to operate a dual curriculum in both English and Arabic to help Muslim children benefit from a Western education, and also to bring those Muslim children who had dropped out of public school back into the education system. Government assistance began in the 2000/01 academic year. In 2006, its first batch of pupils sat for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

The children attend their respective English curriculum classes from 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., when they switch to Arabic classes. During the latter, all pupils assemble in one classroom to study the Qur'an. The school currently has a complement of ten teachers, only three of whom are trained; four of the remaining seven teachers hold secondary school certificates, and the other three are Arabic instructors.

Out of the 373 (217 boys and 156 girls) children enrolled, about 75% of them live in surrounding villages and walk an average of six kilometres to school every day. About a quarter of the pupils live with the three Arabic instructors, who double as foster their parents. Because it offers the best of both worlds – an English and Arabic curriculum – the school attracts children with an Islamic background from all over Western, Central, Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo regions.

During routine campaigns of preaching Islam, parents from these regions hand their children over to the instructors for them to get an education. However, this invariably turns into a kind of child exploitation and abuse. These children (mostly boys) sleep together in a mosque and often have to work in order to feed themselves in the morning, as well as to clothe themselves. These dynamics appear to affect the patterns of school attendance. Moreover, some of the pupils at this school also migrate to major fishing towns to earn money along with other children from Narkwa community, especially during the school holidays.

In table 5:3, I present the profile and characteristics of all the 18 dropout children from Narkwa and Kyeakor who participated in the study. The analysis of the background characteristic of the dropout children provided some insight into the profile of pupils who drop out of basic school in the study area. From the analysis, three main characteristic features of dropout were delineated for analysis. They were drop out indicators using: (1) the duration a previously enrolled child had been out of school since he/she stopped schooling (see table 5:3); (2) the child's attitude towards schooling, work, and economic well-being; and (3) reasons for stopping attending school. The accounts and narratives of children's experiences of dropout is analysed and presented in chapter 6 and 7.

Table 5:3 Profile and Characteristics of Dropout Children engaged in the Study

Biographic statistics				School history				Family characteristics					
Name <sup>27</sup>	Age	Sex	Grade left	Period out of School (months)	Academic performance	Time taken to walk to school (min.)	Enrolment status	Type of work done by Child	Position in family	Siblings education	Guardian	Guardians Education level	Guardian's Employment
Serwaa	9	F	2	24	Average	25 mins.	Out	Caring	3 of 4	1	Mother	None	Farming
Owireduwa	10	F	3	8	Average	15 mins.	Back	Selling	2 of 3	None	Grandmother	None	None
Amankwa	11	M	4	12	Poor	1: 45 mins.	Out	Fishing	1 of 5	3	Self	-	-
Anima	12	F	3	8	Average	30 mins	Back	Caring	4 of 5	1	Mother	Primary	Farming
Sarpong	13	M	3	8	Poor	15 mins.	Back	Farming	2 of 4	2	Father	None	Farming
Marfo	14	M	6	12	Average	20 mins.	Back	Fishing	3 of 5	None	Grandmother	None	None
Oparebea	14	F	5	18	Poor	2 hrs.	Out	Selling	1 of 5	3	Parents	None	Farming
Ampofo	15	M	3	24	Poor	40 mins.	Back	Fishing	3 of 4	2	Foster	None	Selling
Ampong	15	M	4	36	Poor	15 mins.	Back	Fishing/Farming	1 of 4	2	Father	None	Fishing
Boateng	15	M	5	36	Poor	15 mins.	Back	Fishing	2 of 4	None	Relative	None	None
Mensah	15	M	3	48	Poor	30 mins.	Back	Farming	2 of 4	2	Mother	Primary	None
Ninkyi	15	M	4	12	Average	25 mins	Back	Fishing/Farming	3 of 5	1	Father	MLSC	Mason
Kyei	15	M	3	12	Poor	15 mins.	Out	Fishing	2 of 4	1	Mother	Primary	Selling
Asieduwa	15	F	6	12	Poor	2:15 mins	Out	Caring	1 of 4	3	Step Father	Primary	Farming
Boatema	17	F	7	24	Average	15 mins	Back	Selling	1 of 3	None	Self	-	-
Ofori	17	M	6	24	Poor	1 hour	Out	Fishing	1 of 5	3	Self	-	-

Source: field notes and school records

<sup>27</sup> These are pseudonyms

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The chapter highlights enrolment and participation in basic education, and school attendance patterns in the Mfantseman Municipality. It also illuminates school attendance patterns and dropout trends by grade and term of 16 sampled schools. The analysis in this chapter gives a general overview of schooling in the study area. The characteristics of the children who participated in the study are also highlighted in this chapter. The in-depth analysis of dropout in Mfantseman is presented in chapter 6 and 7 using the dropout experience of 18 children. The next chapter is devoted to a detailed presentation of the data analysis that illuminates dropout children's understanding and interpretation of dropout.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Dropping out of School: Dimensions and Dynamics of Dropout**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter answers research question 1. It analyses dropout children's understanding and interpretation of dropout in the study area, and how their school attendance patterns prior to drop out and their attitude towards schooling reflects in their understanding of dropout. The first part of the analysis focuses specifically on types of school dropout, as based on children's accounts.

For analytical purposes and in terms of dropout children's expectations of schooling, work and economic wellbeing, dropout is categorised according to two dimensions: temporary dropout and permanent dropout, in which there are five types of dropout manifested. Nevertheless, these two categories are not wholly independent of each other, having some shared overlaps created by dynamics within the types of dropout. The section also shows the relationship between the types of drop out and CREATEs' models of exclusion from school.

The second part of the analysis in this chapter focuses on the stories behind the two dimensions of dropout, as a reflection on the patterns of school attendance in chapter 5. Finally, the chapter concludes with three case studies, using children's narratives to highlight the manner in which they dropped out.

The data analysed in this chapter was collected from children through in-depth interviews, informal discussions, observation and examination of school records. I also collected data through informal discussions with parents and teachers.

#### **6.2 Ambiguous Definitions of Dropout**

In considering the ways in which dropout cases are identified, most teachers I spoke with during data collection expressed ambiguous and inconsistent views

on the length of time a pupil stayed out of school to qualify as dropout. They found it difficult to tell which aspects of children's unexcused absence from school could be classified as cases of dropout and which could not. The simple and straightforward answers teachers tended to give were leaving school before graduation or no longer attending school. This renders identification of unexcused attendance and dropout indistinguishable.

For example, a school head, Nyaminpa, (not his real name) said, *"Dropout means deserting school...a child who has stopped school."*

In a similar vein, another teacher, Hamid, also commented, *"A child who has stopped attending school is a dropout."*

A parent also said, *"A child becomes a dropout when he or she no longer attends school."*

When I asked how dropout was identified, one teacher told me, *"Non-attendance for one academic term qualifies as dropout."* However, this teacher's school head stated that it was *"continuous non-attendance for one academic year;"* adding, *"Identifying when a child becomes a dropout is a problem... We don't have any established way of doing so."* Often, children who had stopped attending classes, returned just as the school was considering taking them off the register.

National access performance indicators used by EMIS to identify dropout is also unhelpful here because it only shows dropout after a child has spent one academic year out of school and regards dropout as finality. EMISs approach is silent on those pupils who stopped school in a term but returned later to continue their schooling. These examples demonstrate inconsistency and lack of clarity in the identification of cases of dropout.

The children I spoke with also had their independent understanding and interpretation of dropout. For example, one child said that, *"dropout is*



*suspending schooling;*” and another said *“deserting school.”* They believed that dropout depended *“on the child’s current condition.”* Parents also explained dropout differently. One said that it constituted conditions whereby *“a child is not sick and he abandons school.”*

These views of teachers, children and parents illustrate the ambiguity, inconsistency and confusion with which dropout is perceived. In the following section, I consider definitions of types of dropout based on children’s accounts.

### **6.3 Children’s General Views on Dropout: Dimensions and Dynamics**

From the interview data, I found out that children’s definitions of dropout are diverse and are founded on the length of time out of school and the reason behind, but that they all amount to deserting school. Based on children’s accounts, two main categories of dropout which may be further divided into five types of dropout emerged (see illustration in figure 6:1). The five types of dropout are founded on the length of time out of school, reason behind stopping, and age at which dropout occurred. The two main categories are founded on children’s aspirations towards schooling, work and economic wellbeing. Dropout may therefore be classified as temporary—sporadic dropout; event dropout; long-term dropout; for children who aspire to return to school, and permanent—unsettled dropout; or settled dropout for children not aspiring to return to school.

Rather than the attendance patterns analysed in chapter 5, my labelling of the types of dropout has to do with the processes leading to dropout and points out the child’s aspirations towards schooling, work and economic wellbeing; the reason for stopping; and the length of time a pupil spent out of school since he/she last stopped schooling.

However all of the various types of dropout have one common characteristic attendance prior to dropout which often falls far below the minimum<sup>28</sup> (40%) attendance required for graduation to the next grade.

If translated literally from English to Fante,<sup>29</sup> the nearest meaning to 'drop out' suggests to fall off, to desert or to depart from something. Children who participated in this study interpreted 'drop out' as to: 'suspend', 'abandon', 'terminate', 'desert' or 'quit' school. From the interview discussions, I noticed that children's interpretation of the term correlated with their explanations of why they dropped out of school and the varying lengths of time they spent out of school.

For example, in one category of children, the definition of dropout was founded on the idea of 'intermittent attendance' or 'seasonal withdrawal' motivated by economic survival needs. Such a view illustrates a concept of dropout based on a temporary economic situation. In another category of children, the definition of dropout as a permanent condition was equally motivated by economic survival needs, but with an additional lack of interest in schooling caused by the perceived diminishing value of education. Thus, the varying definitions of dropout were largely founded on the children's current situation, which was sometimes the reason for leaving school. The following section focuses on the temporary and permanent dimensions of dropout.

### **6.3.1 Dropout as Temporary**

In my discussion with a group of children who had stopped attending school owing to temporary economic needs, critical event(s), or both and spending prolonged periods out of school, dropout meant temporary withdrawal from school. Such children dropped out of school for periods that lasted between five weeks to four years. The reason(s) for dropping out being either the economic

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<sup>28</sup> The criterion of 40% attendance for progression in Ghanaian schools seems extraordinarily low. It seems to recognise that most children spend most of their school time out of school.

<sup>29</sup> The Fante language is the native dialect of the study area and is spoken in most parts of the Central Region of Ghana.

survival needs of the child, the critical event(s) at home, school or both. Of the 18 dropout children interviewed, 10 who had returned to school defined dropout as temporary.

#### **6.3.1.1 Sporadic Dropout**

For one category of children, dropout was defined as temporary withdrawal from school due to temporary economic needs. For Anima, a 12 year-old girl, dropout meant, *“to attend school for a period of time and stop attending as a result of a problem; or staying in the house for maybe four to eight weeks without attending school pending a solution to the problem.”*

In another child’s interpretation which clarifies the nature of the problem, dropout meant, *“to stop attending school because you don’t have money to buy food at school; or stopping school to work for money to buy a new school uniform”*

This view perceives dropout as temporary termination of schooling in the short term owing to the child’s economic survival needs. I term this type ‘sporadic dropout’. Its manifestation is marked by continuous or intermittent non-attendance (irregular attendance) for periods lasting between 8 and 24 weeks before returning to school and the reason behind drop out being for economic survival need.

#### **6.3.1.2 Event Dropout**

Children’s views of dropout according to another definition reflected their response to one or more critical events in their lives. I term this type ‘event dropout’. Here, dropout is defined as a condition that is an outcome of one or more critical events, either at school, at home or both. Unlike sporadic dropout, such events that encourage the child’s motivation to suspend schooling are not caused by the need for economic survival.

Events that lead to dropout could result from the child's background or within the school. For example, a child may dropout as a result of migration of his/her family, and the death of one or both parents. At school, conflict between a child and one or more teachers may be one such event that results in dropout. In some cases, dropout occurs as a result of a combination of two or more of these factors. Accordingly, for Ampong, a 15 year-old boy, a dropout was *"a child who stops attending school because the teacher tells him or her not to set foot in the classroom again."*

Certain events at school may cause dropout to occur. For example, when conflict emerged between a child and the teacher, the child was often found guilty and punished. Children who refused to conform to punishment were given a stern warning not to return to class until the terms of the punishment had been met.

The case of Boatemaa, a 17 year-old girl, is another example. She told me, *"After stopping school for some time, I attempted to go back in the second term...but the teachers told me that I couldn't be admitted in the second term; so, I should go back when the next first term began."* She fell pregnant before the start of the new academic year. Thus, the school's postponement of Boatemaa's readmission appears to have contributed to the exacerbation of her dropout status.

In some cases, such events may occur in the child's household. For example, Owureduwa a 10 year-old girl, stopped schooling because of the death of her parents. Thus, she told me, *"A dropout is a child who stops attending school because of the death of the parents."*

Another child, Amankwa, said, *"A dropout is a child whose parents have migrated and he has to stop school and join them."*

In addition to stopping school in response to a critical event, these children continuously stay away from school for one to two years maximum. Such

children may return to school when the situation that caused them to stop attending improves.

On the other hand, of the 18 children I tracked, 5 of the event dropout cases had originally fallen into the sporadic dropout category. For example, when a sporadic dropout returned to school he/she easily becomes event dropout because of conflicts with school authorities over punishment for non-attendance, serving probation such as repeating a grade, not having their names in attendance registers. Such conflicts often result in deepening the dropout status of sporadic dropouts. In this instance, the reason for stopping school has shifted from economic survival need to a critical event.

#### **6.3.1.3 Long-term Dropout**

For a third category of children, the definition of dropout is based on their 'overage' status and on the prolonged periods they have remained out of school. The reason behind this type of dropout may be similar to event dropout case. However, some distinguishing characteristic of these children is that they tend to be older than 12 years of age, and are significantly older (4 years) than the prescribed age for the primary grade they have attained and have been out of school for periods lasting between 2 and 4 academic years. Accordingly, for them, dropout means falling out of their cohort group. I term this third type 'long-term dropout'.

Ampofo, a 15 year-old boy who dropped out of Basic 3, defined a dropout as *"a child who stops attending school, and his or her classmates are now about to complete school."*

Another 15 year-old boy, Boateng, who also dropped out of his cohort group, illustrated the definition of long-term dropout thus: *"A dropout is someone like my friend Mensah or me, who has stopped attending school for a long time... My friend stopped attending school when we were going to Basic 4, but I stopped in Basic 5... Our classmates are now in JHS 1 [grade seven]."*

Children who fall into the long-term dropout category are significantly older than the prescribed age for the primary grade and have also spent prolonged periods out of school; but, like sporadic and event dropouts, they are usually hopeful of returning to school. Indeed, three of the 18 children I interviewed who had fallen out of their cohort and spent more than two years out of school returned to their classes during my fieldwork.

The three types of dropout – sporadic, event and long-term – that emerged from children’s accounts typify the status of dropout as a temporary condition. Such children may not have considered their situation to be permanent because they envisaged a return to school as the most likely outcome of the current situation. Nevertheless, for some children, what started as a brief deferral of schooling – sporadic dropout – became event dropout and from there proceeded to long-term dropout.

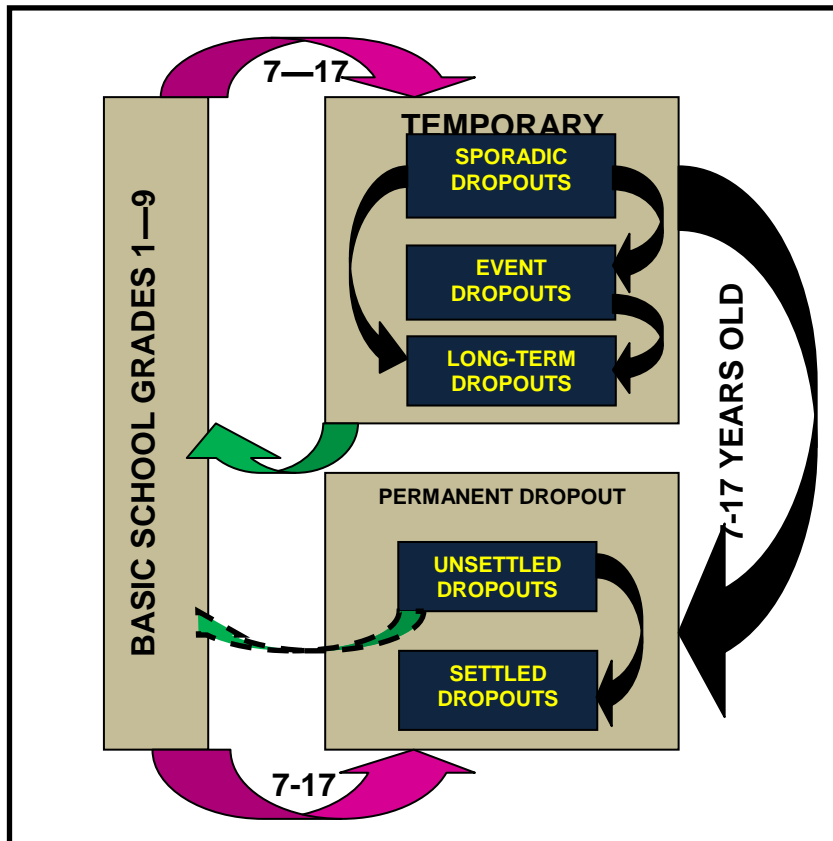
The concept of dropping out carries dynamics within it that range from a temporary condition with the probability of returning to school to a permanent state. The pink arrows in figure 6.1 show the movement of children from pupils to school dropouts. Dropout dynamics are illustrated by the black arrowed lines connecting ‘sporadic dropout’ to ‘event dropout’ and to ‘long-term dropout’.

Children who became sporadic dropouts often returned to school – indicated by the green arrow pointing towards school, but some of them dropout again this time to become event dropouts. I noticed that although sporadic dropout children return to school, they were given certain conditions<sup>30</sup> to comply with, which sometimes generates conflict between the returning child and school authorities. For sporadic dropout children, when such situations emerge, a second dropout occurs but this time as a result of a school event—conflict with school authorities.

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<sup>30</sup> Conditions include, repetition, not registered in official register, signing of bonds to be of good behaviour. These are common practices in school in the study area (see Appendix 5)

**Figure 6:1 Types of Dropout: The Dimensions and Dynamics of Dropout**



Source: the Author.

Equally, the dropout status of some of the event dropout child is further deepened by another dropout. In the cases I engaged, such unresolved conflicts resulted in children spending between 1 to 2 years out of school. For children I refer as long-term dropouts because of their over age status at the time they dropped out of primary school and have spent between 2 and 4 years out of school, this type of dropout may be regarded the peak of temporary dropout cases.

Temporarily dropout children for whom the value of schooling is diminished and they spent more years out of school and have become older in age become permanent dropouts (indicated with the black arrow from temporary dropout box to permanent dropout box). Next, I discuss the views of children who drop out of school permanently.

### 6.3.2 Dropout as Permanent

For a second category of children, their dropout status shifted from a temporary to a permanent condition, their definitions of 'dropout' revealing the fourth and fifth types. Children in this category define dropout as permanent because they have no intention of returning to school or are engaged in a vocation. While some of them began earning from child labour, others felt rejected by the school, and the rest considered that they were too old to attend the same class as younger children. Such a definition of dropout appears to be founded on the perceived diminishing value of schooling. Children in this category fall into two groups – *unsettled* and *settled* dropouts.

#### 6.3.2.1 Unsettled Dropout

According to the views of those children I refer as '*unsettled dropouts*', the definition suggests unsettledness. Asieduwa, a 15 year-old girl, used her situation to define her status, saying, "*When I stopped schooling and did not re-enter school...I had become a dropout... I'm not sure I want to go back to school again... I don't even know what to do now.*"

Two other children – Nkansah and Ntiful, both 17 year-olds – also expressed their views on the subject. For Nkansah, a dropout was "*a child who has been in school for a period of time but has decided not to attend school again because he is too old.*"

Ntiful added, "...you see, if a child is older than his classmates and he has stopped attending school, and doesn't make an effort to go back, that child has become a dropout." These views illustrate children's doubts about going back to school. Such indecision may result from feelings of embarrassment at being too old for a given grade and the prospect of having to attend class with younger children.

Nkansah noted his reluctance to learn with younger children, thus: "*In fact, it is not easy to go back to school because I am older than all these children I have to join when I go back.*"



Ntiful's response also posed a question that demonstrates the frustrations and despair of an overage child. He asked, *"What am I supposed to do? I don't know whether to stay at home and work, learn some trade, as for going back to school? I am older and bigger than most of the children at school. I would find it humiliating to join those young children again."*

These views of dropout demonstrate indecision about going back to school. Such children may claim to have permanently dropped out, but a prevailing uncertainty suggests that they might return to school if they saw any sign of hope and support in graduating (as indicated in figure 6:1 by the green broken arrow). I was told by one head teacher that, *"Several older children who dropped out re-entered school when the capitation grant scheme was introduced in 2006."* During my first round fieldwork, one of these children re-enrolled and started attending school again but he dropped out again and has migrated.

#### **6.3.2.2 Settled Dropout**

To a fifth and final group of dropout children who are settled in an alternative occupation to school, the definition of dropout is founded on their current situation. These children are engaged in a vocation or learning a trade. Ofori, a 17 year-old boy who was earning a living in the informal labour market, said, *"To dropout means to stop attending school to work for money."*

Another child, Oparebea, who was 14 years old, saw the status of dropout as a permanent condition based on the difficulty of learning at school. She described her predicament, explaining, *"A dropout is someone like me who don't understand what is taught at school. I left school and I don't want to go back because I didn't understand anything. I was just wasting my time walking five miles to school every day."*

This last category of children who consider that school is not for them learn a vocation or engage in petty trading. Their decision not go back to school is a

reflection of the perceived diminishing value of education. Therefore, they focus on learning a trade or finding a job straight away in order to earn money.

In summary, the temporality of dropout and possible drop in of the children I tracked typically appears to signal a process that starts with simply missing school regularly as a result of economic survival needs, but deteriorates into a more protracted absence fuelled by conditions within and outside the school until the child eventually drops out to become permanent dropouts. From drop out children's understanding and interpretation of dropout, their account reveals both the parts of the types of dropout that manifests along the progression from being pupils to dropout children.

#### **6.4 Types of Dropout and Exclusion from Basic School**

This study has enabled me to look at how dropout is defined and the types of dropout found in a rural Ghanaian context, from the perspective of affected children themselves. It has provided a valuable insight into the relationship between children's accounts of exclusion and how their views of dropout fit the CREATE model of zones of exclusion.

CREATE uses the term 'zones of exclusion' to describe the various spaces where children are included, excluded, or are at risk of exclusion from education. Children falling into these zones of exclusion are the subject of research in the CREATE project. Many of these excluded children are from disadvantaged groups, e.g. the very poor, girls, HIV/AIDS orphans, displaced people, ethnic minorities, etc. The CREATE model of zones of exclusion has six main hypothetical zones of exclusion. Appendix 9 presents a cross sectional model by grade of participation which locates children who are losing or have lost access to conventional education systems. It illustrates how typically enrolments decline steeply through the primary grades in low enrolment countries, and how pupils attending irregularly and achieving poorly fall into "at risk" zones. In the CREATE hypothetical model more than half of all children leave before completing primary school, and about half of the primary completers are selected into lower secondary school where attrition continues.

The study found that the five types of dropout that emerged fall within CREATE exclusion zones 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 (see appendix 9 for details of CREATE exclusion zones) of the model. Sporadic dropout cases may constitute children *at risk* of dropping out or those *silently excluded* due to irregular/intermittent attendance; pupils who may not be able to complete the curriculum requirements to proceed to the next grade. In the school at which I collected data, procedure to the next grade was based on a minimum school attendance rate of 40%, and success in continuous and end of term assessments<sup>31</sup>. Failure to meet these requirements led to grade repetition, a requirement that cases of sporadic dropout were often subject to.

The evidence from the study shows that in this rural context, dropout may be temporary or permanent. Children's economic survival needs and critical events both within school and out of school shape the length of time a child may stay out of school. Often, children who start attending school intermittently become *sporadic dropouts* and begin their journey towards permanent dropout status. In terms of CREATE zones of exclusion, sporadic dropouts are regarded as being at heightened risk of ceasing to attend school completely. Such children fall within zones three and six of the CREATE model. While the temporary dropout cases that I refer as '*sporadic dropout*' cases may fall within CREATE exclusion zones 3 and 6, event dropout and long-term dropout cases fall within zones 2, 4 and 5.

However, the evidence also shows that low attendance, which has hitherto been regarded as a sign of being at risk, is actually a type of dropout considering my operational definition of dropout. While some children may drop out of schooling temporarily with a return to school being very likely, others – especially those who are overage and for whom schooling has lost its value – drop out permanently. Such children may focus more on economic well-being by engaging in child labour or learning a trade. Applying the CREATE zones of

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<sup>31</sup> This practice is common in all the school in the Municipality

exclusion, children who drop out of school permanently fall into zones 2, 4 and 5.

The children's views of dropout examined in this study are very useful because they allow us to focus on the nuances of their definitions, which highlight the types and forms of dropout in context. As a synthesis, the different types of dropout emerging from these first-hand accounts show that 'dropout' is defined as gaining initial access but not currently attending, although a return to school is possible.

A school dropout was operationally defined by me as any school age pupil whose attendance in the immediate past term was less than 40% and he/she is not attending school; or any school age pupil who stopped schooling for more than one term without excuse from teachers. Considering dropout children's understanding and interpretation of dropout and the views of teachers and parents, I have reconsidered my operational definition of dropout.

A school dropout may therefore be defined broadly as any younger (6-11) and older (12-17) school age child who has accomplished some basic education but has stopped schooling owing to temporary economic survival needs, critical events at home or school or both. On a more specific note, a dropout is any younger or older school age child who terminated his or her schooling for any of the reasons mentioned and spent more than half of the academic term without permission but still has a chance of returning to continue; or any younger or older school age child who has not progressed from one grade to the next and is also not repeating; or any younger or older school age child who has not completed the nine years of basic education and has no intention of returning to school but rather intends to or has entered a vocation.

Considering this definition of dropout, the patterns of attendance (see table 5:2) suggests that even with the criteria of 51 -70, those pupils at the lower end of this band would be missing more than 20% of their schooling. They are likely to

be silently excluded. In the next section, I present patterns of school attendance of some of the dropout children that is illustrative of the type of dropout.

#### **6.4.1 Patterns of School Attendance that Illustrate Types of Dropout and Exclusion**

This section highlights the pattern of school attendance and stories behind the temporary and permanent dimensions of dropout. The data I analyse here draws on school attendance records of 6 of the 18 dropout children who participated in the study. I collected the data from the two schools from where they had dropped out. The findings from the two schools are comparable with the analysis of the general patterns of school attendance in the sampled schools in the municipality where attendance drops in the third term (see details in chapter 5.4.1). The declining attendance and the subsequent dropout cases presented in this section may therefore be described as typical of schools in the study area. To highlight the progression in the dropout process, I present the temporary dimension of dropout cases that typify school attendance pattern two first, before presenting the permanent dimension of dropout to illustrate school attendance pattern one.

##### **6.4.1.1 Pattern Two Attendance and Temporary Dropout Cases**

In terms of children whose education in the study area manifested pattern two attendance, it was noted that similar to temporary dropout children whose attendance falls below 40%, their teachers considered them to be incapable of learning enough to proceed to the next grade.

School attendance pattern two is illustrative of cases of temporary dropout. Children in this category stop attending school after a brief period, but the school usually holds their records in anticipation that they will return. Such children are within the official age of graduation so they see returning to school as a possibility, although if they do return, they are forced to repeat their last grade. The cases of 3 children, Ninkyi (15 years), Owureduwa (10 years) and Among (15 years), who stopped attending school temporarily as variously

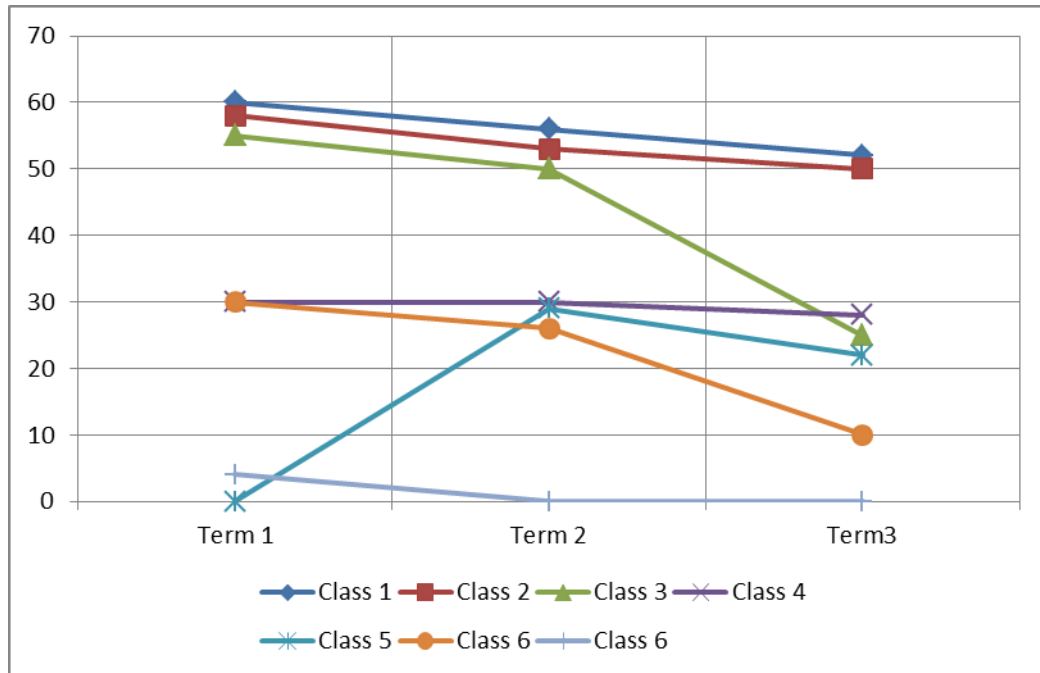
sporadic, event and long-term dropouts, make the point that they had experienced temporary dropout conditions and returned to school later.

### Sporadic Dropout: The Case of Ninkyi

Ninkyi's attendance pattern is a typical example of a sporadic dropout child, going to school for half a term before stopping. His initial record of low attendance became evident in the third term of Basic 3, before dwindling drastically to 25 days. Then, from Basic 3 to Basic 5, he did not spend more than 30 days per term in school.

In the first term of Basic 5, he stopped attending school entirely when his father took him to the capital city, Accra, where they worked as masons. In the second term, when he once more 'dropped in', he was still unable to improve his attendance record, until dropping out again in Basic 6 for two whole academic years while repeating. This time, he went to Half Assini with his friends to 'hustle'. Although at the time of the study Ninkyi had returned to school, his attendance remained irregular.

Figure 6:2 Ninkyi's Attendance Prior to becoming a Sporadic Dropout



Source: field data from school records

The story behind Ninkyi's attendance is narrated in box 1. There were many other children in the study area whose stories and their school attendance may be similar to Ninkyi's as manifested in pattern two (see patterns of attendance in chapter 5).

### **Box 1: Ninkyi's Narrative**

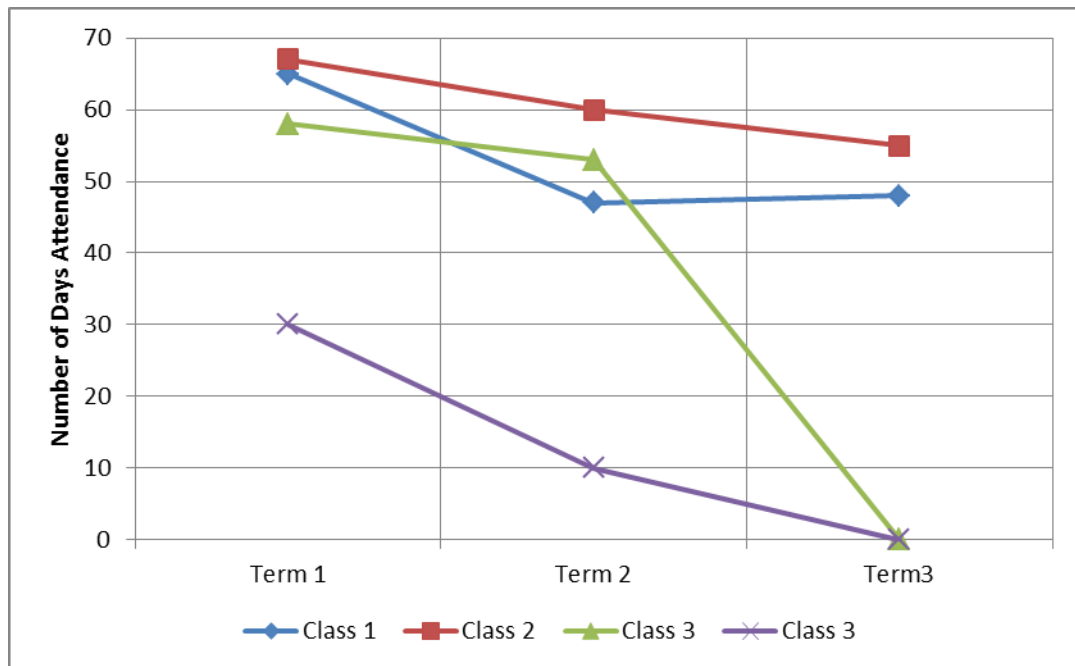
You see, my mother is often complaining that we don't have any money...so sometimes I don't eat breakfast before going to school. I skip school sometimes so that I can weave baskets and sell them for some money to buy food and my schooling needs. My father took me to Accra to go and work with him. That was when I did not go to school in the first term of Basic five. There were times when teachers were absent from school, so I left school to find some work to do. Because I don't go to school regularly, whenever I do go, my mates call me names. Sometimes, I beat them but the teachers punish me by caning me... As for the teachers, they just love using the cane, they cane you at the least mistake you make. When they asked me to repeat, I decided I was not going to school again because I didn't like how the teachers treated us. These teachers themselves don't go to school sometimes, but when we are late for school or don't report early when school re-opens, they cane you, ask you to go and weed, or bring stones and sand to school. They have always done these things to us...but you see, you can't go to school when you are hungry or don't have school uniform.

Ninkyi's case also suggests that his low attendance was the result of a combination of the situation at home and circumstances at school. His parents' inability to provide him with breakfast or other education needs coupled with issues at school, such as the absence of teachers and discipline among others, resulted in his intermittent attendance in favour of engaging in child labour to meet his economic survival need.

### **Event Dropout: The Case of Owureduwa**

The case of a 10 year-old girl, Owureduwa, is another example of temporary dropout that typifies event dropout. This type of dropout falls within school attendance pattern two. Owureduwa went to school regularly until the second term of Basic 3, when her attendance dropped significantly. In the third term of Basic 3, she dropped out of school, although she returned the following academic year to repeat her last grade she dropped out again in the third term.

Figure 6:3 Owureduwa's Attendance Prior to Becoming Event Dropout



Source: field data from school records

From available staff records, I gathered that around the time Owureduwa ceased attending Basic 3 there was no regular teacher for her Basic. She stopped going to school because she lost both parents at about the same time. She was then left alone to take care of both herself and her grandmother. In September 2008, Owureduwa dropped back in when one of her relatives offered to look after her, and she started repeating Basic 3 for the third time.

Commenting on her performance after dropping back in, Owureduwa's teacher told me, *"She is brilliant but she is finding it difficult to adjust... With time, she will pick up."* In response to my question about what the school was doing to ensure that she caught up, the teacher continued, *"You see, these children are so many and because irregular attendance is common in this village because of poverty, there is not much we can do as teachers... Sometimes we try to slow down a little when teaching but you can't do that all the time... When they are irregular, we try to discourage them by using punishment."* Owureduwa's story is related in box 2 below.

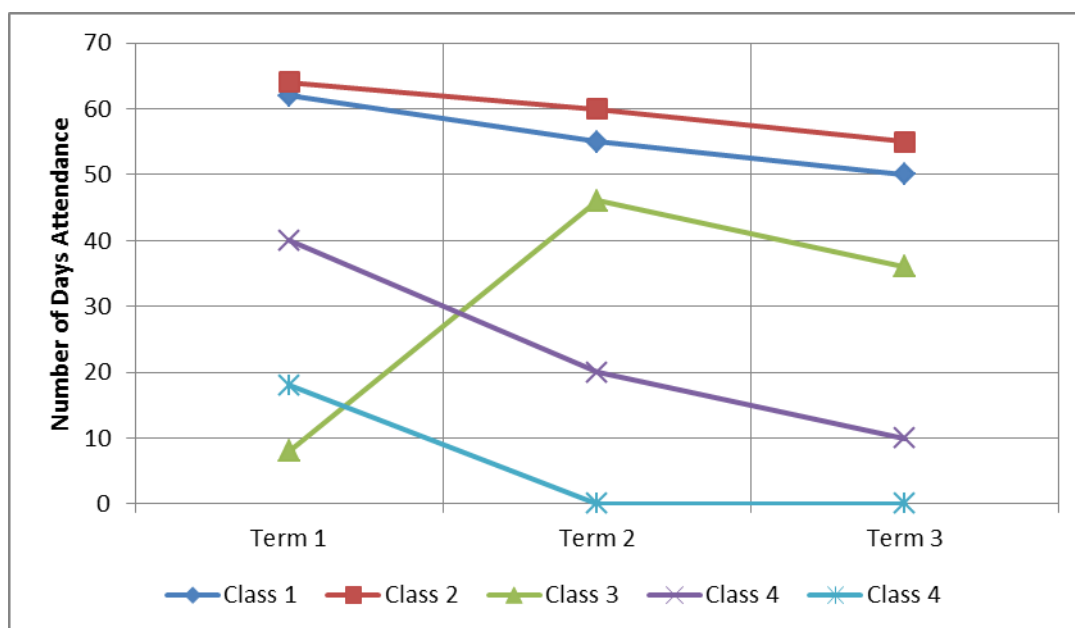


### **Box 2: Owureduwa's Narrative**

I have been working to make money to buy a new school uniform...so I attend school irregularly... You see, my father and mother are dead so there is nobody to take care of me. I have to work hard to raise money to buy food for myself and my grandmother. I stopped school when my uniform was worn out. After my parents died, I didn't go to school regularly again because I had to work and sometimes look after my grandmother whenever she was sick. I travelled to Half Assini to work like other children in this village do. Sometimes, I went to school without food and I felt so hungry that I had to run away from school to sell for people so that they would give me food to eat. Now, one of my uncles has offered to take care of us, so I am back in school. I hope to finish school and become somebody in the future.

### **Long-term Dropout: The Case of Ampong**

Ampong's case typifies both long-term dropout and the situation of those children whose attendance does not exceed ten days each school term before stopping entirely. According to his attendance record, in the first term of Basic 3, he only attended school for 8 days. However, he returned for the second term when he participated by attending 46 days but in the third term, he spent 36 days in school. Having achieved the minimum attendance required, he was promoted to the next level. However, during the second term of Basic 4, his attendance dropped again to only 20 days; and in the third term, he was only in school for 10 days; he had virtually dropped out.

**Figure 6:4 Among's Attendance Prior to Becoming Long-term Dropout**

Source: field data from school records

When Among returned to school, he began to repeat his last grade but dropped out whilst doing so. He then stayed out of school for three consecutive years while his classmates progressed far beyond him. Interestingly, he returned to school at the beginning of the 2008/09 academic year but by then, he was significantly overage for his grade. His story is related in box 3.

### Box 3: Among's Narrative

When I was in Basic three, I lost my mother... I am the eldest child, so I helped my father take care of my brothers and sisters. Later on, my father travelled to attend to some family problems and he stayed away for almost three months. I had to take care of my brothers and sisters, so I resorted to going fishing and hustling at the beach... Sometimes, I caught crabs, which I sold to raise money to feed myself and my three brothers and sisters. That was when I started attending school irregularly. Whenever I was late for school, the teacher caned me for being late; so, any time I was late, I didn't go to school at all. I found some work to do for money instead. I also repeated because the teachers said I was not serious about my attendance, but you see, it was not my fault that I didn't go to school. Whenever there was no food in the house, I had to find a way out by getting some food for us. When I was repeating Basic four, I travelled to Half Assini during the vacation to fish; but I did not return when school reopened, and I stayed there longer working for money. But when I returned to school, the teachers insisted on punishing me, so I stopped going to school.

I noticed two points in respect of Ampong's story: first, the death of his mother; and second, his father's absence, which together put the onus for looking after his brothers and sisters. Combining this new responsibility for childcare with his schooling disrupted his attendance. Ampong's case began as event dropout, which subsequently became long-term dropout when he stayed 3 years out of school and his classmates overtook him academically. Considering the progression in dropout, children such as Ampong may be described as reaching the peak of temporary dropout, a phase from which it is all too easy to deteriorate into the permanent dropout category.

From the three above cases, all of which illustrate pattern two attendance and temporary dropout, it appears that when the demand for child labour in communities where seasonal economic activity is intense and clash with school times (see 7.3), children's school attendance decreases and some drop out during such periods (see 5.4.1). Moreover, attendance pattern two is very common in children who are significantly overage for their grade and came from backgrounds where parent could either not support them or are not there.

The cases of Ninkyi, Owureduwa and Ampong, who dropped out of Basic 4, 3 and 4 respectively, show that they stopped attending school as children overage for their grades. Indeed, Ninkyi should have been in Basic 6; Owureduwa, Basic 5; and Ampong should have been in his final year of JHS at the time of the study.

From my interviews with children, teachers and parents, I found that pattern two cases as shown in chapter 5 reveal a progressive trend (decline in attendance toward the third term) owing to the influence of the seasonality of economic activities. One head teacher explained: *"We have a problem in this village concerning the way children attend school... They come in the first term but by the third term, some of them only spend two days in school...this sometimes continues for weeks. Although some of these children come back after staying away for a few days...others end up as dropouts and never return... Even when children drop out and return, very few of them are able to complete school*

*because they drop out again.*” This portrayal illustrates how dropout cases increases as children approach the third term of a given academic year.

The end of the third term marks the date when basic school children sit graduation examinations, after which they proceed from their present grade to the next. Generally, the authorities at the two schools in which I collected data did not consider those children who had missed lessons and examinations during the third term to be eligible for graduation to the next level. According to one teacher, *“If a child does not attend for more than half a term<sup>32</sup>, it means that he or she did not participate fully in the continuous assessment that is part of the third term exam either; so we don’t graduate such children to the next level.”*

Considering the pattern of decreased attendance in the study area, a seasonal pattern of dropout emerges which suggest that during the harvest season school children engage in economic activities for money.

With the influence of seasonality on children’s attendance occurring in the third term, the practice of using only full participation during the third term in particular for determining graduation placed pupils who had only missed the first or second term at an advantage over those who missed the third term. Although pupils wrote examinations at the end of each term, only the results of the third term examination were often used together with a good attendance record to graduate children to the next level. Interviews with teachers revealed that they considered the third term to be more important than the first two because it was the culmination of the academic year. Thus, in the third term, children got the chance to demonstrate the knowledge they had acquired throughout the whole academic year.

Although it may appear strange, emphasising completion of the third term as the basis for graduation to the next level was considered by teachers to be an effective means of ensuring that children remained in school until the end of the

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<sup>32</sup> School terms in Ghana run between 60 and 72 days. First term starts from September to Mid-December, Second term from Mid-January to Mid-April, and Third term – Early-May to Mid-August.

academic year. I found this practice – which resulted in the frequent grade repetition of a certain category of children – to be somewhat irrational because instead of encouraging regular attendance, it demoralises those children already at risk because of irregular attendance to become dropouts. The next section discusses some cases of children who have stopped attending school altogether.

#### **6.4.1.2 Pattern One Attendance and Permanent Dropout Cases**

A second category of children manifesting pattern one attendance spends a whole academic year or more out of school. These children are listed in official school documents as dropouts. It appears that such children are not interested in schooling because they have dropped out permanently. In terms of characteristics, it seems that older children in particular find it difficult to return to school, and consequently become permanent dropouts. According to one teacher; *“Children who are more than three years older than their grade average are often unable to complete school once they dropout... Sometimes, some of them come back but they dropout again.”*

Commenting on the relationship between overage children and dropout, one head teacher noted, *“When older children terminate schooling, they often never return to school...even when they do, they dropout again.”*

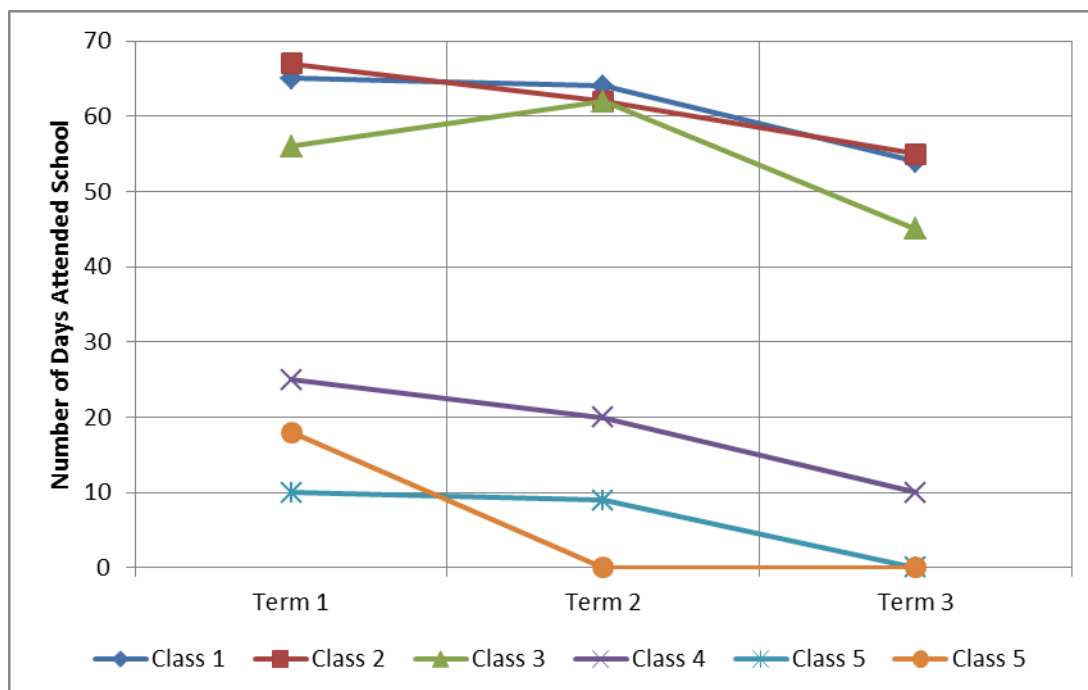
Three typical cases that illustrate the relation between overage and permanent dropout – both unsettled and settled – are Ntiful, a 17 year-old boy; Ofori, a 17 year-old boy; and, Oparebea, a 14 year-old girl; who stopped attending school in Basic 5, 6 and 4 respectively. The stories behind their attendance and dropout are related in boxes 4, 5 and 6 below.

#### **Unsettled Dropout: The Case of Ntiful**

Ntiful started school in the village and attended irregularly until the latter stages of Basic 3. He became more irregular in his attendance when he reached Basic 4. He often earned an income as a farm labourer whenever he was not in school. He repeated Basic 4 twice because at certain times, he stayed away

from school for a whole month before returning for a week or two and then disappearing again. He dropped out of Basic 5 after repeating it.

**Figure 6:5 Ntsiful's Attendance Prior to Becoming Unsettled Dropout**



Source: field data from school records

Ntiful was not interested in finishing school because being 17 years old and still in Basic 5, he considered himself too old and felt embarrassed when learning in the same class as younger children. His story is related in box 4.

#### **Box 4: Ntiful's Narrative**

I don't have anybody to support me at school. My parents are poor so I have to support myself. I know whenever I don't go back to school, my classmates will be learning ahead of me. But I can't go to school without food, books or a pen either. Therefore, I go to work for people so I can raise some money to use to take care of myself.

When you don't go to school regularly, the teachers repeat you. That is what I have been going through all this time. But now I'm getting old and all these children at school are so young, and I feel bad when I am learning with them. Any time you make a mistake, all the Basic laughs at you. When the teacher canes you, you feel very bad because younger children are there and laughing at you. I'm not really interested in going to school again; I don't want to go back but I am not sure what type of work to do.

### Settled Dropout: The Case of Ofori

Ofori's exclusion from schooling began with low attendance in his third term of Basic 4, during which he attended school for 30 days. His first episode of prolonged absence from school occurred in the third term of Basic 5, when he did not attend at all for the whole of third term, demonstrating a case of sporadic dropout. He later dropped back in the following academic year to repeat Basic 5. He then stayed in school for the first two terms, attend irregularly and dropped out again in the third term. Obviously, his classmates graduated ahead of him.

Figure 6:6 Ofori's Attendance Prior to Becoming Settled Dropout



Source: field data from school records

Ofori told me that he was not interested in going to school again, as he was earning a living from fishing. His narrative is related in box 5.

### Box 5: Ofori's Narrative

When I got to Basic four, there was nobody to take care of me; my parents travelled, leaving me behind. So, during the harvest season, I started hustling at the beach to make money. Later, in the long vacation, I travelled to Half Assini to hustle there too. I was supposed to enter Basic six but I did not return from Half Assini early enough. I missed most of the days, so I was punished for not reporting to school early.

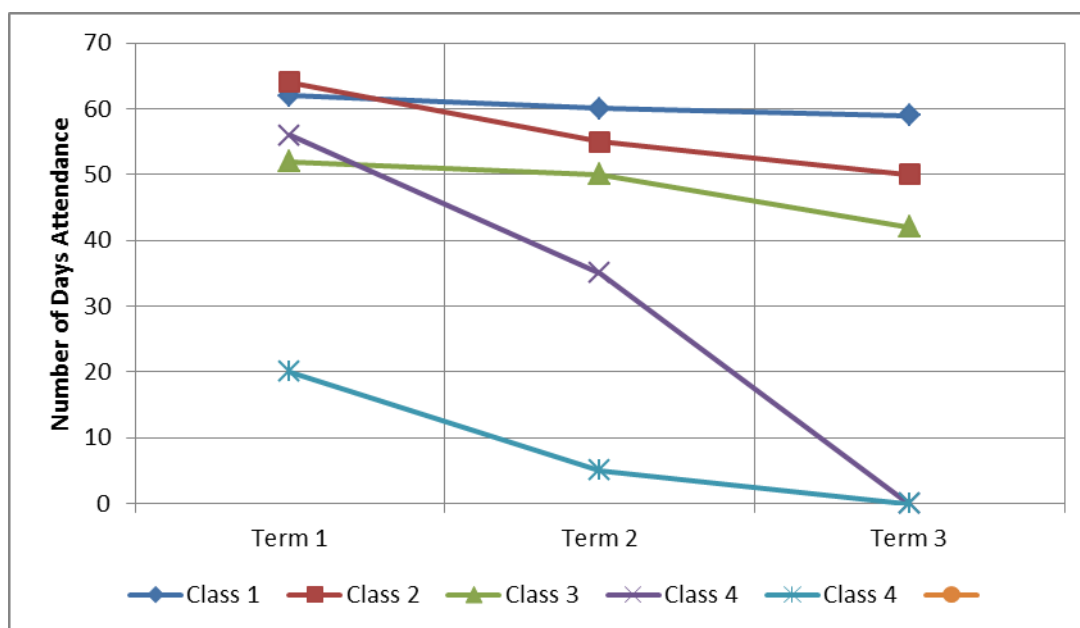
But you see, before the long vacation, there was no teacher in our Basic so I felt it was better to hustle at the beach for money than waste my time in school. In the third term, I did not go to school at all because this time, I travelled early to Half Assini to work. When I went to school the following term, I had to repeat because I had not written the third term examinations. The problem is that when you stop school for some time and you go back, the teachers ignore you when they are teaching. They only ask children who are answering their questions whether they understand. Whenever you complain that you don't understand, they tell you it is because you stopped attending school. You see, the main problem was that nobody at school knew I was taking care of myself. Sometimes the teachers thought I was not serious...but during sports and athletics lessons, they often called me to go and help. I really like sports but now I am too old to be in school... Most of the children there are too young and I can't learn with them. If you are older in a Basic of younger children, they often tease you when you give wrong answers... It is also very embarrassing when teachers cane you in front of these younger children.

Now, I have made a decision not to go to school. I am making enough money fishing. In the future, I will buy a canoe.

### Settled Dropout: The Case of Oparebea

Oparebea was another dropout case that typifies school attendance pattern one. Oparebea went to school regularly until the second term of Basic 4 when her attendance began to drop. In the third term of Basic 4, she dropped out of school. She returned to school the following academic year to repeat Basic 4 but in the course of doing so, she dropped out again during the second term after attending school for only five days.



**Figure 6:7 Oparebea's Attendance Trend Prior to Becoming Unsettled Dropout**

Source: field data from school records

She told me that she might not go to school again because she did not understand what was being taught. At the time of the study, she now was selling rice in the village. Her narrative is related in Box 6.

### Box 6: Oparebea's Narrative

I have been going to school all these years but I don't know anything. I walk six kilometres to school every day but I don't get anything at school from what is taught. I am not able to learn anything teachers are teaching in the school. They don't teach what I want to learn. For example, I want to learn how to make cloth and I am good at sports but in Basic, the teacher always insists we write but I am not good at writing, so now I have decided not to go to school again. I thought I would be able to finish school and become someone important one day, but now I know I am not going to be one of those. But it is not bad; I am doing well with my business.

From the accounts of these three cases of permanent dropout, it is clear that when children do not find the school environment to be supportive, they will invariably drop out. The two boys, Ofori and Ntiful, similar to most other dropout cases attended school irregularly because they combined work with schooling (see 7.2.3). Eventually, they dropped out when they could not continue to combine the two occupations. It appears that such children may make an effort to remain in school, but conditions such as the unavailability of teachers in the

case of Ofori, and an unsupportive teacher attitude towards children at risk as in the case of Oparebea, result in dropout (see 7.4.1).

The cases of Ofori, who would rather earn a living; Ntiful, who was not interested in returning to school; and Oparebea, who felt that she was wasting her time at school, all reveal a loss of interest in schooling. The figures on patterns of school attendance in table 5.2 show that there were several other dropout children in the study area whose cases were similar. They all had their own stories to tell, but their situations may not have differed so very much from those of the three children discussed above.

In summary, children who manifest attendance patterns one and two can be respectively identified as temporary and permanent school dropouts. These children may be identified from two observable particularities of their profile. The first is the child's enrolment status before dropping out, the timing of dropout; and the second is the circumstances that led to dropout.

In respect of the timing of dropout, children who manifest attendance pattern one include those who graduated from the previous grade but did not attend their new class, as well as grade repeaters. Two categories of those repeating a grade are evident: children who were required to repeat but did not go to school the following term, and others who began the repeated grade but afterwards stopped attending.

In terms of the circumstances that led to dropout, children for whom the value of schooling appears to have diminished stopped going to school, a situation that manifests as pattern one attendance. Children who faced temporary economic needs, as well as those with challenges related to behaviour such as discipline at school, manifest pattern two attendance.

In cases of both temporary and permanent dropout, all the children concerned were overage in grade before dropping out of school. The evidence from children's accounts of the types of dropout and the stories behind them indicate

that dropping out of school has been a gradual process. The next section focuses on the processes that lead to dropout employing three case studies.

#### **6.4.2 The Process of Becoming a Dropout: Three Cases**

This section examines three case studies that demonstrate the processes leading to school dropout. The children's narratives are unpacked to reveal events external to and within the school, and how they played out contextually to 'push' and/or 'pull'<sup>33</sup> them to drop out. By bringing the voices of the children to the fore, I highlight causal factors and their consequences in the process leading to school dropout. In the cases presented below, the events that pull or push children out of school seem to be interconnected, complex and, in some instances, inconsistent. In the following subsection, I cite excerpts from the interview using illustrations from three case studies first, and then contextualise the findings in wider literature and conclude with a summary of findings of dropout cases that are analysed in detail in chapter 7.

##### **6.4.2.1 Case One: Marfo's Story**

At the time of his interview, Marfo was 14 years old according to his parents. His records at Narkwa primary school showed that he was born in the village of Faso near Half Assini. He was interviewed separately from his parents. Both his father and mother came from Narkwa. Marfo had five siblings, the eldest having finished JHS. His immediate younger sister had never been to school and was living in Cote d'Ivoire with a relative at the time. Marfo's two younger siblings were in Primary Two and Nursery One respectively, but their school records indicated they attended irregularly.

Marfo started nursery and proceeded to kindergarten (KG) in Narkwa. He enrolled in Basic 1 of primary school in the 2001/02 academic year at the age of eight. His school records reveal that his attendance was irregular in the lower primary grades. In Basic 3, his attendance continued to decline in the third term, followed by desertion of school before the end of term. Later, in Basic 5, he

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<sup>33</sup> Push-pull is used in this study to refer to the disincentives and the incentives that incite school children's decision to drop out of school

became a chronic sporadic dropout, repeatedly returning to school only to withdraw again. In the third term of Basic 6, after dropping out again he returned only to repeat a pattern of continuous irregular attendance. It is evident that, following Marfo's first withdrawal from Basic 3, most of his schooling for the following three years manifested irregular attendance.

### **Marfo's Account of the Socio-economic Factors that Led to His Dropout**

Focusing on the socio-economic context, the events that influenced Marfo's schooling decisions are revealed in his story as follows:

*I don't do any major household chores except occasional errands for my grandmother, who I love so much because she takes good care of me. She was the one who got me back to school when I dropped out the first time. At home, my grandma gives me food and most of the things I need, although I prefer sleeping at my friend Ntiful's place with two other dropout boys.*

*I also have an adult friend who watches over canoes at the beach, and sometimes I sleep at his place. He often insists that I go to school or else I should not go to his place. At times, the adults are unfair to you when you go to the beach and ask for fish after helping them... If they don't give me any, I refuse to run errands and then they call me stubborn. Because adults say I'm stubborn, other children also join in calling me names like 'kobolo',<sup>34</sup> so I fight them. When I am not at school, I go fishing or hustling at the beach. On days when there isn't any fishing, the coach of the town's football team sends for me to play football.*

*I stopped schooling because my mum complains about not having any money, which I need to buy food [breakfast or lunch] at school during break time, and my school uniform was torn. I usually need about twenty pesewas (USD 0.18). That is why I sometimes stop going to school and go to the beach to hustle or fish. I give some of the fish to my grandmother, who sells them and keeps the money, which she gives me for school when I need it.*

*When I do not go to school, I go to the beach. I prefer schooling, but when I see the fishermen come and there are no teachers in class, I leave school and go hustling for fish. I leave because I prefer the money I get from fishing to suffering in school when they [teachers and children] are hostile to you. I usually leave school when I am late and the teachers start*

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<sup>34</sup> Truant.

*using the cane, or when they demand that we bring sand, stones and hay to school. I prefer going to make my own money at the beach to working at school only for the teachers to collect the money.*

*Sometimes, I sell the fish myself. When the catch is not good, I only get about two Cedis<sup>35</sup> a day, but when it is good, I get four, sometimes five Cedis a day. When I go fishing at sea with adults, I get more fish to sell and can get as much as six to eight Cedis. At Half-Assini, I can get as much as 350 Cedis before coming back to school. I use the money to buy clothes and food, and have got a bicycle. I also give some of the money to my grandmother.*

### **Marfo's Account of the Events at School that led to His Dropout**

*I think school is important because you could become a teacher one day. But I stopped schooling because of the punishment of removing tree stumps; it was too much hard work and I couldn't do it. Sometimes, our teacher does not go to school, so I also do not go often so that I can fish. But you see, the problem is when I do not go to school, the teachers punish me; but also, I don't want to go everyday if they are not going to come and teach us.*

*The teachers insist that we [schoolchildren] do things that we don't like [referring to child labour at school], and they are quick to punish when I refuse to participate. But we don't know what they use the money they get from the work we do for, so I don't go to school when I know we shall be labouring. I don't go when they cane children who arrive late either. Sometimes, I get to the entrance of the school but when I realise they are caning latecomers, I just go back home or to the beach to hustle.*

*When I was in Basic 5, I travelled to Guinea when my grandmother handed me over to my maternal uncle to go and fish. I spent about four months there. I came back alone because I wanted to complete school. I knew that I would have to repeat Basic 6 because I had not attended school regularly. But sometimes you don't understand the teachers at all. They don't go to school regularly either, and they ignore me when I complain to them about children calling me names. Also, when I ask a question in class the teachers don't take any notice of me, so I don't know what to do. But I think I want to reach JHS 3 before finishing school.*

In my experience as indigenous and a native speaking teacher who taught at the basic school level for over six years, I noticed how a series of events – both

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<sup>35</sup> One Ghana Cedi is equivalent to USD 0.65 (April 2008 exchange rate).

external to and within the school – could force a child to withdraw. Focusing on the socio-economic needs of rural children and the shortage of teachers in rural schools in particular, pupils often attend school irregularly in order to work to support themselves and their family; so any event at school, such as suspension, the prospect of repetition, or corporal punishment among other things results in children losing interest in their education.

With regard to the influence of socio-economic events on Marfo's schooling, he attended school irregularly on account of household poverty and his parents' inability to provide for him educationally. Throughout the seven years he spent at primary school, he never attended for two consecutive weeks without missing at least one day. Given the lucrative opportunities to work in the informal labour market, he regularly skipped school to engage in child labour.

The engagement of children in labour in Ghana is not exclusive to Marfo's community. Fentiman's (1999) work on enrolment patterns in rural Ghana cites labour as the most common reason for school dropout. Other research has also found that child labour causes children to attend school irregularly and drop out (see Khanam, 2008). As a key determinant of child labour, exploitative local labour market conditions and their resultant disruption of children's schooling are not limited to the study community either. Wahba (2000) cites the influence of market wages on child labour and child schooling. Moreover, Dachi and Garret (2003) found that pupils' absenteeism, repetition and eventual dropout were caused by child labour.

This suggests that among other things, Marfo's persistent irregular school attendance and sporadic episodes of dropout were due to his engagement in child labour. Indeed, it has been found that, combining work with schooling creates pressure on the child's time and can lead to irregular school attendance and absence (Esardo, 2005).

When I started to interview Marfo in June 2008, he was still contemplating whether to return to school or not. He was wondering if he would not be better

off working rather than continuing with his education. This was because he would have been forced to repeat his last grade and consequently teased at school if he dropped back in. He explained to me that he had repeated the grade already but his teachers were demanding that he should repeat it for a second time.

Grade repetition is also a practice not peculiar to Marfo's school. According to Rose and Al Samarrai (2001), grade repetition may also be a deterrent to school completion, and often leads to children becoming overage for a given grade. Studies indicate a relationship between repetition and dropout (Hunt 2008).

It is quite common for schools to force children to repeat a grade if they have attended school irregularly, and or when such children are not making any headway in their studies. Grade repetition results in a child being overage for his or her grade (Ampiah-Ghartey 2008). It appears that the practice of requiring children to repeat primary school grades is very common in Ghanaian schools; especially if teachers, and sometimes parents, consider that a child is performing poorly or has been identified as an irregular attendee (MOESS 2005), although such practice is not official policy.

Conflict between Marfo and his teachers at school may have been a strong contributory factor to his irregular pattern of attendance and behaviour towards schooling. He told me that he found school very uninteresting and that the environment was hostile since his teachers viewed him as a stubborn child and he felt ostracised by classmates.

Research also indicates that teacher absence does not only occur in Narkwa and Kyeakor communities. Rather, it is generally common in poor rural communities because they may be less able to hold teachers accountable (Alcazar, 2006).

It may be argued that these factors, together with Marfo's lack of a school uniform or the money to buy food at school, among other things, were the constituent causes behind his first episode of dropout. Additionally with exposure to work and the ability to earn a living, he may have found it difficult to abandon entirely the temptation to seek employment in order to satisfy his economic survival needs, so long as the conditions at school that shaped his decision to withdraw in the first place remained unchanged.

Marfo told me that he preferred the responsibility of earning whatever money he could make from working on the beach to going to school on days when his teachers – who themselves attended irregularly – punished children who were frequently absent, and exploited those who did go by engaging them in child labour for the teachers' own gain.

After experiencing independent child migration and working to support himself until he might return to school, Marfo had known a side of life that most of his classmates had not, and this could have made it very difficult for him to readjust to being a schoolboy. Finally, Marfo told me that when he was among friends who had also dropped out, he no longer felt isolated, as was the case at school.

#### **6.4.2.2 Case Two: Asieduwa's Story**

Asieduwa was born in 1992 to Papa Kojo and Awo Yaa, who hailed from Ejumako Besease in Ghana's Central Region. Her parents migrated to Ekumase in 1991. Asieduwa first dropped out when she transferred to another school; although she attended for two academic terms, her teachers refused to add her name to the class register. She subsequently embarked on a chequered schooling career that was marked by frequent transfers, irregular attendance and grade repetition.

Before dropping out of Basic School in Kyeakor, Asieduwa had enrolled in three different schools during the previous ten years. Her parents continually migrated from one area to another, leading to frequent changes of school, which



Asieduwa found disruptive. She had three younger siblings who also attended school irregularly.

After dropping out in September 2007, she had still not returned to school at the time of the study. She did not seem to be very sure whether she wanted to return or stay out of school. Her indecision was doubtlessly compounded by certain events such as the rejection by teachers, which remained a major obstacle that she was unable to resolve by herself.

Moreover, her mother, who had promised to send her back to school in order to settle the issue, had gone away leaving her to take care of her siblings. At the time of the interview, her mother had still not returned from her journey. Even though Asieduwa's stepfather confirmed that he was aware of her problems at school and her supposed rejection by teachers, he had never made an effort to contact the school authorities.

Asieduwa narrated her story as follows:

**Asieduwa's Account of the Socio-economic Events that Shaped her Schooling and Eventual Dropout**

*My mother often travelled to different towns and she took me with her. She left my father and married another man. At one point, I was sent to my biological father in Achiase [a town in Eastern Region] but I could not stay there because my father's wife did not want me...so my mother brought me back to live with her at Ekumase. Usually, I do household chores like cooking, cleaning and fetching water. I also help my mother in trading and taking care of my younger brothers and sisters. At the moment, she [her mother] has travelled to Accra to work. She said that when she came back, she would go to the school to talk with my teachers. Currently, I'm taking care of my brothers and sisters, who are in school. I bath them and cook for them, and ensure that they go to school in the morning before I go to the farm to help my stepfather.*

Socio-economic events such as the rural–urban migration of families among others could be one of the key factors that lead to the disruption of children's schooling. Asieduwa's case is a typical example of how the incessant transfer of a child from school to school disrupts progression. Although children who

accompany their parents during migration may gain admission to another school – as in Asieduwa's case – it is also known that migration leads to temporary withdrawal from the education system while enrolment at another school is sought (Hunt 2008). Furthermore, divorce and separation of parents is known to also affect children's schooling and potential dropout, especially in cases where fathers shirk their responsibility and show no interest in their child's schooling (Obeng 1999). In some instances, fostering as a cultural practice is adapted to meet demands of homes, with young females working as carers (Stephens, 2007).

In the study area, it was also common for girls to support their mothers by engaging in petty trading to supplement the family income; as well as babysitting younger siblings, a practice common in many rural African communities (Rose and Tembon, 1999). Research indicates that girls may drop out of school to look after younger siblings (Brock and Cammish, 1997). Moreover, a study in Pakistan by Hakzira and Bedi (2003) indicates that the presence of younger siblings in the household increases the workload of a girl child. Thus, it appears that such phenomena are not limited to Asieduwa's case.

### **Asieduwa's Education History and the Events that Forced Her out of School**

Asieduwa enrolled at the local Methodist Primary School in 1999 at the age of 7. In 2003, at the age of ten, she transferred to Ejumako Primary School, enrolling in primary Basic 2, which she attended for three years. Later, her family moved to Accra for a year, and she had to repeat Basic 5 at Kotobabi Primary School. Asieduwa's mother migrated back to Ekumase and re-enrolled her at the Methodist Primary School, where she repeated Basic 5 again. In 2006, Asieduwa left Ekumase Methodist School and gained admission to Kyeakor Islamic School, to attend which she walked six kilometres a day before eventually dropping out of Basic 6.

### **Asieduwa's Account of the Events at School that Forced Her to Drop Out**

*My mother took me to go and stay with my biological father because I was having problems with my class [six] teacher. He always told me that I*

*didn't know anything. He insulted and caned me any time I made the least mistake at school. One day, he drove me away from class when I refused to be caned for getting my assignments wrong. Whenever he met my mother in town, he told her that I couldn't even write my name and that I was useless; and that my mother should take me out of school to go and learn a trade.*

*My mother tried to enrol me in another nearby school, but the teachers said I should wait till the first term. Later, I went by myself to Kyeakor Islamic School, where I was enrolled but my name was not written in the school register for two terms; and this worried me. It didn't make sense to walk six kilometres to school, and they wouldn't even write my name in the register. So, when my mother decided that I should stay at home for a while and look after my brothers and sisters because she was travelling, I didn't have any choice. I know that schooling is important because without it I cannot lead a fruitful life in the future.*

*It would be difficult or even impossible for me to even learn a trade without basic education. These days, no madam [informal vocational trainer] is willing to train a girl who doesn't have a basic education certificate. So, I think school is very important even if you intend to learn a trade. Considering my situation now, I can't leave my brothers and sisters alone because no one would take care of them, and I don't know whether the teachers would write my name in the register now if I re-enrolled.*

Asieduwa's accounts of the problem she had had with the teacher and the last school she had dropped out of were confirmed by her stepfather. With regard to the events that forced her out of school, it appears the teacher's attitude towards her was the most probable reason for her dropout. When I spoke with the head teacher of the school from which Asieduwa had withdrawn, he confirmed that they had not added her name to the class register on account of the fact that it had come to their attention that she was noted for changing schools whenever she realised that she would have to repeat a grade. He told me that he had been reliably informed that Asieduwa and a couple of other girls who had transferred to his school never remained at any given school for long. I gathered from other members of staff that Asieduwa's former Basic 6 teacher had supplied the information that she was not a conscientious pupil and therefore should not be enrolled.

In relation to Asieduwa's poor academic performance and possible special educational needs, it is probable that when teachers do not have the appropriate training, or are unable to identify the learning difficulties of children (Obeng, 2007), their handling of such cases may result in silent exclusion and the potentiality of eventual dropout (Hunt, 2008). The attitude of Asieduwa's teacher, which pushed her to seek admission to another school before eventually dropping out appears to corroborate the findings of reports from Peru (Ames, 2004 cited in Hunt, 2008) in which teachers are identified as having very low expectations of girls because they are expected to drop out as a matter of course.

#### **6.4.2.3 Case Three: Boatemaa's Story**

Boatemaa was born in Nanabin, a village near Narkwa, to Opanyin Quansah and Maame Ama Mansah, both of who came from Narkwa village. Boatemaa was eight years old when she enrolled in Basic 1 of primary school. She lost her father when she was eleven and in Basic 3. Her mother later travelled to Cote d'Ivoire, leaving her with her grandmother. Boatemaa had two siblings, neither of whom went to school. Soon after she started Basic 5, her grandmother died leaving her to look after herself. At the time of the interview, Boatemaana was 17 and had given birth to a baby girl who was then 2 years old.

#### **Boatemaa's Account of the Socio-economic Events that Affected Her Schooling**

Due to the fact that she had lost her grandmother, who had been taking care of her, Boatemaa sold oranges in order to meet her needs and those of her child. She travelled to Mankessim on market days to buy oranges, which she took home to sell in Narkwa. Like other children in Narkwa, during July and September, Boatemaa migrated to Half-Assini in search of employment. She attended school irregularly on account of her economic survival needs. It was one such episode of withdrawal that led to her eventual dropout from school.

*My dad passed away, and my mum travelled to Cote d'Ivoire when I was in Basic 3. I lived with my grandmother, who did not work but got an allowance from my uncle, who was a fisherman at Half Assini. I have a*

*brother and sister: one is staying at Apam and the other lives with my mum. Now, my grandmother is dead, so I have been looking after myself here in Narkwa. My child's father is in Accra but he does not provide for her. I sell oranges in the village to get by. Sometimes, I make a profit of 10 Ghana Cedis. I got the initial capital from Susu<sup>36</sup> along with my friend.*

### **Boatemaa's Account of the Events at School that Forced Her to Drop Out**

Academically, Boatemaa was an average pupil; but she dropped out for the first time when she did not report for school at the beginning of her first term of Basic 3. She was out of school for the whole of that term due to the fact that she had travelled with her mother to Cote d'Ivoire during the vacation, and they did not return in time for Boatemaa to go back to school. She told me that her mother took her out of school in order to send her to work in someone's house as a servant; but her grandmother had prevented that arrangement and took Boatemaa to live with her.

*In the middle of the second term of JHS 1, I stopped attending school in order to work for money to take care of myself at school. That was after my grandmother passed away. But when I returned to school later in the middle of the second term of the following academic year, the teachers told me that they could only readmit me at the beginning of the first term. I was one month pregnant before the beginning of the 2005/06 academic year, but I went to school anyway. By the time I was four months' gone, both the teachers and my classmates were teasing me and calling me names. Eventually, I dropped out of school to give birth and take care of my baby. I gave birth in November 2006 and tried to re-enrol again in May 2008, but the school still insisted that I could only go back in the first term, which will begin in September 2008.*

Although socio-economic needs appear to have forced Boatemaa to suspend schooling for a brief period (sporadic dropout), her dropout status was further exacerbated by the school's policy of readmission only at the beginning of the academic year. Moreover, it seems that the school regulations that had exacerbated her dropout status in the first instance had been reapplied when I met Boatemaa during my fieldwork.

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<sup>36</sup> Susu is the name of a type of savings scheme where people save any amount of their choice daily which they collect at the end of the month.

With pregnancy and childbirth, a girl's chances of returning to school and completing her education diminish considerably, especially in communities in which it is not considered acceptable for those in such circumstances to re-enter the academic system. Boatemaa told me, *"Some girls in this town stop schooling when they become pregnant. If a young mother tries to go back to school, they [teachers, children and community members] start calling her all kind of names in this village."* As a result of the difficulty emerging from the stigmatisation of young mothers who may attempt return to school, some girls who wish to complete their education may be deterred from doing so.

In terms of Boatemaa's academic performance, I gathered from her school records that her grades had been average before she dropped out, although her attendance was irregular. She attended intermittently due to her orange-selling business. She explained, *"When I was at school I did not like the sand we had to take to school. At times, when teachers require of us to bring sand to school, I rather travel to buy oranges for sale."*

#### **6.4.3 Dropout and the Causes: Summary of Findings from Cases**

In summary, the accounts from the above cases point to dropout as either a temporary or a permanent condition. This is evident from the subtle variations in children's interpretations of 'dropout', from which five types of the phenomenon emerged.

School attendance patterns one and two give an indication of how children who drop out of school may be identified. From their accounts and attendance records, it is evident that a pupil who begins showing signs of irregular attendance, poor performance and grade repetition could be entering the first phase of dropout. The children's narratives and the three case studies (Marfo, Asieduwaa and Boatemaa) demonstrate that the process of dropout is gradual, and can be initiated by causes originating either at home or in school. Moreover, the effect of a critical event that could lead to dropout on a child's schooling often manifests irregular attendance. Further complications may then

set in, forcing the child to terminate schooling on a long-term or sometimes permanent basis.

The causal factors that set the dropout process in motion are either ‘pull’ or ‘push’ forces, depending on their impact on the child’s schooling. While some of these factors may act as an incentive – ‘pull’ that entices the child away from school – others may act as a disincentive – ‘push’ that compromises school attendance. Whether push or pull, such causal factors appear to be located in the child’s background or socio-economic environment, within the school context, or in both. Next I present an adumbrated note on the causes of dropout that emerged children’s narratives.

### **Causal Factors Located within Children’s Background Context**

A background of household poverty and socio-economic survival needs may force children to engage in economic activities in order to make money to support themselves at school. Engagement in such activities and the attempt to earn sufficient income may create conditions that pull children away from regular school attendance and cause them to drop out temporarily.

The economic survival needs of children – and subsequently, the obligation to engage in child labour in order to meet these needs – appear to precipitate the initial event that sets in motion a process that leads to the child’s preliminary exit from regular school attendance.

For older children who are above 15 years of age, independent child migration and seasonal withdrawal from school increases the likelihood that they will eventually drop out from school.

Household poverty may also result in lack of parental control or child neglect, leaving children’s schooling decisions in their own hands. Moreover, the influence of children who have already dropped out appears to encourage others to withdraw from school.

Children's schooling may be caught in the crossfire between parents who have separated, and this is likely to lead to the children being moved from place to place, disrupting the stability of their education.

### **Causal Factors Located within the School Context**

Children's decisions to withdraw from school and engage in economic activities could be due to teacher unavailability, teacher absenteeism, or the negative attitude of teachers towards children they do not consider to be conscientious pupils. Additionally, the engagement by the school of pupils in income-generating activities during lesson time may be why a child decides to stay away from school and use that time to make money for him or herself instead.

The insistence of schools on readmitting children who terminate attendance seasonally only at the beginning of a new academic year seems to exacerbate the situation in terms of their dropout status. Moreover, such school conditions may push those children who do re-enrol to become significantly overage for their grades, thus increasing the probability of repeated dropout and the diminishing likelihood of dropping back in for a sufficient period of time to finish school.

The mode of punitive measures adopted by the school may be a key contributory factor that pushes children out of school, especially if they consider such punishment to be unjust.

Children may become significantly overage for their grade and feel uncomfortable about the school policy of repetition; and a child may thus be forced to drop out of school in order to avoid such embarrassment.

In some cases, continuously changing school may result in an inconsistent academic record, which can make progression difficult for a child as was the case of Asieduwa



A teacher's poor handling of a child's learning difficulties can be interpreted as teacher rejection, which may push the child to drop out of school.

There is a relationship between irregular attendance, seasonal withdrawal and temporary dropout. If not well managed, such absence from school could lead to recurrent withdrawal and an eventual state of long-term dropout.

The detailed analysis of the conditions outside and within school that push and or pull children to drop out of school using the accounts of the 18 dropout children is presented in chapter 7.

### **6.5 Conclusion**

In terms of types of dropout and how it occurs, the data show that children begin their journey towards dropout when they start attending school irregularly. What appears to be an episode of short and temporary withdrawal from school often degenerates into protracted absence and, ultimately, to permanent dropout. From the examples of the dropout cases analysed, it may be argued that children who are in the lower band of school attendance pattern four may enter pattern three if conditions that led to missing school is left unattended. From there such children may enter pattern two and eventually progress to pattern one. Children manifesting school attendance patterns one in particular may therefore be described as crossing the threshold from being enrolled to out of school children.

The narratives of dropout children on how they withdrew from school illustrate that the causes of dropout are varied and complex. While some of the reasons for dropping out are related to the child's background, others may be located within the school. In chapter 7, the causal factors – both external to and within the school – that push or pull children to drop out are discussed in more detail.

## CHAPTER 7

### Experiencing Dropout: The Causes of Dropout and Drop-in

*I stopped going to school because my uniform was torn and my mother did not have any money to buy a new one for me. Because I didn't have a school uniform, I often felt out of place and odd among my classmates when I was at school. My classmates frequently teased me, so I decided to stop school and work for some money to buy another uniform. But you see, apart from the problem with my school uniform, there was also no regular teacher in our class... I went back to school after our class teacher came to my house to talk with my mother and me (Anima a 12 year-old girl who dropped out of Basic 3).*

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter answers research question 2. The chapter analyses data from children's accounts of the causal factors that influence the decision to drop out of school and to drop in again. The data reveals the various issues and events that influence children's patterns of attendance and attitudes towards schooling. First, the analysis focuses on socio-economic factors outside school and conditions within the school environment that compromise attendance.

Second, I analyse children's responses to the question of why they may have dropped-in again, in order to highlight the conditions that encourage a return to school, as well as those that do not. I identify the factors that influence schooling behaviour from children's accounts and subject them to rigorous empirical inspection.

I exemplify my analytical claims with relevant interview excerpts and photographs from the field study. Data was gathered by means of in-depth interviews with children, observation of their activities, and their own photographs.

In the 2008 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR), the question is raised: "Education for all by 2015: will we make it?" Although it is a very simple and straightforward inquiry, the answers are highly complex.

Ensuring that children enrol in school is one thing, but whether they will complete their education is another issue altogether. It has been argued that most children in Africa are enrolled in school, but that the real problem concerns children dropping out of school (Dumas et al., 2004; Lewin, 2007) and quality of pedagogy.

In the literature on school dropout, factors such as the cost of education and other socio-cultural issues are alleged to be accountable for school dropout. Most researchers attribute the reasons why pupils are unable to complete basic education in developing countries to structural reasons such as issues at household, school and society levels (Colclough et al., 2003; Eie, 2003 cited in Wikan n.d.; Hunt, 2008).

I analysed children's accounts of their reasons for dropping out of school in the light of such research findings. The analysis examines the causes of dropout from two points of view: first, children's accounts of their family, socio-economic and societal circumstances; and second, conditions within the school. I also analysed accounts of dropout children who have returned to school. Their views on the last point shed light on the factors that encourage drop-in and the manner in which schools respond to pupils learning needs after they return.

This section is devoted to children's views of contextual circumstances external to the school that influence the decision to terminate schooling. It is important to note that these factors are not independent of each other; rather, they often exert their influences concurrently, and an understanding of the relative importance of such factors in affecting children's schooling decisions can only be obtained if they are studied simultaneously.

**Field Notes Phase I, 2008**

Mensah told me that he seldom had breakfast before going to school, and that he bought food on credit at break time because he did not have any pocket money. When he could not get anything on credit, he borrowed money from his friends. He had been skipping classes to go to the beach to earn money to pay his debts; but he eventually stopped attending school because he made enough to live on at the beach.

**Field Notes Phase I, 2008**

In my conversation with Marfo, he told me that his parents could not afford to get him a school uniform, so he attended school irregularly in order to work and buy one. He also told me of the transfer of his teacher without a replacement, which meant that he did not bother to turn up early when school reopened. Consequently, he had to dig up tree stumps as a punishment before being allowed to return to classes; but because he refused to carry out the task, his teachers told him not to set foot in the classroom.

These two examples illustrate the conflict and complexity surrounding children's decisions to drop out of school, which appear to encompass several contextual issues. To shed light on such issues, I explored contributory family, socio-economic and societal factors in detail.

## **7.2 The Socio-economic Context as a Push or Pull Factor in the Dropout Process**

### **7.2.1 Household Poverty**

When I asked children about the conditions outside school that prompted them to drop out, their answers appeared to encompass several factors. However, almost without exception, household poverty and the need for economic survival was cited as a major cause that pulled children out of school; and, specifically, the lack of children's school supplies (CSS)<sup>37</sup>, arising from the family's inability to purchase them, was a significant determinant of the desertion of school. The following complaints are typical:

*You have to go to school without food, and [then] staying in school till home time becomes difficult... you cannot go for lunch with your friends because you do not have any money; meanwhile, you are hungry.*

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<sup>37</sup> CSS include breakfast, a school uniform, shoes, stationery and a school bag.

*Sometimes, there is no breakfast in the house and my parents are not able to give me any pocket money to take to school either; so, I have to skip school to work to make money to support myself.*

Children who do not eat breakfast may not want to stay in class, preferring to look for opportunities to find food. Hungry children are more likely to drop out of school because they are unable to concentrate in class (Avila and Gaperini, 2005).

Lack of CSS is likely to have influenced most of children under study to drop out of school. The children I interviewed who had dropped out of primary Basic 3 and 4 emphasised that they had stopped attending school because they did not have a school uniform. This leads me to suspect that the abolition of school fees is not enough to ensure retention.

Anima, a 12 year-old girl who had dropped out of Basic 3 and stayed at home for two years, told me, *“I did not have a school uniform; that is why I stopped going to school.”*

Another child, Sarpong, a 13 year-old boy who had dropped out of Basic 3, also explained, *“I saw everybody wearing school uniform except me; that is why I stopped going to school.”*

Similarly, Mensah, a 15 year-old boy, said, *“My school uniform was worn out and I couldn’t wear it to school any longer, so I stopped attending school.”*

Yet, interestingly, school authorities did not prevent children who had not got a school uniform from attending class. One teacher said, *“Nobody prevents children without uniform from coming to school.”* Nevertheless, it appears that pupils felt singled out from their class mates if they went to school in different clothes. Such children therefore chose to stay out of school until they were able to acquire the official uniform.

Most parents were well aware of their children's reluctance to attend school if they did not have a uniform. For example, one parent, Lawife, complained that school uniform amounted to barrier to access because children who did not have one refused to go to school, explaining:

*This school uniform thing is really affecting children's attendance... When we were kids, we wore any old clothes to school, so nobody really worried about not having the official uniform. But now, because most children wear the same school uniform, a child without it won't want to go.*

**Field Notes Phase 1, 2008**

I visited a school on Thursday morning. During assembly, I noticed a teacher going round among the children inspecting their shoes. After ten minutes, she had collected a pile of flip-flops from them. I was informed that these children were later punished by having to weed the school compound for wearing unofficial footwear to school.

The practice of collecting unofficial footwear from children may have forced some pupils to drop out of school. One child told me, *"I don't go to school because I don't have the official shoes."* Based on this account, it is apparent that although teachers claimed that pupils were not turned away from school for wearing unofficial clothes, the practice of collecting children's flip-flops and punishing them seems to have prevented some of them from attending school regularly. Although teachers and school authorities may be unaware of the negative effects of the practice of collecting unofficial footwear from pupils, the practice may be portraying the school as not a child seeking school.

It appears that due to household poverty, most parents could not afford to provide their children with a school uniform or shoes. I was told by parents and teachers that when the harvest was poor, children's education became a luxury that many parents could not afford, since a low yield compounded existing low socio-economic status, leading to further household privation and disruption to children's schooling. Consequently, some – though not all – pupils chose to find a job in order to buy their CSS themselves.

Anima told me, *“My mother said the harvest was bad and she was not able to sell anything to raise the money to buy my uniform, so I stopped school.”*

Sarpong, who had not been able to make the transition from Basic 3 to four, said, *“My father could not afford to buy my school uniform to start the new academic year because the harvest was poor.”*

Sarpong’s father told me, *“Last year, we did not get any good catches during the fishing season; therefore, I could not buy his school uniform so he stopped attending school.”*

These quotations clearly demonstrate the effects of seasonality on children’s schooling, a view shared by Gubert and Robilliard (2006). Owing to the already low socio-economic conditions of the poor, households become vulnerable and suffer income shocks when the harvest is poor. Thus, children from such households are faced with some form of demand to withdraw from school (ibid).

Dropping out of school owing to lack of a school uniform was probably mentioned as extensively as it was because by the time most children in the two study communities made the transition from Basic 3 to 4, their parents had stopped providing them with their basic schooling needs.

One child told me, *“Your parents tell you that you should try and buy the things you need to go to school yourself because they do not have money.”*

According to one teacher: *“These children look after themselves at school because parents in this village are poor; so the children look after themselves.”*

Therefore, in many ways, it seems that one of the major causes of school dropout in Narkwa and Kyeakor was household poverty. Based on children’s accounts and interviews with teachers, it may be argued that there is a relationship between poor harvests and school desertion. In this regard, it is important to note that the fishing season in Narkwa and Kyeakor includes the

months of September and late October (see figure 7.2), months that coincided with the beginning of the academic year.

I gathered during the interviews with teachers that at times of poor harvest, household poverty is exacerbated and children are obliged to drop out of school. According to my interview with teachers, during periods when harvest is very poor it results in decreased attendance and dropout. They told me that when the harvest is poor, those children who had travelled to work do not return to school the following term. Also, some children stopped coming to school following poor harvest. During my fieldwork, I often heard fishermen complain about the poor harvest they have been experiencing these past years. I also observed women wanting to buy fish at the beach come and return home with empty pans because the catch was poor. This may be why some sporadic dropout cases occurred in the month following a poor harvest; and also why dropout children who intended to return were pushed to stay away from school for longer. Most long-term dropout cases and some overage instances are traceable to this development.

### **7.2.2 Family and Parenting Style, and Dropout**

Interviews with children also revealed that parenting/fostering practices played a critical role in terms of pushing children away from school. For example, the education of a child whose father or mother was absent from the household was disrupted because the child had at least partly to make up for work that had hitherto been carried out by the missing parent. Amongst, a 15 year-old boy who had dropped out of Basic 4, told me, *“I was going to school until my mother passed away, and my father also travelled... I stopped school to work for money to take care of my brothers and sisters.”*

Another child, Owureduwa, a 10 year-old girl who had dropped out of Basic 3, said, *“My father and mother died last year and there was nobody to take care of me and my grandmother, so I stopped schooling.”* These examples demonstrate how the presence of parents can make a difference to a child's schooling decision.



I gained insight into the nature and influence of parenting on pupils' school attendance when I spoke with foster children and those who had been neglected. Boateng, a 15 year-old boy, shed light on how his experience as a foster child pushed him to drop out of school:

*My parents had travelled to Cote d'Ivoire and I was staying with my aunt. She was very busy and often went to Accra to buy goods. When the money for food ran out, my aunt was sometimes not around to give me more, so I had to stop schooling and earn some money.*

Another girl, Asieduwa, also told me:

*My mother had travelled to Accra and I went to live with my stepfather... I had some problems at school, but my stepfather said that he was busy and could not help me solve the problem. All I do now is take care of my younger sibling.*

These accounts of foster children reveal that they were pushed and or pulled to drop out of school because they were not living with their parents. In the case of Boateng, it appears that his decision to stop attending school was prompted by lack of parental control. Realising that nobody was showing interest in supporting his schooling and faced with no money to buy food at school, he decided to drop out and earn some money instead.

However, I got the impression from Asieduwa's account that she had not made her decision unilaterally. Rather, it seems that her stepfather's unconcerned attitude, which may have been a deliberate ploy to keep her out of school so that she would take on her mother's responsibility of looking after her sibling, was what pulled her out of school.

The accounts of Boateng and Asieduwa suggest that the probable reason behind their dropping out was the unconcerned attitude of foster parents towards their schooling. It is likely that some event dropout cases in particular may occur because of such indifference towards children's schooling.

However, it should be noted that living with biological parents did not guarantee that pupils would stay in school. During my fieldwork, one category of children I interviewed told me that they had dropped out because their parents neglected them. In my discussions with other interested parties, one head teacher, told me, *"We all know that parents in this village are poor, but some of them use poverty as an excuse to stop taking care of their children...and when children feel neglected by their parents, they drop out of school."*

Given the poor socio-economic conditions of the community, I was sceptical about the issue of child neglect being a cause of dropout until I heard the story of Amankwa, a 11 year-old boy, who explained, *"My father disowned me and drove me away from the house as a punishment for supporting my mother in an argument with him."* Yet, interestingly, Amankwa's father could not be counted among the poor parents of Narkwa since, according to Amankwa, *"He owns 2 fishing canoes and has over 16 workers. He also runs a bar with my mother."*

Amankwa's father refused any plea for reconciliation on Amankwa's behalf, even from his class teacher, so the boy went to live with a friend. I regularly saw Amankwa at the beach rather than in school; and I suspected that he may have been finding it difficult to come to terms with his predicament, and had dropped out of school out of frustration. It thus emerged that child neglect in Narkwa and Kyeakor was sometimes overt, as in Amankwa's case; or it could be covert, as in instances in which parents shirked responsibility towards older children.

Child neglect manifested covertly in cases in which children lived with their biological parents but were left to fend for themselves when they reached the upper grades of primary school. One parent informed me that, *"In this village, there are opportunities for children to work and some children are able to make more money than adults... with the poverty that faces us, at least they can support themselves."* One probable explanation for this development is that in the past, some parents resorted to child neglect as a survival strategy in the face of difficult economic conditions, and the practice had subsequently become

an acceptable way of raising children after they reached a certain stage in their lives.

This is because children in the study area were perceived to be capable of earning a living by the time they reached the age of about ten. A further explanation of why children were neglected by their parents is that some of them may have believed that support required by pupils was only in terms of the provision of their schooling needs. As such, where opportunities to earn an income from child labour existed, children could be left to their own devices and expected to complete school without dropping out.

However, by the time they reach the age of ten, most pupils are making the transition from lower to upper primary school, a level at which parental support in the form of monitoring attendance is very important. Parental decisions do affect retention and children whose parents monitor and regulate their activities; provide emotional support; encourage independent decision-making; and are generally more involved in their sons and daughters' schooling, are less likely to drop out (Okumu et al., 2008). In respect of the types of dropout, as discussed in chapter five, it can be seen from these explanations that some cases of temporary and permanent dropout are manifestations of parental neglect and lack of interest in children's schooling.

### **7.2.3 Household Obligations: The Opportunity Cost of Schooling, Child Labour and School Dropout**

The opportunity cost consists of the value of all resources in their next best alternative use. Regarding school children, opportunity cost is measured in terms of the value of alternative opportunity that both the pupils and society sacrifices when the pupil spends time in school rather than working (Psacharopolous and Woodhall 1985). The opportunity cost of schooling and the gendered identity of a child operate in complex ways to influence both his and her ability to stay in school and attitude towards attendance. According to some children, parents and teachers I spoke to, engaging in certain activities pushed or pulled children out of school.

Talking to children about their experiences revealed a sharp division between older and younger boys, and older and younger girls. It emerged from the accounts of the girls that household duties, such as taking care of family member, affected their schooling; but boys' narratives revealed that engaging in economic activities was what pulled them to drop out of school. Attendance was influenced by the opportunity cost of schooling because some girls did housework and some boys engaged in economic activities, both of which made regular school attendance difficult.

A teacher, Hamid, mentioned that, *"In this village, children drop out of school because they have to help at home or work to earn income instead of schooling."* This statement clearly shows that school dropout results from the precedence that household chores and economic activities take over schooling.

Girls told me that it was boys who usually dropped out of school on account of the opportunity cost of schooling. A possible explanation for this is that the socio-economic activities children engaged in the study area was gendered. Miyoc, a female teacher, told me:

*Girls do not drop out of school as often as boys in this village. This is because girls are not allowed to go fishing or work for hours on the farm...fishing and farming are for males. Normally, girls sell things when school is over...so they are able to attend school more regularly than boys are.*

*Boys are affected more because, although most children look after themselves at school, boys have to support their households as well. Boys make money by fishing and farming, but they cannot combine these things with schooling because these activities start in the morning, which clashes with school hours. So, boys have to choose between attending school and missing school to work for money instead, because they cannot combine activities like girls can (teacher, Narkwa).*

Table 7.1 which I constructed from observation of the 18 children's daily activities confirms Miyoc's view that there is a necessary relation between

gendered household chores and the economic activities children engage in, their age and irregular school attendance. In comparing boys to girls, it notable that owing to the gendered nature of economic activities, boys were more susceptible to those activities that resulted in dropout than was the case with girls. It seems that older girls in particular were not easily pulled out of school so readily as boys because most of the domestic and economic activities that girls engaged in were practiced outside school hours; thus, they were able to combine them with schooling.

**Table 7:1 Children's Daily Activities by Age, Gender and Hour of Day**

Sex	Age	5:30	7:30	8:30	9:30	11:30	13:30	15:30	17:30	19:30	21:30	22:30
Male	7-11											
	12-17											
Female	7-11											
	12-17											

KEY	Fishing	Farming	Caring	Household Chores	Hustling	Selling
	Playing	Cinema	Bed	School hours	Outside-School Hours	

*Source: Field data- based on in-depth interviews and observation of dropout children*

In terms of the effect of the opportunity cost of schooling on girls' education, their accounts show that in cases in which her mother was employed, it was a female child who was relied upon to do general housework such as cooking, washing, fetching water, and, in some cases, taking care of a siblings, or sick or elderly relatives.

It emerged that the extent to which household activities pulled a girl out of school was also dependent on other factors such as her age, the nature of the household activity, and other arrangements at the school level. With regard to the nature of domestic work, most girls seemed to be able to combine routine housework with their schooling without dropping out. It was when issues such as taking care of a relative arose that the girl's age became a key determinant of whether she was able to combine activities or dropped out of school.

In order to gain an insight into the effect that looking after a relative had on girls' schooling, I analysed them in two groups of younger and older children respectively. The findings imply that younger girls (7–11 years) dropped out of school due to extra domestic, non-economic work. For example, Serwaa, a 9 year-old girl who had dropped out of Basic 2 told me, *"I stopped school to take care of my younger sister so that my mother could go to the farm."* It was likely that when girls were requested to free their mothers by taking care of siblings, they would be pulled out of school because such services were often required at times when girls were supposed to be at school.

However, I noticed that some older girls were not forced to drop out when looking after younger siblings not enrolled in school. It appears that owing to the relative maturity (11–17 years) of the girl, and the pre-school age (3–4 years) of the sibling, the former was able to combine schooling with assisting her mother without necessarily being pulled out of school. Carrying a sibling to school seemed to be practicable as long as the girl's teacher was a woman. I got the impression that a female teacher weighed the relevance of girls' schooling against a pupil's physical and mental capacity to combine both tasks before allowing her to take her young sibling to school.

A female teacher, Hamatu, told me, *"Although it is a difficult arrangement, I permit some girls to come to school with their siblings if taking care of them is the reason they are dropping out of school. But I always make sure the girl is old enough to handle the situation before I allow it."* As to whether she would allow younger girls to bring their brothers or sisters to class, Hamatu said, *"no, because they are too young to combine schooling with taking care of a young sibling."* This means that only older girls who were physically strong and mentally alert were allowed to combine schooling with taking care of siblings, since younger girls were by default not considered to be sufficiently mature to possess such qualities.

Another probable explanation for allowing an older girl to take her sibling to school is the teacher's better understanding of the social milieu in which the

domestic activities girls were obliged to undertake disrupted their education by pulling them out of school. The teacher's familiarity with the girl's family may be another factor that influenced her decision to permit such informal arrangements in her class. It is important to note that such a practice emphasises the importance of good school–community relations for retention. Such an arrangement and the ability of older girls to effectively combine housework with schooling could be the reason that dropout cases involving girls in Narkwa and Kyeakor seemed to be particularly affecting younger pupils between the ages of 7–11 years and those in the lower grades of primary school.

My interviews with some older girls also revealed that the relative age of the person they were taking care of was a significant factor in determining whether they stayed in school. For example, in the case of Asieduwa, the girl whose foster parent made no effort to help her return to school, it is likely that another key reason she dropped out was to take care of three of her siblings. She told me, *"My mother is now working in Accra so I am taking care of my brothers and sisters till she comes back."* Asieduwa cooked breakfast for her siblings; washed up; went to the farm to fetch vegetables; and then prepared the family's evening meal. By the time she had finished all the housework and ensured that her siblings had been fed and were ready for school, she was herself too tired and too late to go to school. Another girl, Owureduwa, had lost both parents, and dropped out of school because she was left alone to take care of a sick grandmother who was 78 years old.

Interestingly, girls' schooling was not directly disrupted by their engagement in economic activities. From table 7:1, it can be seen that girls did not pursue economic activities during school hours. As mentioned earlier by Miyoc the female teacher, girls' economic survival activities tended to be pursued after classes and during the school holidays. These arrangements notwithstanding, it could still be argued that there is some relationship between girls' dropping out and the opportunity cost of schooling, which depends on various factors such as a girl's age and the nature of the work she is obliged to undertake.

On the other hand, it is often argued that boys' education suffers from disruptions brought about by the opportunity cost of schooling because they engage in vital economic activities at the expense of attendance; and it is clear how such economic activities coincide with school hours (see Table 7.1). Most boys who dropout in the study area were obliged to shoulder the responsibility of supplementing the household income in addition to working to support themselves at school. The evidence shows that the strain of attempting to meet such demands might have been so great that they ended up being pulled out of school.

In terms of age, some older boys (12 years and over) dropped out of school because they worked long hours. Mensah told me, *"I work hard to make money because if I do not give money to my mother there will be no food in the house."*

Another boy, Marfo, also said, *"When I work, I give the money to my grandmother, who looks after me."*

It seems that the pressure on boys to contribute to household income was one of the main reasons for the high rates of sporadic dropout among them in Narkwa and Kyeakor. Unlike the case with girls, owing to the gendered nature of boys' economic activities and the manner in which they clashed with the school timetable, they were unable to combine work with schooling.

When I asked why they did not combine schooling with work like the girls, Boateng told me, *"When I am going fishing, I leave home early in the morning – around 3:00 a.m. – and return after 1:00 p.m."*

Sarpong, who did farm work, said: *"By 6:30 a.m. at the latest, I must be on my way to the farm to avoid being docked pay; and I return in the afternoon, around 3:00 p.m."*



These accounts of children's work patterns confirm the fact that there were invariably clashes between the school timetable and boys' hours of work. It is likely that boys who engaged in economic activities might therefore have come under pressure to drop out of school in order to be able to go to work. This may explain why the number of sporadic dropout cases amongst boys increased dramatically when they entered the 12–17 years cohort groups. By this age, most of them were likely to have started working in the informal labour market in order to support themselves and their families. Second, boys may also have dropped out of school because their parents expected them to contribute to household income in times of economic difficulty. In a context of strong cultural constraint and the discriminatory treatment of girls within a culture of prevailing machismo, boys might have been more capable than girls of making such a contribution.

From the above discussion of the opportunity cost of schooling, it may be concluded there is a relationship between the work children do and the processes leading to school dropout. In respect of the gendered economic activities of children, it seems that the influence of the opportunity cost of schooling as a push or pull factor depends to a large extent on the socio-cultural context; a child's age and gender; and the available labour market opportunities for children to secure employment.

Local labour market opportunities appeared to prompt children to pursue income-generating activities instead of going to school. I noticed that children participated enthusiastically in economic activities in Narkwa and Kyeakor, even competing amongst themselves for work in the local and external informal labour markets.

The informal labour market structure gave children the opportunity to gain employment by taking part in fishing expeditions, 'hustling' at the beach, and working on farms; as well as to sell various items ranging from farm produce to provisions. It is thus likely that children were pulled out of school by the attraction and accessibility of such an informal labour market structure.

It appears that older children in particular were motivated to work. In terms of maturity, the analysis of age in grade in chapter 5 indicates that most children in schools in the study area are overage. Accordingly, in Mfantseman municipality, overage in grade was very common.

Younger children's school attendance might have been more regular because the distractions of the informal labour market that might influence their school attendance seemed to be minimal. However, older children might have found that they were not able to concentrate fully on their schoolwork because by the age of 12, it was becoming more difficult to postpone immediate financial reward in order to pursue temporally remote but more valuable academic goals, a phenomenon termed academic delay of gratification (see Bembenutty and Karabenick, 2004).

For example, instead of attending school, some children in Narkwa – particularly older boys – joined groups of adults who left home early in the morning to go fishing, or sometimes waited at the beach for the fishing canoes to dock; while a larger number of younger children joined them later in the afternoon when school was over in order to 'hustle' at the beach.

**Figure 7:1 Children's Photograph of How they 'Hustle' at the Beach**



*Source: Field data*

The extent to which children were motivated to seek avenues for pursuing economic activities instead of going to school is illustrated by the field notes extract below.

**Field Notes Phase I, 2008**

What was most interesting was that Boateng [a 15 year-old boy] and Ampong [a 15 year-old boy], neither of whom had completed primary school, were sitting under coconut trees on the sandy beach playing cards at around 9:00 a.m. in the morning while most of their age mates were in school learning. Apparently, they had stopped going to school and went to the beach early every day to wait for the canoes to dock, which usually took place between 9.00 am and mid-afternoon. I suspect that they might have been waiting at the beach this early because of the opportunity to make more money if they started hustling as soon as a canoe arrives before other children from school heard the news and joined in to compete with them.

This no doubt reflects the extent to which boys in particular were attracted to seek employment in the informal local labour market instead of going to school. It seems that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds and the

indifferent attitude of the community towards schooling were the reasons why some children considered selling their labour to be attractive.

Lawife, a parent, told me, *“Because of the money they make from fishing activities, some of the children in this village are not willing to stay in school, and most of the adults in this community are not worried that children are not staying in school.”*

It appears that children’s attraction to the informal labour market was supported by covert ‘collective communal support’ for them to sell their labour. It thus seems that the community condoned dropping out of school in preference for finding a job. It is likely that such collective communal support created an enabling environment that acted as a driving force, pulling children out of school to sell their labour in the informal labour market. It may be argued that such a collective communal support compromising children’s school attendance was the covert manifestation of a structural devaluation of schooling.

For example, upon the arrival of the canoes at around mid-afternoon, all other activity in the village ground to a halt and both children and adults converged on the beach to do brisk trade, as may be seen in figure 7:1. Some pupils even ran away from school so as not to miss out if the boats docked early. Apparently, adults needed child labour, a point that became clear when Among told me, *“We [children] have to be at the beach to help unload the fish, and our parents expect us to bring fish and money home.”*

It can be argued that children engage in economic activities because of the existence of a market for child labour. This view is corroborated by Duryea (2003), who found that a buoyant job market acted as the main force pulling children out of school in Brazil. Similarly, Okumu et al. (2008) emphasise how communities can influence dropout rates by providing employment opportunities during school hours.

Apparently, the labour market in Narkwa and Kyeakor shaped children's schooling behaviour and attendance patterns because although most children enrolled, they only attended classes until fishing and farm work were available (see Appendix 7), after which they dropped out in order to earn money. In effect, this may explain the issue of the seasonality of declined attendance in the third term (see table 5.2 for decline in third term attendance) and some dropout cases discussed in chapter 6. The attendance records of older children who dropped out of school reveal that almost all of them withdrew from school for at least a month. Moreover, it appears that children who previously attended school irregularly, especially to pursue economic activities, easily dropped out of school again. Often older children migrate independently to work while younger children are withdrawn to accompany migrating parents. Smita (2008) highlights the influence of seasonal migration on educational access. The next section highlights evidence of the overlap between seasonal migration and school academic calendar in the study area.

### **7.3 Community Context as a Push or Pull Factor in the Dropout Process**

#### **7.3.1 Seasonal Child Migration and Dropout**

Seasonal migration came up in my interviews with children as one of the critical factors that pulled children out of school (see chapter 5 on patterns of attendance). The effect of seasonal migration on regular school attendance was twofold.

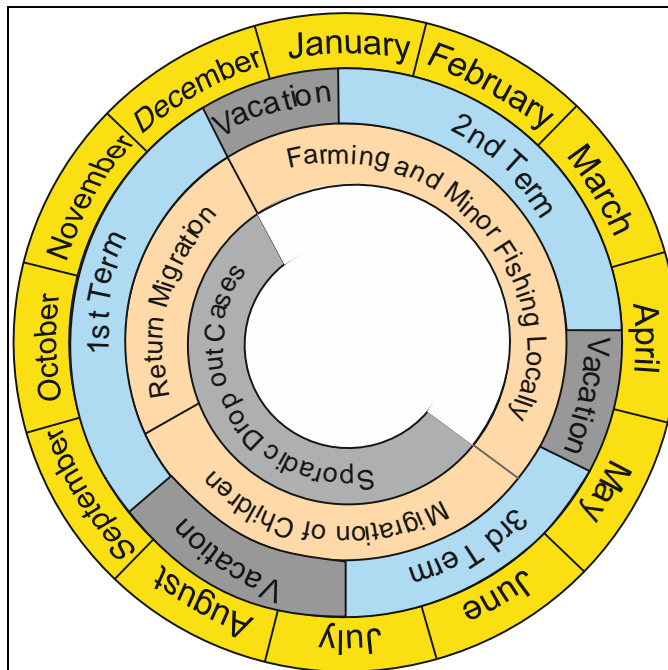
##### **Field Notes Phase I, 2008**

It was exactly 8:15 am in Narkwa Methodist School and the children had marched from the morning assembly ground to their classrooms. The register was being marked and the children were responding to their names. For any child that was absent, the choral response "Half Assini" was shouted amid laughter from the children present; laughter because they were now aware that I was working with school dropouts. What was most interesting was that about a quarter of the children were not in school that day, having already left on the routine migration to Half Assini. At the lorry station, I met a couple of schoolchildren boarding buses with their parents who were migrating to other fishing communities in Western Region.

On the one hand, parents migrated with their children even before schools broke up for the holidays; and on the other hand, some children independently

migrated seasonally to work in other fishing communities (see figure 7.2). Figure 7.2 illustrates the clash between school times and seasonal migration.

**Figure 7:2 Academic Calendar, Schooling and the Seasonal Economic Activities of School Children**



Source: Field data.

Figure 7:2 shows that the first school term in the academic year begins in early September and ends in mid-December. During this period, migrant children return to continue their schooling. Again the second terms of the academic year begins in early January to mid-April. This period coincides with farming and minor fishing activities in the locality. The third term which marks the end of the academic year begins in early May and ends in late-July. This term clashes with major fishing and farming activities. It is during this period that out migration is common in the study area. The model in figure 7:2 shows that during the months of late-May through mid-December, sporadic dropout cases occurs. These periods which clashes with the third and first terms of academic calendar marks the out and return migration of school children.

Some younger boys aged between 6 and 11 years dropped out of school because they migrated with their parents. A child's education was disrupted

when he or she was withdrawn from school to accompany his or her parents on the seasonal migration. I was told by Amankwa, a 11 year-old boy who had dropped out on account of parental neglect, *“I was in Basic 2 by then and school hadn’t yet broken up, but my mother took me to accompany her to Cote d’Ivoire; and she left me there with my aunt for eight months.”* Thus, taking a child out of school before the end of term obviously resulted in disruption to his or her schooling. In confirmation of this point, a teacher, Hamid, explained:

*Some children drop out of school because their parents migrate with them. In some cases, the child is left behind but they later migrate to join their parents. However, when school reopens, some of these children do not report early and this disrupts their schooling.*

Considering such migration, disruption of school attendance could be overcome if the schools adapted to it. I asked teachers why the school calendar could not be adapted to accommodate this inevitable seasonal activity. One teacher told me, *“We don’t have the authority to change the school calendar...all schools follow the same calendar.”*

Another teacher elaborated, *“All schools in Ghana follow the same timetable for reopening, writing exams and holidays... We don’t have the authority to change any aspect of the school calendar.”* From these comments, I concluded that there was no provision to allow for adjustment to the school calendar in order to suit local variations in seasonal activities that potentially disrupted school attendance.

In my informal discussion with the parent teacher association (PTA) chairman and one school management committee (SMC) member, they told me that they wish they had the power to change the school times in order to avoid clashes with harvest periods. They believe that such changes may be useful in ensuring that school children remain in school throughout.

Educators seemed to be unaware of the strong effect that the incidence of seasonal activities had on children’s attendance and academic performance.

Therefore, a better understanding of local seasonal variation may be useful in optimising the school calendar.

For most children in the study area, seasonal migration began in mid-June, that is, about five weeks before the end of the third term. Children who migrated often stopped attending classes at this point, a practice that could have been prevented by adapting the school calendar to the local seasonal activities that clashed with it.

Furthermore, the younger the pupil, the more likely it seemed that the child's parents would withdraw him or her from school to accompany them when they migrated. In an interview with one mother, when I inquired why she withdrew her younger child (this child is not one of my study cases) from school, she told me, *"He is too young to be left behind...my son will go back to school when we return."* I got the impression that some of these migratory parents were unaware of the effect of such a decision on their children's schooling, as they may have been under the impression that such children were too young to be engaged in any vital learning.

It appears some parents believed that children needed to reach a certain degree of maturity before they started any serious learning. Another parent told me, *"When children are very young and you send them to school, they may not be able to learn anything... Sometimes, they feel restless and cry all day at school, only to come home feeling ill."*

In response to my question of when in her opinion a child should start school, one mother said, *"The best age to enrol a child is when you think he or she can adjust and play with other children at school without crying and falling sick."*

These opinions also indicate that some parents might have deliberately delayed the enrolment of their children or withdrawn them from school because they believed they knew the right time to enrol a child to start learning. Moreover, considering the mother's view that a child may "cry all day at school and come



home ill,” such a belief might have been an indication of her distrust in the school’s ability to take good care of her child, a reservation that could have prompted some mothers to delay enrolment.

As discussed in chapter 5, the period of migration in the third term was the time of the school year when children sat their graduation examinations; thus, non-participation in such assessment meant grade repetition. Therefore, in addition to late enrolment, it is probable that seasonal migration partly explained the cases of overage in grade, given that grades were most frequently repeated.

From another angle, it appears that older children who did not accompany their parents migrated during the school holidays to join them then, but that such pupils did not return home early enough for the beginning of the new academic year. Such cases may manifest as sporadic and event dropout. It seems that boys in the upper primary grades were the most affected category of children whose schooling was disrupted by seasonal migration. Although these older boys migrated during the school holidays, they were often unable to return early enough to register at the beginning of the new academic year and thus continue their schooling.

Marfo told me, *“During the vacation, I travelled to Half Assini to fish, but when school re-opened I had not made enough money to go back to school... So, I travelled further, to other communities, in the company of other children to fish.”*

Taking the duration of the third term as being from May to July, and the beginning of the first term as being in early September into consideration, it appears that seasonal migration from mid-June to early October might have been largely responsible for temporary dropout cases. It could be argued that the clash between the school calendar and seasonal migration created recurrent cases of school dropout and drop-in during the academic year. This correlation between seasonality and disruption of schooling is corroborated by Colclough et al. (2000):

...many children, who enrol in September, at the beginning of the school year, leave...because demands on their labour during harvest time are so great. In some cases, they re-enrol the following year...but, again, are unable to complete the year (ibid).

In the cases of children in Narkwa and Kyeakor, it seems that the influence of seasonal migration on their schooling was so strong that some pupils' education spanning two academic years might have been marked by sporadic dropout and/or event dropout, punctuated by subsequent drop-in episodes. Clashes between school times and seasonal economic activities in the study area corroborate finding by Smita (2008) and Hadley (2010) on how seasonality influences children's education.

### **7.3.2 Networks, Economic Survival Strategies and Dropout**

During interviews with children who had dropped out of school to engage in economic activities and those who independently migrated seasonally, I got the impression that some of them – especially boys – had dropped out due to peer pressure. It is further probable that advice about economic survival strategies was passed among pupils through their association with those who had already dropped out, especially older children. The field note presented in the box below shows the close network among boys in school and boys who dropped out of school.

#### **Field Notes Phase I, 2008**

It was around 11:00 a.m. on a Sunday at Narkwa Beach. Some boys were playing football on the sandy beach, while others waited for a go. I was there with Teacher Becas, [not her real name] to watch the daily activities at the beach. One of the boys, Boateng [not his real name], who I was having a discussion with about his friends was also with us. As the other boys played football, Boateng gave a running commentary, including the enrolment status of all those on the pitch. From his information, I ascertained four categories of children: a) regular school attendees, b) irregular attendees, c) school dropouts and c) those children who had never enrolled but who mixed readily with the pupils.

In Narkwa and Kyeakor, there was a strong informal network that bound children together whose influence extended to the school level. For example,

boys often met socially at food stalls and video cinemas in the evenings; and during such interaction, working children bought food, sweets and cinema tickets for their friends who could not afford them because they attended school and so did not work. It appears that this display of wealth by working children might have enticed schoolchildren to seek avenues for making money as well. Indeed, some children told me that their friends kept them informed about how much money they made from their jobs.

For children from poor socio-economic backgrounds, information on economic survival strategies is often keenly sought. In recounting his experience, Ampong told me:

*When we meet to play, my friends sometimes show as much as five Cedis<sup>38</sup>[USD 3.6] cash that they make a day from hustling at the beach... I need money to buy food, so I borrow from them...but the only way to pay it back is to join them in hustling at the beach.*

Another boy, Mensah, also said:

*Some of my friends who had dropped out came back to school with money, and they could buy anything they needed... They told me that they got the money from working on the farms... I needed money too, so I followed them to work on the farms.*

These narratives illustrate how children's social networks in a context in which some of them attend school while others do not may be a threat to pupils' school attendance. Children who work and do not attend school seem to be influencing pupils with money made from child labour to stop school and join them.

It appears that peer pressure to stop schooling and work pulled more boys out of school than it did girls; and it affected older boys (12–17 years) to a greater extent than it did younger boys (7–11 years). One reason is that fishing and farming for money are gendered activities which girls do not participate. Also, the boys who are physically strong were the ones hired to participate in economic activities. As a result, older pupil might have been more susceptible to irregular attendance and dropout in this respect because most of pupils in the

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<sup>38</sup> One Ghana Cedi is equivalent to USD 0.72 (April 2009 exchange rate).

study area were overage in grade (see figure 5.7); thus, sitting in the same class to learn with younger children might have made schooling an embarrassing and unattractive prospect.

Another reason why some of these older children dropped out of school could be due to a relationship between their relative maturity and household poverty. Their parents tended to neglect them and leave them to support themselves at school, while the informal labour market attractions of work were condoned by the 'collective communal support for child labour'. Indeed, although community members in Narkwa and Kyeakor complained about the way children dropped out of school, it is interesting to note that they did not appear to object to their children abandoning their education to engage in economic activities.

It appears that community members' unconcerned attitude towards children's irregular school attendance and dropout might be due to the value they placed on education. One parent maintained, *"School is good, but only when it gives our children opportunities."*

Another parent observed: *My eldest son has completed school but, like most other children from this village, he is still here, fishing and farming.*" This indicates that if parents did not appreciate the benefits of education, they might have been reconsidering the whole notion of enforcing their children to attend school regularly.

The influence of socio-economic conditions on the decision to send children to school appears to encompass several interlinked – sometimes, contradictory – issues that nevertheless play a critical role in the dropout process because they are among the determinants that can disadvantage children's schooling. For example, the background of poverty and parental neglect that often incites children to pursue economic survival strategies facilitated by the informal labour market are critical issues affecting their education.

It is important to note here that owing to social network peer pressure on children in school, and collective communal support in the pursuit of economic survival strategies, the children in the study area seemed to be comparing the opportunity cost of schooling with the apparent merits of education. Yet, although the children's narratives point to the fact that some conditions at home and in the wider community contributed in diverse ways to pull them out of school, other issues raised suggest that the critical determinants that often forced children to terminate their education lay beyond the influences of the socio-economic sphere alone.

In light of existing evidence showing that children from similar socio-economic backgrounds to the study area tend to remain in school, the findings of the present thesis suggest that socio-economic influence notwithstanding, the critical determinant of who drops out is the school itself. I therefore argue that although the socio-economic context is a contributory factor to the generation of a process that ultimately leads to the premature termination of a child's education, it seems to be only one element of the two major causal factors that push and or pull pupils out of school. In the next section, evidence based on children's accounts that supports this argument is analysed.

#### **7.4 School Context as a Push or Pull Factor in the Dropout Process**

Interviews with most children who had dropped out showed that conditions at the school level had a critical influence on their decision to terminate schooling. Most of the pupils in the sampled schools experienced difficulties on account of the poor socio-economic background they came from, which challenged regular school attendance as evidenced by the high cases of irregular attendance in third term (see chapter 5); but the school still retained the potential to act as protective mechanism to prevent dropout from occurring (UNESCO, 2007a).

Children drop out of school when personal, financial, home or employment problems coincide with their lack of confidence in the school's ability to give them adequate support. This suggests that the school has the potential to act

as a powerful support mechanism for pupils, enabling them to cope with external difficulties without resorting to dropping out (UNESCO, 2007a).

In terms of the dropout cases in Narkwa and Kyeakor who participated in this study, it emerged that children abandoned their education at the point when the school system and conditions within it failed them. In my interviews with children and school observations, I gathered that some issues at the school level had critical implications that resulted in dropout. These are what I term the ‘teacher factor’, ‘school-related child labour’, and school policy on ‘repetition, readmission and discipline’.

#### **7.4.1 The Influence of the Teacher on Dropout**

Teachers play a critical role in the lives of schoolchildren; and it appears that in the two communities and the two schools where I collected data, the lack of teachers, teacher absenteeism, and teacher attitude to those pupils who may have been at risk of dropping out of school all conspired to incite the termination of pupil attendance. In this study, I refer to such teacher issues that push children out of school as the ‘teacher factor’. In addition to insufficient teachers, teachers who are supposed to be at post were often not in post, sometimes for no apparent reason. From interviews with children, it seems that there is a strong relationship between dropout and the teacher factor.

**Figure 7:3 Children’s Photograph of a Class without a Teacher Being Taught by Another Pupil**



*Source: field data*

#### **7.4.1.1 Teacher Unavailability or Absenteeism and Dropout**

In the case of some older children who had dropped out of school, it appears that they withdrew because there was no regular teacher for their classes. Anima, the 12 year-old girl who had dropped out of Basic 3 because she did not have a school uniform, told me, *“There was no regular teacher for our class, so teachers from other classes came to teach us; but there were times when we went to school and for three days, no teacher came to our class to teach – sometimes other teachers came to cane us for making a noise.... It is just a waste of time and it is better to stay at home and do something else.”*

Another child noted that, *“Our teacher does not live in this village so sometimes, she is not in school for a whole week...we only go to school to play.”*

These accounts show insufficient staff and teacher absenteeism may affect children.

In the study area, it seems that under circumstance in which no class teacher was available, children attempted to transfer to another school in the neighbourhood, or else stopped going to school altogether.

One child told me, *“The teacher did not come to school regularly and that is why I got a transfer; but at this school too, I got to Basic 4 and there was no teacher, so I stopped for some time.”* It is likely that the lack of teachers and teacher absenteeism provided the critical impetus to push children already at risk of dropping out to stop schooling.

In cases in which either due to insufficient staff or absenteeism, there was no class teacher available, children were sometimes engaged to take the class. The two field extracts below exemplify this phenomenon.

**Field Notes Phase I, June 2008**

I arrived at one of the schools around 7:00 a.m. to witness the daily routine of morning assembly. Pupils were busy sweeping rubbish from the classrooms and school compound; but at exactly 8:00 a.m., the bell rang for morning assembly and they ran from wherever they happened to be to assemble in the open yard where the assembly was held. Three out of the nine teaching staff of the school were present at the assembly. By 8:30 a.m., when the children had settled in their classrooms, only four teachers had arrived and were beginning their lessons. As of 10:50 a.m. a total of five teachers, including the head, were in school.

In classes in which there was no teacher, the children were present after morning assembly, but an hour later (at 9:30), most of the children had left and the classrooms were almost empty. After the first break, the remaining children from the classes for which there were no teachers spent a little longer playing in the field until the head teacher drove them to their classes; although some children left school and went home.

Later in the afternoon, I strolled down to the beach and found some of the boys playing football. Apparently, since their teachers were not in school, these boys preferred to find something more interesting to do.

I returned to the school, which was about 200 meters from the beach, and found that one of the teachers had moved from Basic five to occupy a classroom in which children had been idle since the morning. Then, some Basic five children moved to other classes that did not have teachers. I noticed that one of the older boys from Basic five was calling the Basic three attendance register. In the other lower primary Basic, another two pupils (a boy and a girl) from Basic five were busy teaching [as can be seen in figure 7.3] a Ghanaian language lesson.



**Field Notes Phase I, July 2008)**

I arrived at the school around 9:00 am but since there was no teacher present, the pupils were playing in the compound. I questioned some of them and they said that their teachers were engaged in the registration exercise. I called the head teacher on his mobile phone and he told me that the other teachers who were supposed to be at school had to attend an in-service training course. Sensing that the situation might be the same at the other site, I visited that community too, only to confirm that the case was no different there. Most of the pupils were playing in the school compound with not a single teacher in sight. The situation at both schools remained this way for two weeks, some of the children reporting briefly and then going homes. Throughout the whole exercise, which lasted for about eight weeks, the schools were scenes of children playing for the entire school day. I noticed that some dropouts who had returned to school and other children who combined work with schooling were taking advantage of the opportunity to pursue their work-related activities full time.

The engagement of teachers in nationwide exercises that took them away from the classroom seemed to exacerbate a precarious situation in which there were hardly sufficient teachers in the first place. It appears that both the secondment of teachers for other official duties and teacher absenteeism – even for a day – may have led to a loss of teaching time that significantly diminished children's achievements; damaged the reputation of the school; and induced pupil absenteeism.

One parent told me, *"The teachers sometimes don't come to school, and the children learn from their example, so they also attend school when they like... can the teachers say they are punishing these children for being absent from school when they are guilty themselves?"*

During discussions with teachers about teacher absenteeism and children spending the whole day at school without a teacher, one teacher, Miyoc, told me, *"The bright children among the class teach when teachers are absent."*

Commenting on the lack of teachers, a head teacher said, *"When other teachers are done with their classes, they move to those classes without teachers to teach the children."*

Such an arrangement had attendant problems because it meant leaving a set of children unattended in one class to teach another. When this occurred, children from the upper classes move to unattended lower classes to teach them. It is likely that the school authorities did not object to pupils teaching their peers because it was better to encourage this practice than to allow children to make noise and play all day.

Additionally, when their teachers leave their class to go and teach another class, some children left their classrooms during school hours to go and play (see figure 7.4), while others went to work (see figure 7.1).

**Figure 7:4 Children's Photograph of Play during School Hours when Teachers are Absent from School**



*Source: field data*

Children withdraw from school when there are no teachers or when teachers are often absent from school. They may then weigh up the pros and cons of completing their education and earning a living. It appears that the attractions of the informal local labour market coupled with the problems of teacher absenteeism prompt some children to opt to pursue economic activities instead of going to remain idle in school every day when there is no one to teach them.

It may be argued that lack of teachers (see chapter 5.5 on staff numerical strength in the two schools) and teacher absenteeism is one of the major contributions to dropout. All primary school level classes in Ghana are assigned a classteacher, so if that teacher is no longer available, this is likely to push children to drop out of school.

In Narkwa and Kyeakor, lack of teachers and, in some instances, frequent teacher absenteeism at the primary level could explain why the cases of school stoppage identified in this study occurred when children were at primary school rather than JHS. Another reason might have been that because most primary school children were overage in grade, their services were needed in support of the household; thus, instead of sitting in the classroom without a regular teacher, termination of schooling might have been the more appropriate choice.

It is important to mention here that although studies on instructional time loss focussed on teacher absenteeism, absenteeism is only one source of loss in the delivery of education. For example, pupils' opportunity to receive information and process it is reduced in multiple stages. While the loss may happen in large blocks at some times, due to teacher assignments, the time is often lost in small increments; a day here, an hour there (Abadzi, 2007).

#### **7.4.1.2 Teacher Attitude towards Pupils and Dropout**

Another teacher-related issue that incited pupils to drop out of school was the attitude of teachers towards children at risk of withdrawal. It appears that children who underachieved, repeated grades, or attended school irregularly were pushed to drop out because of the unsupportive attitude of teachers towards them.

For example, Marfo was at risk of dropping out because he had repeated Basic 6, was performing poorly, and attended school irregularly. He told me how the

teachers referred to him as ‘woabon’<sup>39</sup>. One girl, Oparebea, also told me, *“The teacher always insisted that I write at school but I am no good at writing. I enjoyed games and needlework but they called me names; that was why I stopped going to school.”* This evidence shows that some children may find some aspects of the curriculum difficult, and in cases in which teachers place emphasis only on such subject areas, affected pupils may find school uninteresting and therefore drop out.

Another child who was attending school irregularly before dropping out mentioned that he had withdrawn because the teachers encouraged his classmates to call him *kobolo*.<sup>40</sup> It appears that children who were called names were likely to receive hostile treatment from teachers whenever they reported being taunted. One child, Marfo, who expressed his frustrations prior to dropping out of school, told me, *“When I go to school, children call me names like ‘kobolo’... I even overheard some teachers referring to me as ‘kobolo’. Whenever I hit a child for calling me names, the teachers punishes me... I think they are encouraging children to tease me.”*

In another example, Sarpong mentioned that, *“The teacher refused to call on me to ask or answer questions in class. Even when I raised my hand, the teacher always made me feel that I didn’t belong to the class; so I felt that I was just wasting my time in school.”*

I got the impression that whilst teachers were aware of the problems of at-risk children, instead of supporting them, they adopted an attitude of indifference, sometimes even reacting in a way that further isolated such pupils. The field notes extract below illustrates my first-hand experience of a case in point.

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<sup>39</sup> Literally, ‘rotten’. In this context, it implies ‘good for nothing’.

<sup>40</sup> An irregular school attendee or someone who is known for playing truant.

**Field Notes Phase I, 2008**

This was the third day of my second month in the school. I arrived at around 10:45 am, immediately after the mid-morning break, and all the pupils had returned to their classrooms. I had spent the previous two weeks tracking the attendance records of pupils at the school. Tired and bored of going through the dusty worn out Basic registers, I decided to observe one of the classes. A female teacher was taking science with Basic five and I stood at the window at the back of the classroom, and observed.

In the middle of the lesson, there was a scuffle between a boy and two girls. The teacher called the boy over and asked what the problem was, and he responded that the girls were teasing him. The teacher asked the boy to sit down and that ended the quarrel.

After about 20 minutes, the teacher assigned some Basic work, but this boy did not participate. He sat there unconcerned, staring at the blackboard and sometimes at the ceiling. I got curious and inquired of the teacher why he was not working as everybody else in the Basic was doing. According to the teacher, this boy had been behaving that way since he dropped-in after staying away from school for eight weeks. The teacher thought that the best solution was to ignore him.

It appears that children who performed poorly and attended school irregularly might have been dropping out on account of name-calling by peers and teachers. Some teachers and parents I spoke with felt that it was an disagreeable practice, but that it was a means of discouraging children from becoming lazy or attending school irregularly. One head teacher perhaps denied the tolerance of name-calling altogether in claiming that, *“children who do so are punished as soon as we get to know about it.”*

Nevertheless, Hamid, who doubled as a subject teacher at the local JHS and a Class teacher for Basic 5, admitted that name-calling did go on: *“You see, children can become lazy, stubborn and play truant, but with the fear of being teased or called names, discipline is instilled in them.”*

Commenting on the practice, one parent said, *“Sometimes name-calling discourages children from misbehaving; it is all right to use it... After all, we all experienced it when we were at school.”*

Such views suggest that name-calling occurred in the classroom on a daily basis, although the school head may have been unaware of the extent of it. However, given the general acceptance of the practice as a means of discouraging children from misbehaving, it appears that name-calling and labelling was at least semi-officially adopted as a punitive measure for managing children's unruly behaviour.

Based on the accounts of children who had been victimised and had dropped out of school, this practice might have achieved some short-term results but in many ways, it was not an effective long-term strategy for the management of pupils already at risk of dropping out. This was because in reacting to being called names, the victims – children already at risk of dropping out – were pushed all the harder to terminate their schooling.

Moreover, teachers' attitudes in ignoring children at risk of dropping out might have been due to the large class sizes that they found difficult to manage. For example a teacher who had been teaching classes five and six for the past five years, said, *'Sometimes, it is difficult teaching all these children together; and if you tried to cater for every child's special needs, you'd never finish the syllabus.'*

Teachers might have ignored the cries for help from children at risk, considering such outbursts to be petty, since, aside from the large classes the former were already obliged to teach, they were also burdened with concomitant piles of homework assignments and tests to mark; as well as all the continuous assessment reports they were required to complete. It appears that some teachers had also developed their own opinions and prejudices about at-risk children, given that most of them seemed to be overage in grade and tended to perform poorly academically. As a result of all these demands, teachers might have ignored such children entirely in class; thus, deliberately but politely pushing them out of school.

It is important to note that this 'teacher factor' has several dimensions—availability, absenteeism and attitude to children, which together constitute one

of the key factors at school level – combining with other causal factors external to the school environment – that incite children to eventually stop schooling. First, the unavailability of teachers and teacher absenteeism may cause children to attend school intermittently. Second, children who perform poorly academically and attend school irregularly may be labelled as such in a humiliating manner. Third, these children may receive little or no attention from teachers while in class, which ultimately pushes them out of school.

#### **7.4.2 School Practices and Processes, and Dropout: Repetition and Readmission**

School administrative policy on repetition and readmission appears to be one of the most decisive factors at this level that incited children to drop out. During interviews with children, I noticed how repeating the same grade three times or more could push a child out of school. One boy told me that he had dropped out of school because *“the headmaster said that even if I passed my exams, I could not graduate because I had not attended school regularly enough.”*

Boatemaa, a 17 year-old girl who had dropped out of school, told me, *“I did not report early when the school term began, and the headmaster asked me to stay at home and come back next year; but I got pregnant, so I could not go again.”*

It seems that insisting that children should repeat a grade or asking them to wait until the following academic year, actually pushed children to stay away from school for a longer period, which might have made their chances of returning to school slimmer.

Adopting measures to discourage irregular attendance and reporting late for the reopening of school could save both teachers and children a lot of time that is otherwise lost on repeating grades, but such measures should be designed to help children stay in school rather than push them to drop out, which, as the above examples demonstrate, was the case.

It appears that children who disliked certain things about school found the education process uninteresting and consequently attended irregularly, which resulted in eventual dropout. Such children might have been interested in subjects the school did not consider to be of great importance. For example, Ampofo told me, *“I like sports and athletics, but at school, these things are only organised once a term. But I always join in during sports and athletics periods.”* In my informal discussions with teachers in the two schools where I collected data, most teachers I spoke with confirmed that some children tended to be more interested in subjects such as sports and athletics whose assessment did not form part of the graduation process.

Moreover, it seems that children did not report early for the reopening of school because they realised that teaching and learning did not really get underway until the third or even fourth week of term. When I asked why they did not start lessons as soon as term began, the teachers said that it was a school custom to spend about two weeks preparing the school compound before beginning formal activities.

As an indigenous teacher, I am aware of the delay in teaching and learning in rural schools at the beginning of term in order to prepare the school compound. Often, school authorities also use such periods to assist community members who have requested the use of pupils' labour. Accordingly, at this time, schoolchildren work on local farms, and collect sand and stones, which the teachers sell to generate income for the school.

#### **7.4.2.1 The use of Child Labour at School**

The reality is that the use of child labour is common in most rural schools in Ghana. Sometimes, it occurs throughout the term, although not on a daily basis.

In my discussions with children, some of them made it clear that they had dropped out of school on account of the incessant pressure teachers put on them to work in order to earn money to run the school.



**Field notes Phase I, 2008**

I was on my way back to the school in the afternoon after finishing an interview with a child, when I met several pupils carrying bowls of sand and stones on their heads [see figure7:5]. This scene reminded me of my own primary school days in the late 1970s, when we had to take sand and stones to school every week. However, I thought that with the introduction of the capitation grant scheme, there was now no need for schools to look for alternative means of raising money. As an indigenous teacher, I am also aware of the position the GES has taken against the use of child labour by the school. The children told me they were taking the sand and stones to somebody's building site.

Sometimes, pupils were sent to labour on local farms for the benefit of the school. During my school visits to the two schools where I collected data, I noted that some older children – boys in particular – avoided attendance every time pupils were engaged in income-generating activities at school.

One child voiced the general consensus of opinion amongst pupils: *“It is wrong for the teachers to ask us to engage in income-generating activities for the school.”* It appears that children were of the conviction that if they could stay at home, work and make money for themselves, it made no sense to go to school on days when they were expected to *“labour and the teachers collect the money.”*

One older boy told me, *“I do not like it when the teachers require us to bring sand and stones to school. We don't know what they do with the money... I also need money, so I prefer to work and make money for myself instead of making it for the teachers.”*

Another boy said, *“We go to school to learn but often, our teachers take us to farms to work; and they collect the money.”*

Judging from these accounts, it appears that children might have formed the impression that teachers exploited child labour for their own ends; and it seems that such children preferred to stay away from school during such periods instead.

For the eleven months of my fieldwork, I observed that at least once a week, pupils were expected to engage in some form of income-generating activity for the school. That some children opted to avoid school at these times demonstrates that they were making a rational decision about their education and economic survival; and it appears that older boys in particular stay away from school with the express purpose of pursuing personal economic survival as a viable alternative to working at school for their teachers.

**Figure 7:5 Children's Photograph of the use of their Manual Labour by Teachers to Collect Sand and Stones during School Hours**



Source: field data

Although the GES has prohibited the use of child labour for school profit, the practice is still endemic, especially in rural areas where education directives are late to take effect and officials seldom visit. One head teacher justified the use of child labour thus:

*We are all aware that it is unlawful to engage schoolchildren in any form of income-generating activity but you see, the capitation grant is not released early, and sometimes we get to the third term before funds for the administration of the first term are released; meanwhile, we have to run the school. It is the earnings from*

*children's work that we rely on to keep the school running until the capitation grant is released* (Head teacher).

It appears this explanation by the head teacher's convinced the PTA but it is not clear how the capitation grant allocated for running the school is spent when it is finally released to the schools. If the school's argument for engaging child labour is to mobilise funds to run the school, then when the government's capitation grant allocation for the running the school is released, children may be justified in complaining that the money from their labour goes to the teachers. Children's view that when they worked, the money goes to the teachers is likely a valid conclusion children may be drawing.

The use of child labour by the school seems to have affected children's education decisions in two ways. One probable effect was that children who felt that they were not making good use of the school day if they had to spend it in income-generating activities decided to drop out of school in order to utilise their time more profitably. Second, in considering the prospects for earning money for themselves, some children might have preferred to avoid expending their energy for the benefit of their teachers, so they dropped out of school.

For most children, their real problems emerged when they declined to attend school at times when their labour was required there. Teachers invariably punished those who would not work in order to help the school; but older children tended to consider such punishment unjustified and did not comply with it. This generated conflict between pupils and the school authorities, and teachers often presented such children with an ultimatum: they could either conform to the school's penal system immediately, or they would be required to withdraw from school altogether. Accordingly, conflict between teachers and children over pupil's refusal to engage in labour at school was the cause of most cases of dropout. This finding corroborates the work of Seidu and Adzahlie-Mensah (2010).

#### 7.4.2.2 Discipline and Corporal Punishment

The practice of corporal punishment was understandably highly unpopular with most schoolchildren. It emerged from interviews that corporal punishment led to several cases of dropout, and children believed that some teachers' approach to discipline contributed directly to withdrawal. Caning as a punitive measure to instil discipline could also have damaging psychological effects. I observed that children who came to school late were caned. As a result, some latecomers promptly ran away from school again to avoid punishment. In the case of older children, this practice generated conflict between teachers and pupils when they refused to comply, which resulted in children terminating their schooling. In particular negative experiences from caning endure long in children's memory (Akyeampong and Stephens, 2002).

For example, some children who had dropped out of school mentioned that they had done so on account of the prevalence of corporal punishment. In describing the frequency and severity with which some teachers used the cane, Kyei, a boy who had dropped out of Basic 3, told me that, *"Teacher Jones [not his real name] does not mess about with the cane at all. If he uses it lightly on a child, then that child will receive about six strokes. Sometimes, you can't sit down for a whole week after those strokes. So, you stay out of school, but when you show up later, he canes you again."* This account illustrates the dilemma that some children faced, which was likely to make school an unattractive prospect to them.

It is notable that while some children like Kyei refused to comply with corporal punishment and thus stopped attending school in order to avoid being caned, other children internalised the situation, often quoting the saying, *"suku ye de nso aba wom"* (school is good, but canning is part and parcel of it). I got the impression that younger children – and also girls in general – chose to endure corporal punishment as part of school life and did not readily drop out owing to the penal system alone.

Older children, particularly boys, most likely thought that corporal punishment was unfair, abusive and inappropriate treatment of children; since by their age, and on account of their socio-economic responsibility,<sup>41</sup> they might have viewed punishment in the presence of younger children as humiliating and embarrassing. Coupled with the available opportunities to work, older boys might have been incited to stop attending school because there were other attractions from the informal labour market to engage them.

In another example, Marfo withdrew from school because he was punished for not reporting early when school reopened. He told me, *“The head teacher asked me to remove tree stumps from the field, but my stature is too small to do that kind of work. When I complained that I couldn’t do it, I was told not set foot in the classroom until I had completed the punishment.”*

It seems that because Marfo was repeating Basic 5, he was already at risk of dropping out, which he demonstrated when meting out punishment under such circumstances only pushed him out of school.

Another boy, Kyei, told me that he had dropped out of school on account of the punishment he had received: *“The teacher confiscated my flip-flops and caned me for wearing them to school... but I do not have any other shoes and cannot walk to school barefoot.”* Indeed, the issue of punishment emerged in most children’s accounts as one of the critical events that informed their decision to terminate schooling.

### **7.5 Returning to School: Conditions that Encourage Children to Drop in**

One of the research questions outlined in chapter 1 sought to discover the process of dropout on the basis of the views of children. Accordingly, in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 children in order to collect primary data on types of dropout (see chapter 6). Analysis of the data reveals that some dropout

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<sup>41</sup> Boys earned an income to support their households and sometimes, to fund the education of their younger siblings.

children do return to school, the frequency of drop-in confirms reported cases in the study area (see chapter 5)

In this section, I analyse children's accounts of their motivation to return to school. The section is in two parts: first, children's views on the conditions that make returning to school possible or impossible; and second, challenges confronting children after dropping back in.

### **7.5.1 Motivation to Return to School: Children's Views**

As a method of discovering the reasons behind children's decision to return to school, I interviewed 10 dropout children who had dropped back in. Data from these 10 out of the 18 children interviewed show that their decision to return to school was motivated by certain incentives brought about by changes in the household; improvements in socio-economic status; children's hope for improvement in the situation at school that caused dropout to occur; and the influence of peer pressure.

For three of the children who had returned to school, motivation arose from changes in household arrangements. Ampong, the 15 year-old boy who had stayed out of school for about three years, told me that: *"I was not attending school because my father was away; but now my father has returned from his journey, I am back in school."*

Another child, Owureduwa, who dropped out of school because she had lost both parents and did not have anybody to take care of her said, *"I came back to school because my cousin now takes care of me... I don't have to work to take care of myself and my grandmother, so I am now back in school."*

For some other children, it was a parent/guardian's visit to the school or a teacher's visit to their home that encouraged drop-in. Marfo, a 14 year-old boy who was a sporadic dropout, told me, *"I went back to school after my grandmother came and spoke with the headmaster on my behalf."*

Another three dropout children who had returned to school did so on account of their teachers' influence on them. The high esteem in which some teachers were held, often as the result of their commendable attitude to work and personal relationships with community members, was a key influence on several children's decisions.

The case of Anima, the 12 year-old girl, is an example. She was won over by her teacher's visits to her home and interaction with her mother, which persuaded her to return to school. She had stopped schooling because she did not have a uniform but there had also been no regular teacher for her class. However, after the teacher's visit, she returned to school, even though she still could not afford a new uniform. Anima confirmed: *"I started going back to school after our class teacher came to my house and talked with me and my mother."*

A child may drop out of school because he or she feels disadvantaged and/or disaffected, but a good relationship between the school authorities and the child's family could help prevent dropout and motivate children to return. Marfo and Anima were able to return to school because of the direct contact between their guardians and teachers. These examples show that collaboration between parents and teachers can prevent dropout and encourage drop-in.

According to some teachers, children dropped back in when the problem that pushed or pulled them out of school was resolved. These teachers believed that as soon as the economic survival needs that disadvantaged the child and led to dropout had improved, he or she quickly returned to school. Yet, a critical review of this belief shows that teachers might have only been looking at the cause of dropout from the perspective of the influence of socio-economic background. The evidence of children's accounts shows that teachers themselves are commonly part of the problem, and that children will only drop back in when such teacher-related issues are resolved. In their study on teachers, Seidu and Adzahlie-Mensah (2010) found the same lack of reflection on the part of teachers as affecting access.

In the case of another three dropout children who had returned to school, the decision to drop back in was motivated by peer influence. These children were sporadic dropouts who had retained contact with their class mates still in school, and it was their friends who persuaded them to return.

One day during the fieldwork, I observed a scene in which some pupils persuaded another child who had been missing classes to return (see field notes below).

**Field Notes Phase II, 2009**

It was a Monday afternoon after school and I was walking home in the company of some pupils. I noticed a boy of about nine standing by the roadside as I walked past with the other children. I heard one of them say to him, *"You have not been coming to school these days...shame."* The boy said nothing. Later, I learnt from the other children that he was in Basic two. The following week when I went to the school, I saw him in Basic. I asked him why he was now in school and he said, *"My friends have been teasing me, saying that I've stopped coming to school...but I haven't."*

From this observation, a glimpse of how peer pressure can encourage drop-in is revealed.

Likewise, according to Boateng, a 15 year-old boy, he returned to school because *"friends and teachers were always asking me to go back to school... Sometimes, I avoided my friends when I saw them coming from school because they teased me for not going."*

Such influence of peers is a strong incentive that shapes attendance. However, the influence of peer pressure on drop-in depends on where it is coming from. For example, while peer pressure from other dropouts potentially influences pupils to withdraw (see section 7.3.2), children in regular attendance can also encourage some dropouts back to school.

Although the accounts of 10 out of 18 dropout children show that they dropped in again on account of improved household conditions, and encouragement



from teachers and peers, I sought to learn what prevented the other 8 dropout children from returning to school; and also why 4 of the 10 children who had dropped-in, dropped out again. Based on data from the 18 children, I found that a child's personal aspirations in terms of education, work and economic well-being was a very important determinant of whether he or she dropped in, dropped out again, or never dropped back in.

The accounts of the 10 dropout children who had returned to school reveal that education had not lost its value for them. Yet, for the remaining eight children who had not dropped back in, the value of education had been replaced by the attraction of work and economic well-being.

The perceived value of education is a critical motivating factor of children's aspirations with regard to schooling. In the case of children who had dropped back in, Anima, the 12 year-old girl who had dropped out of Basic 3, told me: *"I want to complete school because I am still young and nobody will employ me if I don't have a certificate...nobody will even take me on for an apprenticeship."*

Similarly, Mensah the 15 year-old boy who had also dropped out of Basic 3, said: *"These days, without completing basic school, nobody is willing to give you a job... People insult you as illiterate because you did not complete school."*

The views of these children indicate that their decision to return to school could be motivated more from a consideration of their prospects for the future – as envisioned in terms of what they do or do not achieve at school – and the social stigmatisation they may suffer for non-completion of schooling, rather than the mere influence of context. Indeed, in some Ghanaian communities, it is common to hear derogatory remarks directed at people who have not completed school.

The views of those children who had not returned to school clearly indicate that they had lost interest in schooling. I got the impression that when children find the curriculum difficult to understand they perform poorly so with no support

from teachers, they tend to lose interest in schooling. Also, children who consider what they are learning to be irrelevant to their work aspirations after school, they lost interest in school. The 14 year-old girl, Oparebea, who dropped out because she did not understand her lessons told me that, *“I am not going back. After all, when you finish school, it is money you are looking for... With my rice business, I am making enough money to keep me going so why should I go back?”*

The 17 year-old boy, Ofori, said: *“We go to school in the hope that when we finish, we can find some work to do... But if you are not doing well [at school] and by chance, you find some work to do now, why waste your time?”*

In contrast, other children may fail to drop back in owing to feelings of rejection at the hands of the school. Asieduwa, the 15 year-old girl, said, *“I can’t go back... What school would take me now? When they refuse to put my name in the register, I feel they are telling me I should leave; so I have left.”*

These views show that children’s loss of interest in school may be the result of any combination of poor academic performance; the school’s inability to meet their learning needs; and the subtle rejection of the pupil by the school.

#### **7.5.2 The School’s Reaction to Children Who Drop In: Pupils’ Experiences**

For children who drop in but drop out again, interviews and class room observations show that – with the exception of Asieduwa, who was openly rejected by her school – certain conditions within the academic environment may compromise children’s efforts to drop in. For example, no provision was made in the study area to cater for the particular learning needs of children who returned to school.

According to Among the 15 year-old boy who had dropped out of his cohort group but dropped back in after three years, the *“teacher does not answer my questions and he won’t even ask me any questions in class.”*

From my class room observation of teachers' approach to dealing with children like Ampong who had dropped back in alongside other children who had been attending school regularly, I noticed that class room instruction was approached without any provision for children who may have had special needs. The account of one boy, Boateng, sheds light on why a child might drop in and then drop out again: *"When I went back to school, I didn't understand most of the things being taught... I am just in the class...the teacher teaches over you as if you are not there... When I couldn't take it any longer, I stopped again."*

In my observations of four other children who had returned to school, I noticed that they appeared to be out of place and disorientated during lessons. One of them, Marfo, said: *"Sometimes, you just sit there in Class and you don't understand a word being said to you."*

Teachers appeared to have a developed particular attitude towards children who had returned to school after a period of withdrawal. The message they put across suggested that the school was not interested in those pupils who dropped out and then dropped in again. According to Marfo's class teacher, *"There is nothing we can do about these children... We can't go back and start teaching the class all over again on their account...we can't go back to re-teach... If you did that, there is no way we would ever finish the syllabus."*

Another class teacher said, *"These children are not serious. Even if you give them attention, they will still fall behind... It may even encourage other children to drop out, knowing that if they return, they will be given extra attention."*

In support of some of the Class teachers' policy of ignoring drop-ins, the head teacher, said, *"We don't even have enough teachers for all the classes... There are over 60 children per class, so there is nothing special we can do for those who drop out and drop in... If children who drop in are able to cope with the class, all well and good; but if they can't, you aren't able to do anything."*

As an indigenous teacher, I am aware of the manner in which teachers ignore truancy and dropout cases. As a result of overwhelmingly large class sizes, teachers may be compelled to ignore children they do not consider to be conscientious pupils. Moreover, the GES does not implement a particular programme to support children who drop in.

From the views of teachers, it appears that retention, dropout and drop-in together constituted something of a 'survival of the fittest' contest. In particular, children who returned to school intending to complete their education were expected to manage on their own. Schools did not make any special provision for children who dropped back in. Pupils might return to school but this did not necessarily mean that they benefited from any meaningful learning. For example, Boateng, in particular, dropped out again as a result of difficulty in readjusting to school and picking up from the point at which he had withdrawn.

The only strategy schools universally adopted to help dropout children when they returned was to start them afresh by making them repeating their last grade. One teacher said, "*Children who stop school and come back repeat because we want them to start anew.*" Yet, with classes of over 50 children on average, compulsory grade repetition of dropout who return and irregular attendants might not have achieved the desired outcome. Moreover, children's views suggest that they needed some form of one-to-one attention that addressed the individual's specific learning needs when he or she returned to school.

### **7.5.3 Returning to Complete School: Views of Children who Drop-in**

Owing to the general attitude of teachers towards children who dropped in, I interviewed the remaining 6 out of the 10 children who had returned to school after a period of withdrawal, and were still in school at the time of the study, in order to discover their opinions about staying on to complete their education. It is possible that such children dropped out again too. Nevertheless, findings on the likelihood of completing school show that for one set of children, continuation of schooling was achieved through the efforts of teachers who

considered them to be valuable members of the school sports and athletics teams. Other children survived repeated dropout due to their determination to complete school, which was based on the perceived value of education for future prospects.

In the case of drop-in children whose continued stay in school depended on their usefulness to the school, Marfo, who was a keen footballer, told me, *“I will definitely complete basic school. I don’t think I will drop out of school again. I will reach senior high school and play football for the school team... In the future, I will become a professional footballer.”*

His teacher asserted that his performance in class was average. However, unlike other children who suffered a policy of being ignored by staff, a deliberate effort from Marfo’s teacher in encouraging him stay in school on account of his talents – sports and athletics – prevented a second dropout. Two other children who had dropped in were also active members of the school football team; thus, after returning, they were constantly monitored and supported by the sports teacher and the head teacher in order to prevent another period of dropout.

Other drop-in children who had survived repeated dropout in spite of being ignored by teachers were sustained by their determination. Owureduwa, the 10 year-old girl, said: *“I think I will complete school because if you don’t then you will become a useless person... Nobody will even accept you as an apprentice if you don’t have a certificate.”* Her statement suggests that such children considered their chances of completing school to be high on account of the perceived prospects and benefits to be enjoyed when they obtained a leaving certificate.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The children’s accounts discussed above highlight the influence of context – both within and external to the school environment – on dropout. It appears that children drop out of school when contextual factors such as socio-economic

background and their situation at school disadvantage them. The data show that pupils who are disadvantaged become disaffected in terms of the educational institution. Evidence of disaffection is indicated in children's accounts of how they had to attend irregularly or withdraw from school seasonally in order to work for economic survival, a situation exacerbated by an unsupportive school environment; and disaffected children soon drop out on a long term basis.

Yet, as school attendance and behaviour patterns show, some of these children return to school while others do not. The motivation to make the decision depends on changes occurring in the context that pushes or pulls them out of school. Dropout children who repeatedly drop in and drop out again could break this cycle if the school provided adequate support for them. Moreover, effective support for dropouts can potentially prevent other children from dropping out, as well as helping dropouts who return from repeated episodes of withdrawal. In the next chapter I theorised dropout and present the summary of finding of dropout process and causes and the implications for universalising basic education in Ghana.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **Theorising Dropout and the Implications for the Education for All Policy in Ghana**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This thesis explored the dropout phenomenon in Ghana. Chapter 1 discussed the background to the study, the research problem, and the principal research questions. The latter sought to address three issues, namely: how dropouts understand and interpret dropout; how the process that leads children to drop out of school occurs; and the implications of the findings for the universalisation of basic education in Ghana.

Chapter 2 introduced the Ghanaian context and highlighted the issues around education reform and participation in basic education.

Chapter 3 reviewed the relevant literature. First, it grounded the study in the context of international policy on children's rights and education for all. Second, it argued for the need to understand dropout by reviewing the varying contextual definitions of the phenomenon posited by different organisations, institutions and individuals. This was followed by a review of empirical studies on the causes of dropout in the context of developing countries. The chapter concluded with the presentation of a conceptual framework of dropout.

With a growing realisation of the need to include the voice of children in informing policy on the particular issues that affect them, chapter 4 focused on the methodology and methods for engaging children as research participants. In this regard, the chapter introduced the methodological position of the study; the strategies employed in data collection; and the ethical dilemmas that emerged from the research process.

Chapter 5 focused on the research area and context. It highlighted the nature of schooling in the study area and explored attendance patterns, and their relationship with seasonality and child labour. The chapter shed light on the

context in which school dropout occurred; and linked enrolment, school attendance patterns and withdrawal with the detailed analysis of types of dropout that is addressed in chapter 6, and the causes of dropout in chapter 7.

Chapters 6 and 7 presented and analysed the findings of the study in order to answer research questions 1 and 2. These chapters addressed children's understanding and interpretation of the concept of dropout, and the ways in which contextual issues within and external to the school environment interacted in a complex way to incite them to withdraw.

The present chapter summarises the main findings of the study and brings it to a conclusion. The chapter discusses the implications of the research findings for education policy in Ghana in order to answer research question 3. Areas for further research are also highlighted in this chapter. The thesis concludes with a reflection on the overall research process, and discusses the strengths and limitations of the study.

## **8.2 Theorising Dropout: Towards a Definition**

This thesis began by identifying the role played by the GoG in increasing enrolment at the basic education level, particularly since independence. It also examined trends in school enrolment and retention over the past two decades, highlighting the dropout phenomenon. On the basis of this context, the notion of dropout and the process resulting in it was problematised and explored.

The contribution of the thesis to the literature is its emphasis on the voice of dropout children; the in-depth insights into a fuller definition of the dropout phenomenon, which are founded on the nuances in children's understanding and interpretation of it; and the illumination of how the dropout process occurs contextually.

In order to highlight the dropout process in context, the study developed a theoretical framework that shows the causal factors of the phenomenon, and how they interact in a complex way to create the process that leads to



withdrawal. The contribution of the findings of this study would be useful for reconceptualising dropout and its implications for education policy. In the next section, I present a summary of the findings on children's understanding and interpretation of dropout.

In line with other studies of the phenomenon in developing countries, the present study found that the definition of the term 'dropout' was both complex and difficult to pin down. To address the problem of definition, I used dropout cases that emerged from the study to illuminate the forms that withdrawal took in different categories of children interviewed. Accordingly, I constructed a five-element typology of dropout (see figure 6:1).

Analysis reveals that according to research participants, dropout was generally interpreted as the desertion of school. Thus, the manifestation of dropout was premised on the assumption that a child was unable to complete his or her education. Yet, accounts of those who had dropped out suggest that on the one hand, to drop out means terminating school temporarily, and on the other hand, permanently – with degrees of overlap between the two.

As a temporary condition, withdrawal manifests as 'sporadic dropout', 'event dropout' and 'long-term dropout'. These three types of withdrawal often mark the starting point at which a school child's journey to departure from school begins.

The first of the three – sporadic dropout – often indicates the very first incidence of withdrawal. This type of dropout is similar to Marrow's (1987) definition as any child who was previously enrolled in school but is currently no longer actively enrolled; as indicated by fifteen days of consecutive unexcused absence, and who has not satisfied local standards for graduation (ibid).

The present study also found that dropout was manifested as either the result of a precipitative event or withdrawal from one's cohort group. Children who manifested event and long-term dropout spent longer periods away from school.

In respect of such event dropout, a study in Latvia by Dedze et al. (2005) defines a dropout as any school child who has not attended school for six consecutive months. This observation may be compared with the present study area in which some children spent about two terms as dropouts, often as a result of critical events at home, school or both.

The study found that the temporariness of dropout was evident from the fact that some children returned to school. Dropout and drop-in as manifested in the study area corroborates Akyeampong et al.'s (2007) implied definition, in which dropout is described as school stoppage but with the possibility of returning. I argue that this possibility should encourage a completely different way of looking at dropout; and the temporariness of the phenomenon suggests that it may be wrong for studies to conceive of dropout as a finality.

The study also found that as far as some children were concerned, dropout meant the permanent desertion of school without any intention of returning. Withdrawal for such children thus meant the non-completion of basic schooling, which points towards the complete cessation of formal education without the completion of any one level or programme (primary or JHS).

The analysis shows that two categories of children may be regarded as permanent dropouts: those termed 'unsettled dropouts' and 'settled dropouts' respectively. While unsettled dropouts refer to those children who have become significantly overage, for whom schooling has lost its value, and who have not yet found any alternative to schooling, settled dropouts, on the other hand, have made up their minds about not wanting to return to school and have found alternative occupations.

The notion of dropout as the non-completion of basic schooling corroborates Fentiman's (1999) definition, which describes a dropout as a pupil who does not complete the nine years of basic education in the Ghanaian system (ibid). Some other studies of the phenomenon regard a dropout as a pupil who leaves a

specific level of the education system without having achieved the appropriate qualification (OECD, 2002; UNESCO, 2005a).

It is interesting to note that emerging conceptions and interpretations of dropout indicate that the phenomenon may be manifested in contrasting ways. As far as one category of children in the study was concerned, dropout was a temporary phenomenon whereby school desertion lasted from between one term in a single academic year to about four years. Interpreting and understanding dropout in this manner is in line with Akyeampong et al. (op. cit.), who note that it is possible for school dropouts to return to school later. However, for the category of children whose views indicate the permanency of dropout, the phenomenon may be regarded as tantamount to non-completion of basic school; a view corroborated by the findings Fentiman (op.cit.), OECD (2002) and UNESCO (2005a).

The findings of the present study broadly define a dropout as any younger (6–11 years) or older (12–17 years) school-age child who has accomplished some basic education but then abandoned it. The study further identifies specificities that qualify this definition. First, any younger or older school age-child who withdraws from his or her primary schooling for more than one academic term without permission, but still has chance of returning to resume it, is a dropout. Second, any younger or older school-age child who has not progressed from one grade to the next, is not repeating the former, or has not completed the nine years of basic education and has no intention of returning to school, is classified as a dropout. These definitions founded on the accounts of dropout children may be applied to both temporary and permanent manifestations of the phenomenon.

A fundamental limitation in terms of the manner in which the dropout phenomenon has been hypothesised – which is reflected in the conceptual framework in chapter 3 (figure 3:1) – is the assumption that dropout is a permanent condition. For example, access indicators in national and

international discourses on education assume that children drop out of school never to return (see UNESCO/UIS 2008).

However, the present study found that while some children dropped out of school on a permanent basis, others who stayed away for periods of between one term and four years subsequently dropped back in to resume their education. In particular, existing dropout data does not take into account those children who stop going to school during the first or second term but return before the end of the academic year. Data on withdrawal only present dropout in terms of those children who were attending school the previous year but are not currently doing so (see ORC Macro 2004).

The erroneous assumption that dropout is final and targeting interventions to prevent withdrawal only at children identified by EMIS as dropouts – neglecting those who drop out on a termly basis – could be one of the reasons why Ghanaian schools still grapple with the dropout problem.

In cases in which pupils stop going to school during the first or second term but return by the end of the academic year, and when those who stop for one to four years also return, dropout is most certainly not permanent. This observation suggests that conceptualising dropout as a finality for all children requires revision. The continuous neglect of the distinguishing characteristics of dropout – its temporariness as well as permanency and focusing solely on the latter – in data collection could render efforts at addressing the phenomenon unsuccessful. Tackling the dropout problem therefore requires another way of looking at it. And in dealing with out-of-school children generally, it would be useful to distinguish between those who have never enrolled at all from those who do enrol but subsequently drop out.

It is important to note that the findings of the present study cannot be overly generalised as it was designed as a small-scale qualitative investigation that analysed 18 cases only. Nevertheless, the experiences and worldviews of dropout children that emerged reveal different facets of the phenomenon that

may be linked with the larger picture of education in the study area. The findings of the five types of dropout identified in this study could therefore be most useful as a basis for conceptualising and addressing the phenomenon in wider terms.

In the dropout discourse, national and international discussion must consider the manifestation of the phenomenon in terms of both its temporariness (sporadic, event and long-term dropout) and permanence (settled and unsettled dropout). These distinctions would be useful in responding to the problem as well as in researching it.

In the next section, I summarise the study's findings with regard to dropout causes and processes in light of both the temporary and permanent aspects of the phenomenon as concepts, together with its causal factors, in order to construct a theoretical framework that depicts the dropout process in its entirety. Our understanding of the process of dropout in general would be useful in striving to prevent it, as well as in bringing dropout children back to school.

### **8.3 Theorising the Dropout Process: The Causalities of Dropout and Drop-in**

The study identified three main causal factors that led to dropout in the study area, manifesting push and/or pull dynamics that encouraged pupils to terminate schooling. The main causal factors were a) socio-economic context, b) community context, and c) school context. In all three, there were sub-contexts and secondary dynamics that also affected dropout.

#### **8.3.1 The Causes of Dropout: Outside School Context as a Push or Pull Factor in the Process**

With socio-economic issues of high poverty trends resulting from depleted fish stock, erratic rainfall, low soil fertility, a high incidence of diseases, and high unemployment rates, engagement in basic education in Mfantseman is undoubtedly negatively affected. For example, with over 60% of the total population of Mfantseman living in poverty and unable to afford certain basic necessities (see 5.2.1), and the attendant seasonal migration in the area, there is pressure on households and their children to weigh the opportunity costs of

schooling on a termly or even daily basis. This is likely to have adverse consequences in terms of engagement in education and, ultimately, dropout.

### **The Household**

The study found that poor socio-economic household conditions affected children's school attendance in several ways. Parents' inability to afford CSS, such as breakfast before school, or uniform, shoes and stationery for use at school, could push children to drop out.

In the study area, it was found that children who went hungry and/or were singled out from their class mates because they lacked basic educational needs were pushed away from school. Similarly, Obeng (1999) found that in Kwaebibriem – a mining settlement in southern Ghana – one of the main reasons for pupil dropout was parents' inability to provide a school uniform. In the present study, it became clear from children's accounts that if a child's family could not meet his or her schooling needs, the pupil was pulled away from school by the lure of the benefits of employment.

It is further argued that poverty and the need for economic survival is a key reason why children drop out of school in Ghana (GSS, 2003). Poverty is also cited as one of the causes of disruption to schooling (Hunter & May, 2003). Similarly, children's accounts from the present study indicate that there is a causal relationship between poverty and school dropout, a view corroborated by Colclough et al. (2000).

However, it is important to note that the accounts of study participants and the arguments of other commentators notwithstanding, the majority of children in the study area from similar socio-economic backgrounds to those of dropout children did not withdraw from school.

Analysis of the data shows that household poverty, which led to a lack of CSS, was one major contributory factor that initiated the process that culminated in the termination of schooling. Nevertheless, there were several other contextual

factors such as children's networks, seasonal migration and a vibrant labour market that promoted child labour and influenced the decision to drop out.

It may be reasonably argued that poverty accounts for most cases of delayed entry into the formal education system, but it does not fully explain school dropout. For example, in a study in South Africa, it was found that in situations in which poor households experienced unexpected socio-economic shocks, children's schooling was hardly ever disrupted (Hunter & May, 2003).

### **Family and Parenting Style, and Dropout**

While household poverty can be regarded a root cause of school dropout in the study area, issues around family and parenting style were also deep-seated contributory factors that could conspire to militate against retention.

The study revealed that children who did not enjoy parental guidance or direction dropped out of school. Lack of family support did not only make it impossible for children to remain in education, but also hindered the monitoring of pupils' performance at school. Indeed, such a family environment and parenting style made it difficult for a child to address conflicts with school authorities, which could eventually result in the pupil's termination of schooling.

Some children also lived with foster parents who showed no interest in their schooling. It emerged that such children were pushed away from school because their foster parents invariably loaded them down with a great deal of work and did not help them to stay in school. Similarly, Fafchamps and Wahba, (2006) found that in cases of children who lived with foster parents the latter placed a disproportionately large burden of household duties on the shoulders of these children in comparison to their own families, which made it difficult for foster children to stay in school, or to learn anything when they were able to attend class.

### **The Household: The Opportunity Cost of Schooling**

The opportunity cost of schooling in terms of the gendered identity of a child also emerged as one of the factors that led to dropout. Children tended to

withdraw from school when they had to work to support their families; the opportunity cost of schooling thus resulted in pupils dropping out of school.

The study found that owing to a child's gendered socio-economic role, boys in the research area more readily dropped out of school to engage in child labour than did girls. Most boys were responsible for earning a supplementary income for the household in addition to working to support themselves at school. Striving to meet all these commitments could become an unbearable demand, which meant that the activity least necessary to economic survival had to be sacrificed. The dilemma between boys' employment and education was exacerbated by the fact that economic activities coincided with school time; and when they were no longer able to combine work with schooling, they dropped out.

It has been argued that when parents turn to their children to contribute to the household income in times of economic difficulty, in the context of severe cultural constraints and the discriminatory treatment of girls, boys may have a greater ability to take on such a responsibility (UNDFW, 2000). This was found to be the case in the study area, where, by the age of 12 to 17 years, most boys were actively employed in the informal labour market in order to support themselves and their families. This finding is corroborated by a study suggesting that a prevalent cultural perception of masculinity encourages a higher dropout rate in boys (*ibid*).

In the present study, it also emerged that older girls were in a better position to combine work with schooling than their brothers, as the former performed most of their domestic and economic duties outside school hours; but younger girls' schooling was disrupted because they were unable to combine household responsibilities (taking care of younger siblings) with schooling. Indeed, it was found that older girls who had to look after a younger sibling were allowed to take him or her to school with them after reaching an agreement with the teacher (female), an arrangement not usually permitted in the case of younger girls and male teachers.



In terms of the way in which the household opportunity cost of education influences school attendance, there is clearly a link between the type of work children do and the process that leads to dropout. The household opportunity cost of schooling and children's gender-specific economic activities determine that dropout depends to a large extent on children's age, gender, socio-cultural context, and the labour market opportunities available to them.

The analysis shows that local labour market opportunities entice pupils to pursue income-generating activities instead of going to school. It emerged that children eagerly participated in the economic activities of the study area, even competing amongst themselves for jobs. Moreover, the informal labour market structure was actually conducive to the engagement of minors.

Schooling was disrupted when a pupil became engaged in child labour; it thus follows that the child was then at risk of being pulled out of school by the attractions of the informal labour market. The study found that the older the child in his or her grade, the stronger the attraction of child labour; since by the time a pupil reached the upper primary level, he or she invariably already had a sufficiently well-paid job to encourage its prioritisation over education. It then became most difficult to postpone the immediate rewards to be procured from the labour market.

The study found that the attractions of child labour could be intensified by a pupil's poor socio-economic background; neglect by his or her parents; and the indifferent attitude of the community to education. Indeed, the latter passively supported child labour in the sense that it emerged that the community as a whole did not act in any way that suggested that it desired its children to focus solely on schooling, rather than combining work with education or leaving school early to go to work. All these factors were found to operate simultaneously to push and/or pull pupils into child labour.

In the literature, Duryea (2003) notes that in Brazil, an available job market in child labour acts as a major factor in pulling pupils out of school. It has also been argued that the community influences the dropout rate by providing employment opportunities for children during school hours (Okumu et al., 2008). In accordance with these contentions, I found that the present study area provided opportunities that encouraged children to engage in labour during school hours.

### **8.3.2 Community Context as a Push or Pull Factor in the Dropout Process**

#### **Seasonal Child Migration**

The seasonal migration of children along with adults emerged as one of the causal secondary dynamics behind school dropout. Children in the study area migrated to areas in which their labour was in demand at times of the year that coincided with the school term. The study found that while younger children were withdrawn to accompany their parents on migration, older children migrated independently during term time. It emerged that children who migrated seasonally tended to come from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

The study found that children who migrated during term time to go fishing dropped out of school temporarily and returned when the season was over. Such seasonal migration occurred mainly during the third school term. Older children from poor backgrounds who had earlier been left behind by their parents to fend for themselves often migrated at this time.

The analysis shows that other children who had migrated during the long school holiday but failed to report for school when the new academic year started in September also began the journey into dropout with this event. The period between May and September was critical in this respect.

The manner in which seasonality results in disruption to education is noted in the literature (e.g. Colclough et al. 2000; Smita 2007; Headley 2010). Colclough et al. (op. cit.) found that children who enrolled at the beginning of the academic

year in September frequently left school prematurely when their labour was in demand at harvest time. In some cases, such children re-enrolled the following September but, again, were unable to complete the full academic year (ibid).

The present study found that children dropped out at times of migration, subsequently to drop back in later when the season was over. Sporadic, event and long-term withdrawal – i.e. temporary dropout – with the possibility of returning to school was very common in the study area.

### **Networks, Economic Survival Strategies and Dropout**

While the community context was found to promote child labour and seasonal migration, children's economic survival needs in combination with social networking facilities motivated them to drop out. Moreover, the study found that some pupils withdrew from school on account of peer pressure, tips for economic survival strategies being passed from child to child through their association with other dropout and out-of-school children.

In the two communities under study – Narkwa and Kyeakor – networking among pupils and other children who were already out of school was found to create social bonds and exert a certain amount of pressure on some pupils – particularly those from poor households – to drop out of school. It was observed that whenever out-of-school children met their school-going friends, the display of wealth by the former attracted the other children to join them in earning an income.

Again, it emerged that older boys in particular were most likely to succumb to peer pressure to drop out. Nevertheless, the analysis also shows that several socio-economic contextual factors – e.g. the forces of peer pressure and the need for economic survival – combined to pull children out of school. Indeed, children of all ages from poor families, as well as those neglected by their parents more readily yielded under the peer pressure to join their out-of-school friends.

The study found that the influence of a child's socio-economic background on his or her schooling encompassed several sets of dynamics that were interlinked – sometimes even contradictory – and which played a critical role in the dropout process. It emerged that such conditions external to the school environment placed children at a disadvantage as far as their education was concerned.

Poverty at home and parental neglect incited pupils to pursue the economic survival strategies on offer in the informal labour market; and children obtained information about the labour market outside the community via their social network. Pressure from this network to terminate schooling and a communal attitude that encouraged child labour meant that children were obliged to compare the opportunity cost of schooling and with the pros and cons of the continued pursuit of their education.

Furthermore, it emerged that in addition to the socio-economic context external to the school environment that contributed in diverse ways to push and/or pull children out of the education system, other issues that lay within the school context also manifested as equally critical contributory factors to the dropout process.

### **8.3.3 The School Context as a Push or Pull Factor in the Dropout Process**

In addition to contextual dynamics in both the household and community that might push and/or pull in the dropout process, the study also found that certain critical conditions within the school itself also contributed to dropout. It emerged that children from poor socio-economic backgrounds deserted school at the point when the education system and conditions within it failed them. While most pupils in the study area came from similar socio-economic backgrounds and remained in school, others who felt that the school was not able to protect them dropped out.

It has been argued that a child drops out of school when personal, financial, home or employment problems coincide with a lack of confidence in the

school's ability to provide him or her with adequate support (UNESCO, 2007). The present study found that teacher-related issues; the engagement of children in manual labour for the school; and certain practices and processes related to grade repetition, readmission and discipline could push and/or pull some children to drop out of school.

### **The Teacher Factor and Dropout**

The study found that too few teachers; teacher absenteeism; and teacher attitude towards pupils who were at risk of dropping out could all result in pupil withdrawal from school. If pupils had no regular class teacher, they stopped going to school as well. In the cases under study, it emerged that if the school suffered from a lack of available teachers, it resorted to either combining two classes or allowing children in senior classes to teach the lower grades, both of which seemed to be detrimental to effective learning.

Teacher absenteeism was exacerbated in situations in which they were seconded to national assignments such as voter registration, and when they frequently attended in-service training courses during term time. In the case of pupils already at risk of withdrawal owing to economic survival needs in particular, the frequent and prolonged absenteeism of teachers contributed to school dropout because the children chose to use these periods to work, and some of them did not return when their teachers resumed their duties at school.

It emerged that when there was no class teacher or if the teacher reported for duty irregularly, pupils reassessed their situation, weighing the disadvantages of going to school without a teacher against the prospect of getting a job and earning some money. They often came down in favour of child labour, which many of them were already combining with school anyway.

While this situation encouraged children to withdraw, it was also found that the attitude of some teachers towards children at risk of dropping out pushed them out of school. In particular, pupils who underachieved, repeated grades, or had a low attendance record were pushed to withdraw if there was no supportive

teacher to address these challenges. It was found that such children – who are over age in grade dropped out because they found school unappealing and the curriculum uninteresting, there being no form of support either academically or socially from teachers to help them persevere with their education.

### **School Practices and Dropout: Repetition, Readmission and Discipline**

The study found that certain practices and processes at school, such as grade repetition, readmission requirements and harsh discipline pushed children to drop out. It emerged that the school practice whereby pupils were only allowed to proceed to the next grade if they participated fully in the third term, had an above average attendance record, and passed the end of term examination resulted in continuous repetition for children who defaulted in any one of these areas.

The practice of graduation based only on full three-term participation placed children who met this requirement at an advantage over those who withdrew in the first or second term but dropped back in for the third term, forcing them to repeat the entire grade. In respect of this phenomenon, the study found that children who repeated the same grade twice often dropped out of school.

It also emerged that regulations set by the school authorities for children who intended to return to school, as well as those who *had* managed to return, compounded the dropout problem. Insistence that dropout children could only re-enrol at the beginning of the first term of the following academic year pushed some dropouts further away from school, exacerbating their dropout status.

The school practice of keeping the names of dropout children who had re-enrolled in secondary registers made such pupils feel isolated and disowned. In effect, this pushed dropout children who wanted to return away from school; indeed, those who dropped in tended to swiftly drop out again when, in need of extra support, they faced rejection by the school.

While the prospect of continuous repetition and readmission pushed children to desert their education, the practice of using pupil labour for the benefit of the school also forced some of them to drop out. It was found that older children in particular considered the idea of an education, as opposed to withdrawal in pursuit of economic survival needs, in a new light when the school demanded that they carry sand and stones for the authorities to sell, or that they work on farms to make money for the school.

It emerged that in using pupils to generate income for the school – a practice that was carried out all year round – older children in particular, began to take their education less seriously. It is also apparent that pupils dropped out of school when they were punished for refusing to participate in income-generating activities.

The issue of discipline and punishment was found to be another critical factor in the dropout process. Unsurprisingly, the study found that the practice of corporal punishment was very unpopular among pupils. It emerged that such punishment often degenerated into conflict between older children and school authorities, and this frequently resulted in dropout.

#### **8.3.4 Drop-in: Motivation, School Response and Avoiding Recurrent Dropout**

The study found that typically, some dropout children in the study area would subsequently return to school to pursue their education. It also emerged that of the dropout children who dropped back in, some withdrew again while others persevered. It was found that motivation in the case of the latter was dependent on certain conditions being met. For example, changes in the family's socio-economic circumstances, or support within the household might result in a child dropping in.

Factors related to teachers' attitudes towards their pupils and the school's relationship with parents and the community at large also encouraged drop-in. The study found that those children who had stopped attending school because they did not have a regular teacher returned when more staff members were

posted to the school. Additionally, it emerged that given favourable conditions at school, pupils were able to influence their dropout peers to return.

Varying aspirations in terms of education, career and economic well-being were found to either encourage or discourage drop-in. It emerged that younger dropout children found it easier to return to school than was the case with their older counterparts. Indeed, older children who returned were more likely to drop out again because they found readjustment to the school routine more challenging. Nevertheless, it was found that the desire to obtain a basic education certificate, which was a necessary qualification for apprenticeship to certain trades and vocations, encouraged some children to return to school.

On the other hand, children who had dropped out because they felt rejected, and those whose learning needs had not been met by the school were not likely to return. It was found that some dropout children who had subsequently dropped in withdrew again when they found conditions at school to be unsupportive. There was total silence in the school about the reintegration of former dropouts; and I concluded that all too often, teachers and school authorities simply ignored the plight of dropout children who attempted to resume their education.

The attitude of teachers in failing to recognise the learning needs of former dropouts made such children feel out of place, isolated and disorientated; so they simply dropped out of school again. I concluded that this attitude towards children who had dropped in was due to the overwhelmingly large classes that teachers had to somehow try to manage.

Such class sizes made it impossible for the teacher to give individual attention to the specific needs of children who had dropped in. The school's shortage of teachers was the main contributory factor to this situation. Moreover, and no doubt as a direct result of class sizes, teachers were found to adopt one teaching approach towards children of varying ages, talents and experiences who were grouped together.



As mentioned earlier, the study found that whereas some dropout children who had returned dropped out again, others were sufficiently motivated to remain in school. It emerged that in some cases, teachers took a keen interest in those who had sports and athletics skills, which provided the necessary incentive for these pupils.

It is therefore apparent that there were instances in which teachers who ignored some drop-in children demonstrated the capacity to prevent dropout in others in encouraging them to return to and remain in school. The study found that the school regarded a former dropout child who participated in games and athletics as an asset because of the key role he or she played in inter-school sports competitions. Thus, with the primary aim of exploiting children's talents, teachers also helped prevent permanent dropout and promoted drop-in.

It is also clear that some drop-in children were simply determined to complete their education, and therefore able to surmount the obstacles that threatened the continuation of their attendance.

An analysis of the experiences of dropout children in Mfantseman Municipality reveals that the entire process of school withdrawal can be encapsulated in a theoretical framework, the examination of which provides useful insights into the phenomenon.

I developed this framework to illustrate the dropout phenomenon theoretically and reveal how it occurs contextually. It shows the causes of dropout – the 'why'; the precursors to and the process of dropout – the 'how'; and the types of dropout – the 'what'. It is represented schematically in figure 8:1.

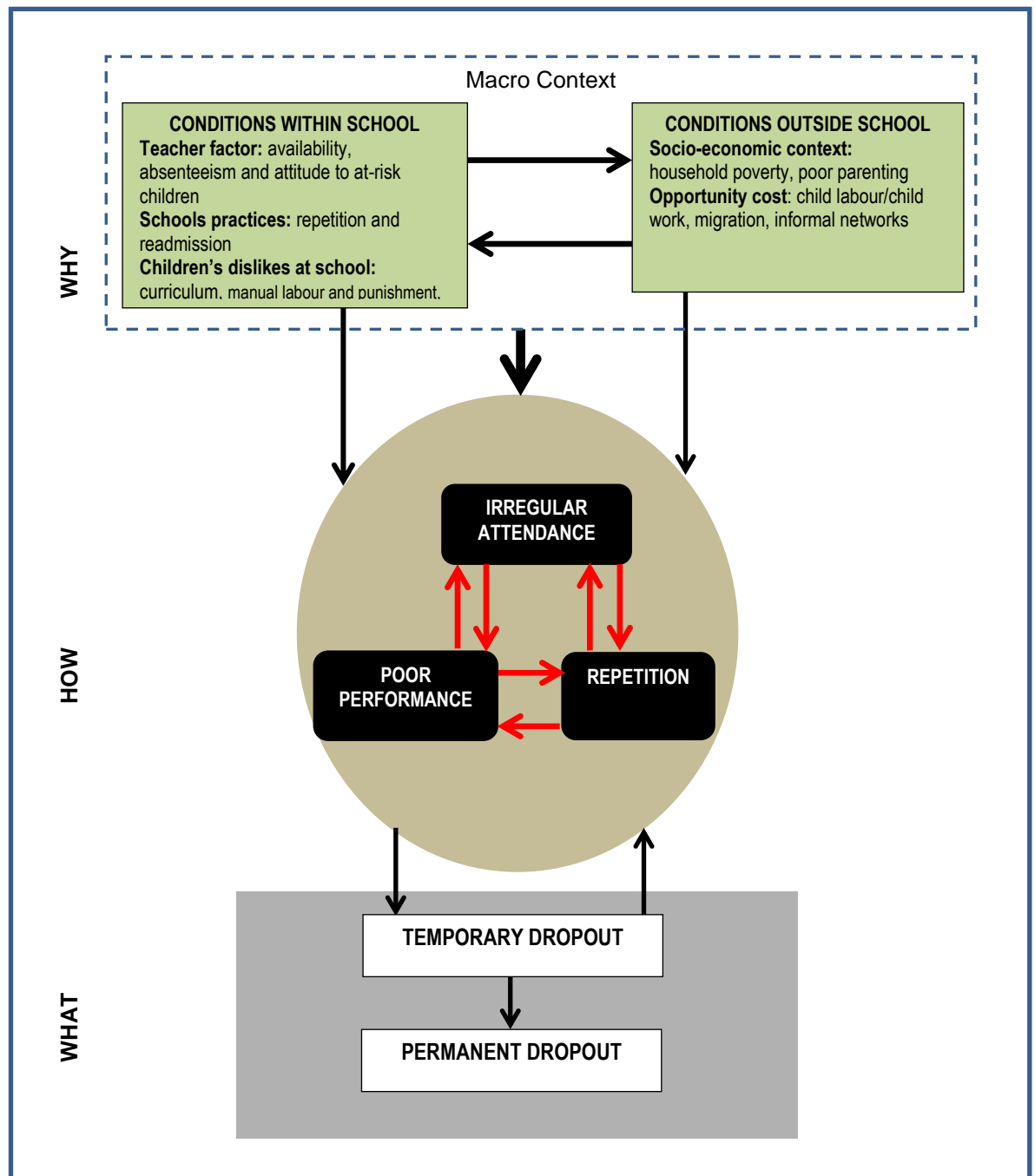
Figure 8:1 shows that the phenomenon occurred in the study area as a result of the myriad of causal factors that shaped the forms dropout might take in respect of different categories of school children. From an analysis of the findings of the

study, it was established that dropout emerged not as a single event but constituted a complex process.

It was found that the process that culminated in dropout was set in motion by a combination of many triggers both within and external to the school environment. I designed the framework in figure 8:1 on the basis of my observation of the context and children's accounts of the interactive influences of household poverty; poor parenting; the opportunity cost of schooling; and the teacher factor, as well as some school practices and processes, to illustrate the dropout process.

In line with the literature, the present study shows that conditions both within and external to the school environment prompted children to drop out. I establish links between the causes, the process and the outcomes in the framework from analyses of children's accounts, school records, my own observations, and the views of teachers and parents.

**Figure 8:1 Theoretical Framework of Dropout: The causal Factors, Process and Outcomes**



Source: the Author

In figure 8:1, the macro context refers to political and economic policy issues that shape the supply of and demand for education. For example, the provision of schools and their resources, and household livelihoods are influenced by macro contexts. As such, the interactive effects of the *why* – conditions within and outside the school that cause dropout – are illustrated by the two arrows

originating from conditions within the school, and aimed at those outside and vice versa respectively .

The effects of the causal factors within and external to the school that prompt pupils to dropout are indicated by the arrows originating in the two boxes (shaded in green) and aimed straight down at the circle. These arrows illustrate the push or pull effect of each factor that signals the beginning of the process of dropout. The interactive push or pull of each factor is illustrated by the short arrow originating in the broken-lined box and aimed at the circle.

The circle and its contents in figure 8:1 are helpful in understanding dropout, as they represent the process. With reference to the conceptual framework in chapter 3, the circle in figure 8:1 illuminates what occurs along the boxed arrow aimed at the drop out box, indicating the experiences of children as they are crossing the threshold of being enrolled to dropout (see also figure 3:1).

The circle in 8:1 depicts what happens to pupils as they begin the dropout process. There are three indicators that may be regarded as precursors of dropout: irregular attendance, poor academic performance and grade repetition. These three indicators constantly interact with each other, as shown by the red arrows. The study found that the point of entry into the process varied. While some pupils began through irregular school attendance, which, as a result, led to poor performance, for others, it was poor performance from the outset, and yet others, on being required to repeat a grade.

As children repeat classes, they inevitably become overage in grade. And children already enrolled at an age two or more years older than that prescribed for their grade more readily enter the process, the value of schooling begins to diminish, and so they attend irregularly. Older pupils are embarrassed at being in the same class as younger children and are also attracted by the prospect of making money from child labour. In combining work with schooling, such children perform poorly academically and lose interest in education. The study found that while in some cases, poor performance preceded repetition and

irregular attendance, irregular attendance per se was found to take the lead in the cases of almost all the children interviewed.

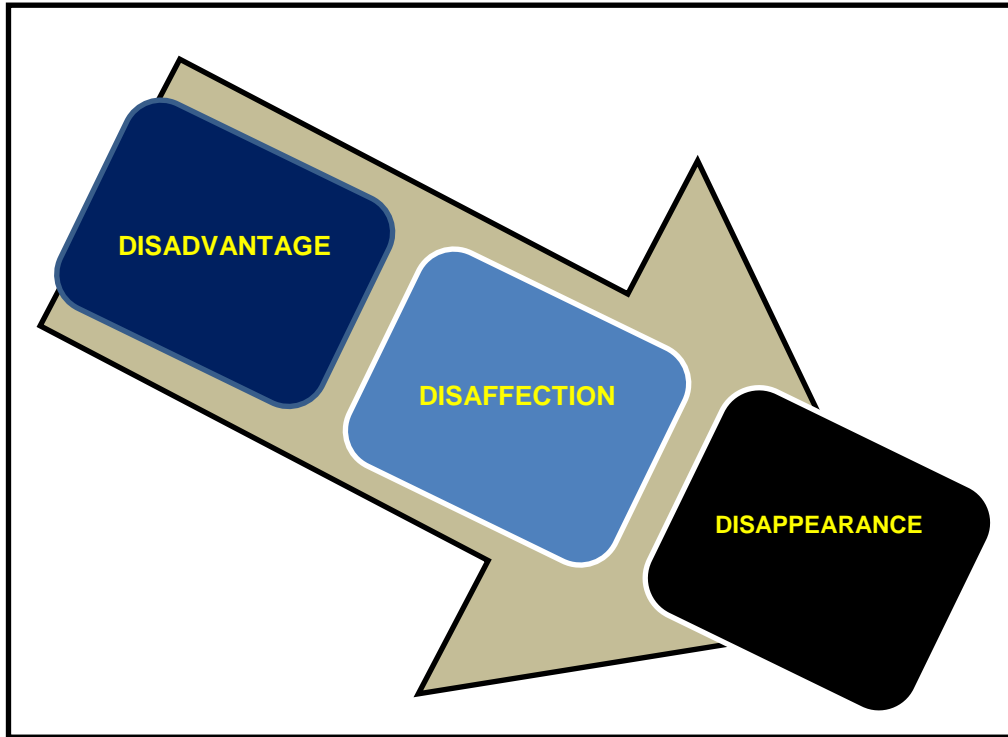
It emerged from the findings that while some causal factors both within and outside the school acted as catalysts to 'push' pupils to drop out, others 'pulled' them away from their studies. In the cases of all 18 children who participated in the study, dropping out of school was the outcome of both push and pull factors. This suggests that dropout does not occur only as a result of push factors but in combination with pull factors as well.

First, pupils drop out temporarily (as indicated in figure 6:1); and from such a position, it is all too simple to fall into a state of permanent dropout (indicated in figure 6:1 by the black arrow pointing from the temporary dropout box to the permanent dropout).

Data analysis from the cases I tracked shows that the entire dropout process can be summed up in three phases: causes that disadvantage children and push–pull them into the process; dynamics within the process (irregular attendance, grade repetition and poor performance) which lead to disaffection; and finally, the disappearance of disaffected pupils from school – dropout.

In other words, the dropout process that emerged from the findings of this study may be described as a continuum – a Disadvantage, Disaffection and Disappearance model – 3D. At the beginning, pupils enter a disadvantaged phase that originates from a poor socio-economic background and unsupportive school environment. Next, they proceed to a phase in which they are disaffected resulting in the interplay between irregular attendance, poor performance, and grade repetition. From there, pupils enter the disappearance phase, in which they first become temporary dropouts before dropping out permanently. This complex sequence of events is summarised in figure 8:2 as the three phases of the dropout process. In the next section, I present the implications of these findings for the universalisation of basic education in Ghana.

**Figure 8:2 The Three (Disadvantage, Disaffection and Disappearance) Phases of the Dropout Process**



*Source: the Author.*

#### **8.4 Implications for the Universalisation of Basic Education in Ghana**

This section considers the implications of the study's findings for policy and practices in terms of universalising basic education in Ghana, and the arena in which education reform through innovation and intervention to discourage dropout and encourage drop-in must take place. Table 8:1 summarises each main study finding and its corresponding policy implications, highlighting the specific areas of figure 8:2 that require attention if the universalisation of basic education in Ghana is to be achieved.

**Table 8:1 Findings and Policy Implications**

<b>Findings</b>	<b>Policy Implications</b>
<b>Different Definitions of Dropout</b>	<b>Disappearance phase: Focus on specificities of dropout</b>
There are five categories of dropout: three possible types of temporary dropout – sporadic, event or long-term – which may lead to one of two types of permanent dropout – unsettled or settled.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need to identify and address specific types of dropout.</li> <li>• The approach to data collection, enrolment management, attendance and dropout should be changed.</li> <li>• Teachers, parents and pupils should work together to become the locus of responsibility for dropout children.</li> </ul>
<b>The Causes of Dropout are Located within and outside School in Ghana</b>	<b>Disadvantage phase: Implications of push and pull factors</b>
The interaction of socio-economic factors – in particular, poverty and the need for economic survival – with the seasonality of economic activities and issues related to teachers – availability, absenteeism and attitude to pupils at risk – is a critical factor that exacerbates dropout.	<p>Schools should be able to adjust their individual calendars to meet the requirements of localised seasonal economic activities.</p> <p>Persistent government demand on teachers' time in seconding them to other national assignments during term time should be discouraged.</p> <p>A teacher-training programme to inform them of their critical role in retention and the prevention of dropout should be implemented.</p>
<b>Dropout Precursors and Process</b>	<b>Disaffection phase: Implications of the dropout process</b>
<p>Irregular attendance, grade repetition and poor performance signal that pupils have begun the journey towards dropout.</p> <p>Teaching pupils of diverse ages and abilities as a monograde, and setting unrealistic conditions for the re-admission of dropouts further worsen the problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clear policy on grade repetition and re-admission is necessary.</li> <li>• Teachers should focus on and devote more time for pupils who underperform and former dropouts who drop-in.</li> <li>• Adopting teaching and learning methods that take into account the diverse ages and abilities of pupils.</li> <li>• Alternative tutoring programmes for children significantly overage in grade necessary</li> </ul>

#### **8.4.1 Policy Implications of Emerging Definitions of School Dropout**

Findings in respect of the views of children who had dropped out of school and other participants in the study indicate that there were at least five different definitions of the term 'dropout' in the research area. An understanding of all such views is necessary if the problems surrounding the identification of a dropout from Ghana's basic education system are to be fully addressed. The five types of dropout that emerged from this study are helpful distinctions with regard to the ramifications for policy in general; the targeting of at-risk children by teachers, school heads and parents in preventing them from dropping out; and for encouraging dropouts to drop back in.

School authorities, parents and children themselves will find definitions provided by child participants in the study useful in removing all ambiguity in the identification of the school dropout. Part of the solution to the dropout problem lies in establishing a distinction between what constitutes acceptable non-attendance and what degree of absence comprises a case of dropout.

A realistic national programme for dropout prevention should thus incorporate the temporary and permanent dimensions of the dropout phenomenon as a guide for school authorities, parents and pupils. The GES must ensure that all stakeholders understand what is regarded as reasonable attendance and unreasonable non-attendance, and the criteria used to determine whether a child is enrolled in school or, conversely, has withdrawn from the formal education system. This information will help teachers, parents and children to easily identify those pupils at risk of dropping out and those who have already dropped out.

It is crucial that in attempting the universalisation of basic education, the MoE and GES bear it in mind that school dropout should not be approached as a finality for all children. Dropout prevention and the encouragement of dropouts to return to school should therefore be focussed on the specific type of withdrawal. For example, programmes and interventions aimed at preventing sporadic dropout from occurring should not be confused with those that are



necessary to prevent other manifestations of the phenomenon (see figure 6:1) such as event, long-term, unsettled, and settled dropout.

Since there are different types of withdrawal and dropout is not always final, it is important that the EMIS approach to dropout data collection take into account both temporary and permanent manifestations. In order to maintain accuracy and integrity of statistics for those pupils who are enrolled and those who have dropped out, it is necessary to establish data collection on a regular basis rather than limit it to the end of the school year, as is the current practice. Collecting data on a termly basis would be useful in capturing an accurate picture of who is enrolled and who has dropped out at any particular time of the school year.

Moreover, in order to avoid duplication, variation and confusion, data collection, maintenance and updating should be coordinated and streamlined. It would be useful for the EMIS to systematise data collection from the school to the municipal/district and national level. This could include institutionalised checking and the cross referencing of data sources from the school to the centre.

In order to implement these innovations, it would be necessary for the EMIS to organise and apply a sustainable system of data entry for all basic school authorities throughout the country. For example, schools could work with SMCs to establish a data management system that provided basic statistical updates on all pupils at regular intervals. The GES should also encourage teachers to develop and implement a system of assessing pupils at risk of dropping out. This might involve examining the possibility of extending the information recorded in school attendance registers and using it as a baseline.

In order to address the dropout phenomenon, the interrelated causes and various problems related to withdrawal require the application of comprehensive models. These could be based on what I refer to as the 'community-school model', which facilitates an all-inclusive approach to the prevention of dropout and the encouragement of drop-in.

'Parent-teacher-community' advocacy collaboration would be a community-school model with the mandate to act as the locus of responsibility towards dropout. The parent-teacher-community advocacy team could collaborate with decentralised education institutions to monitor the problem. First, the team would collate information on events that cause pupils to withdraw. Teachers and parents in particular require such information in order to appreciate that dropping out of school is the result of a dynamic interaction of factors.

Second, the GES could collaborate with the parent-teacher-community advocacy team to develop programmes for targeting pupils who might be in the disadvantaged phase of withdrawal. Such children would then be monitored and their particular needs identified for intervention to prevent them from entering the disaffection phase (see figure 8:2).

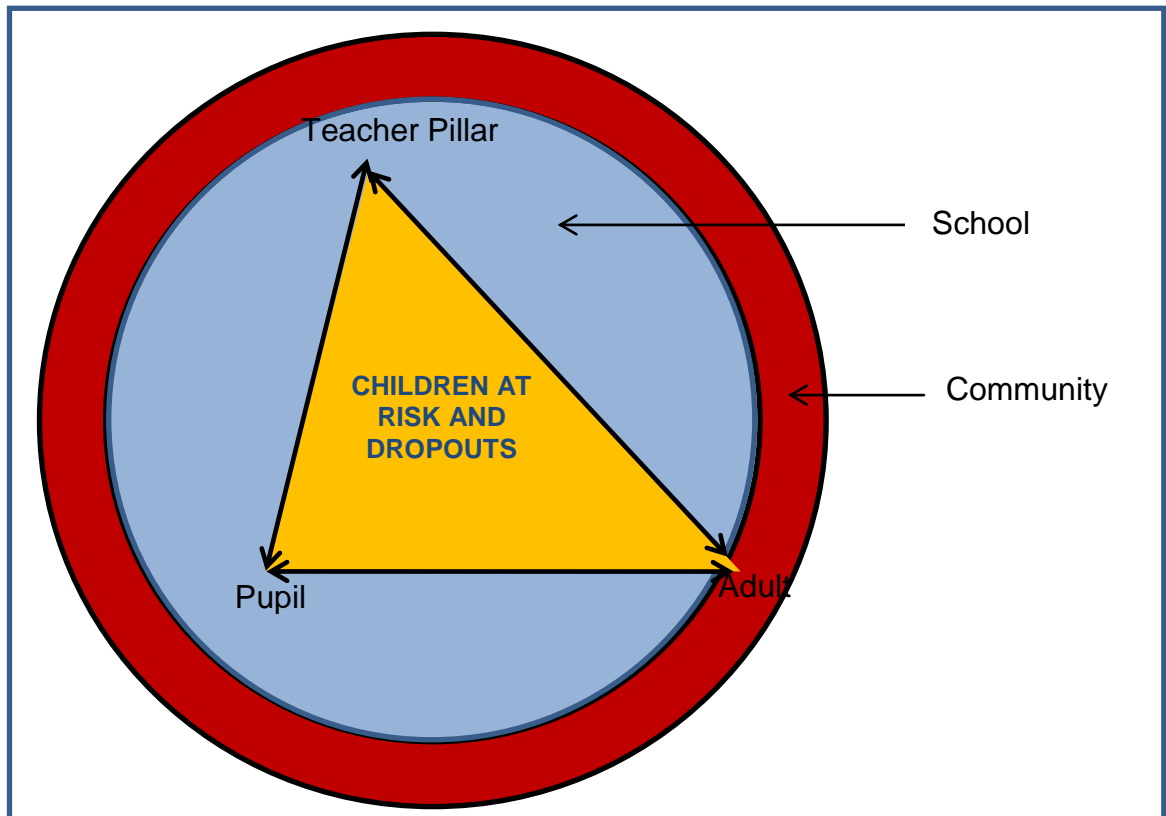
As institutions that are already working in schools, the PTA and SMC could be of much assistance in acting as a further locus of community responsibility towards dropout. For example, an effective PTA and SMC could address the phenomenon at the micro level and go a long way towards remedying many aspects of it. Teachers, the SMC, community members, and pupils themselves could combine forces work together to encourage children on the verge of dropping out to stay in school and try to persuade dropouts to return.

Although this study did not identify any existing concrete locus of responsibility for dropout children, there appear to have been some elements of responsibility for the phenomenon diffused throughout both the community and the school. At one level, credit must be given to pupils who applied peer pressure to encourage their dropout classmates to return.

Additionally, teachers sometimes followed up cases of pupils who had withdrawn and persuaded them to return. Some parents/guardians also took children who had dropped out back to school; and there were instances in which community members articulated their concerns about the phenomenon in general. Therefore, the creation of a locus of responsibility could revolve around

what I term ‘pillars of retention’ at school, community and school–community levels (see figure 8:3).

**Figure 8:3 Pillars of Retention**



*Source: the Author*

At the school level, pupils and teachers could team up to form the first pillar of retention – the ‘peer and teacher-led pillar’ – in order to monitor children’s school attendance and support those who might be at risk of dropping out. The peer and teacher-led pillar could also encourage children who had already dropped out to return to school. Often, children who regularly attend school and those out of school interact and play together, which presents a good opportunity for teachers to encourage pupils to try and persuade their friends to return.

The second pillar of retention – the ‘peer and adult-led pillar’ could operate at the community level to monitor children’s attendance. This pillar would be

responsible for finding out why a child was not in class during school hours; in a sense, it would police school attendance.

The third and final pillar, which would bring together pupils, the school and the community, is the 'peer-teacher-adult-led pillar'. This would involve pupil and teacher collaboration with the PTA and SMC in matters of children's school attendance.

As illustrated in figure 8:3, these pillars of retention would form the points of a triangle of responsibility that aimed to address contextual issues both within and external to the school environment that pushed and/or pulled children to drop out, and operated in as a whole to resolve them.

#### **8.4.2 Push-Pull Causes of School Dropout and Drop-in**

I have argued that identifying the causes of the phenomenon and understanding its process would be useful in the prevention of dropout and the encouragement of drop-in. In addition to the efforts of the GoG to increase enrolment in its implementation of the capitation scheme and school meals programme, discrete initiatives are required to address the dropout issue in particular.

In respect of the clash between the organisation of the academic year and the seasonal migration that pulls children out of school, policy on the school calendar should be reformed and adapted to the requirements of local activities. The study found that there was only an overlap of about a month between such activities and the school term. Thus, it would be a relatively simple matter to introduce an element of flexibility, allowing the authorities to address the persistent irregular attendance and temporary withdrawal caused by the seasonality of economic and agricultural activities that encouraged sporadic dropout. Children who migrated temporarily at certain times would then have an opportunity for uninterrupted school attendance throughout the academic year.

The problems of teacher absenteeism and unavailability are often discussed in terms of contact time lost, neglecting their influence on attendance and dropout.

This study found that issues particularly related to teachers' absence from school, unavailability to teach, and attitude towards pupils at risk were critical indicators in the precipitation of dropout. The MoE and GES should therefore endeavour to end the practice of seconding teachers to national programmes during term time. Moreover, recruiting more teachers and motivating them to accept postings to rural communities would be helpful in most cases of teacher unavailability.

The ability of teachers to identify at-risk children early on and offer them continual support is very important. Accordingly, teacher-training programmes should start building capacity for the identification and management of issues related to children at risk of dropout before teachers are posted. They would then be in a better position to identify the habits and peculiarities of at-risk pupils in class, and monitor such children from the early stages of identification of being at risk. This would help prevent pupils from proceeding to the disaffection phase and dropping out of school. Building the capacity of teachers already in post through in-service training that equipped them to identify pupils entering the disaffection phase would also be useful.

Teachers' classroom behaviour and practices are known to be more than a product of the content of teacher training programmes; they are also influenced by their personal socio-historical past, beliefs and values (Wideen et, al.; Knowles cited in Akyeampong et al., 2002). Teachers assume roles that, in addition to the influence of local culture and context, reflect their personal value systems. As such, they often employ these values and past experiences as lenses through which they make sense of their everyday behaviour. Teacher attitude is therefore considered to be the most important factor in determining successful inclusion programmes (Akyeampong op. cit.; Ackah 2010).

It is argued that because teachers' socio-cultural backgrounds influence their attitudes, beliefs and classroom practice, there is a need to make background more explicit and give it a voice in the training process (Akyeampong et, al., 2002). Teachers play a very important socio-political role in the school and the community. For example, they are seen both as people who stand at the front of

the class teaching and also as role models in society. Harnessing this community function could be most helpful in improving pupil engagement and retention. Teacher training courses should therefore provide an opportunity for trainees to discuss issues relating to the socio-cultural and economic factors that hinder children's participation in education, and the contribution teachers can make to improve the situation. Thus, it is necessary to reflect on and make explicit commonly accepted socio-cultural norms and values associated with the teaching profession in particular contexts as part of a strategy to improve teaching and education quality.

Where the commitment to teaching is weak, the chances are that many teachers will drift out of the profession. In considering teacher shortages that are sometimes caused by high attrition rates owing to the perception of some that teaching is less lucrative than other professions, government policy on teacher training and recruitment requires as a matter of urgency a policy response to bridge the gap between prospective teachers' future expectations and reality.

To reduce the disconnection between theory and training, and the personal images and perceptions trainee teachers hold about the intrinsic nature of teaching and the role of the teacher, closer attention needs to be paid to experiences and ideas about the profession trainees bring with them (Akeampong et al., 2002).

Moreover, teachers should strive to gain insight into the lives of children in a rural context, the forces that shape their identity, and those that put pressure on their commitment to education and school attendance. In this way, teachers will be in a position to empathise with the challenging conditions under which these children must live, and adopt practices that respect pupils' multiple identities – as children in school and as young adults in the community – especially in environments in which work is not an option but an essential component of everyday survival.

### **8.4.3 Dropout Precursors and Process**

It is obvious that there is no quick and simple solution to the dropout problem. Dropout children have wide-ranging characteristics and require different programmes to meet their needs. However, in order to be effective, programmes should primarily address at-risk children.

It would be useful if the GES were to review and clearly spell out its education policy for basic school practice in respect of grade repetition, readmission, discipline, and teacher–pupil relations. The GES should also clearly set out the circumstances under which a pupil should be made to repeat a grade, and consider whether the practice is necessary at all. Furthermore, legislation governing the re-enrolment of dropouts would be more effectively adhered to if it were combined with the implementation of programmes that supported and met the learning needs of such children.

Issues of discipline and teacher–pupil relations might require the involvement of the PTA and SMC in school governance to some degree. Introducing such governance systems would have the potential to eliminate discrimination in all its forms, including bullying and teacher prejudice towards pupils who attended irregularly, performed poorly, or were forced to repeat grades. Another key to the prevention of dropout is to support those pupils who perform poorly and help them overcome feelings of alienation from school.

All these measures hinge on the teacher's capacity to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom and the school as a whole. Pupils at risk of dropping out need positive reinforcement of their efforts. Teachers can ensure that children see the school environment as a place of learning where they are nurtured and encouraged to contribute to civil society, and develop the competencies to earn a decent living. For example, the curriculum should include basic study skills, social skills and life skills. In this regard, the reassessment of education programmes in terms of their potential to meet the actual needs, and address the long-term social and economic interests of pupils is necessary.

In respect of overage pupils wishing to continue their education but who are embarrassed at the prospect of studying with younger children, a preferential system of education should be created. The GES should formulate curricula and equip teachers with methodology that is able to address the diversities in age and ability of pupils. In communities in which the overage-in-grade phenomenon is endemic, it may be necessary to introduce multi-grade and multi-age teaching and learning techniques.

Alternative school programmes might also be useful in providing courses for dropout children who were overage on withdrawal, and those for whom schooling had lost its value but might yet be willing to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The MoE and GES should consider creating an effective system of second-chance programmes. This could be in the form of the introduction of courses for the completion of primary education. It is important to develop a system that offers choices for children who wish to complete their primary education and continue with their studies. Such courses could be held at times that suited the realities of children's other commitments; and should include not only the syllabi for missed years, but also practical life-long learning.

Overage children who migrate seasonally and engage in child labour may benefit from school programmes designed to suit their itinerancy, such as mobile schools and flexible timetables planned to make use of periods when they are not working.

To the extent that dropout causality lies in the households as well as the school, greater importance needs to be focused on government policies aimed at reducing poverty and improving the livelihood of rural communities. Considering parents and community members' indifferent attitude towards dropout, governments' programmes to reduce household poverty need to be intensified. Also, those charged with improving the education system need to give priority to processes and practices within the school and examine ways of making schooling relevant to the realities in the job market.



### **8.5 Reflections on the Research Process**

Having completed the study, there is a need to reflect on the research process and point out the strengths and limitations of the entire undertaking. This will be facilitated through a critical discussion of the approach used to conduct the inquiry, as well as outlining a number of areas in which further research is recommended to complement the literature to date.

#### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

The primary significance of this study is the opportunity it afforded to listen to the narratives of children who had dropped out of school and bring their stories to the fore. Through interviews, field observation and the documentary analysis of a single phenomenon, the fieldwork was able to combine the use of different methods in a single study. For example, through the use of the interview, I was able to obtain much qualitative biographical information around the dropout experience.

The nuances in meaning that dropout children attached to the phenomenon came to light. Through direct field observation, I also gained firsthand insight into the kinds of activities children engaged in out of school, as well as the conditions within the school that pushed and/or pulled them to drop out. Documentary analysis of children's school-going behaviour patterns allowed me to cover a reasonably large number of attendance records, which together with children's stories exemplified the different forms dropout took in the study area. At the same time, documentary analysis also gave me the opportunity to crosscheck the varying periods different children had attended school before dropout; and also the length of time they had been out of school. In this fashion, secondary data greatly improved the richness of the information gathered for the study.

In addition to highlighting the views of dropout children on the phenomenon, the study was also able to explore issues surrounding dropout from the points of view of parents and teachers. Thus, by adopting a multivariate approach, a grounded perspective on school dropout was provided.

Though the study was successful in collecting and analysing data to address the research questions, there were also some limitations to its implementation; and there were also a number of challenges that confronted my use of the methodology and methods of data collection.

First, Narkwa community was located in an area in which a great deal of research by NGOs focusing on poverty had already been conducted. As a result, the study community could be described as suffering from 'research fatigue'. Some parents told me that although many different people came to ask questions all the time, their situation had not changed. In a related example, some children withdrew their assent in terms of agreeing to participate in the study. For example, there was an instance in which a child gave assent but after one meeting, decided not to participate any more.

Another difficulty was related to the use of photographs as a method of data collection. First, I had to spend considerable time teaching the children how to operate the disposable cameras. Second, at their first attempt, their pictures only showed friends and family members, subjects that were not particularly relevant to the issue I was exploring. I thus had to buy another set of cameras for them, which proved to be very expensive.

Some difficulties also arose from the longitudinal research aspect of the study. For example, when I returned to the field for a second round of data collection between October and April 2010, and to validate the first set of data, I found that some of the children who had originally participated in the study between May and October 2008 had disappeared and could not be traced.

Research methodology limitations also affected the entire study in various ways. First, selection of children for participation in the study was limited to those dropout cases I was able to track and gain physical access to. Although I also travelled to the communities that dropout children migrated to when they stopped attending school, my access to them was still restricted to those I came

into contact with. As a result, interviews were limited to those dropout children I was able to locate.

Second, broadening the variety of cases to include children as young as six years old would have captured the views of more children, thus increasing the representation of dropout cases in the study; but such young dropouts often disappeared and could not be easily located.

Another factor that influenced the dropout children included in the study was migration of children and parents relocation of their families to other parts of the country which was hard to reach. If most dropout children had not moved away from their communities, it would have facilitated the process of selecting participants for the study. However, as it was, the process of selecting participants was cumbersome and time-consuming. The help of some dropout children, pupils and teachers who had spent at least five years teaching in the community notwithstanding, I had to travel long distances and also spent considerable time in selecting cases for the study.

Language is another issue that is likely to have influenced the quality of data gathered for this study. Although English is the official language of Ghana, neither the children who participated in the study nor the majority of their parents could express themselves in English during interview. I therefore had to conduct interviews in the local language – Fante – before transcribing and translating them in English. My proficiency in Fante notwithstanding, the translation process might still have led to a loss of meaning to a certain extent, which could have negatively affected the quality of the information I gathered.

## **8.6 Concluding Remarks**

This study has shown that dropout is an outcome of a process set in motion by a myriad of contextual factors both within the school and external to the school environment. As noted earlier, the moment the process is set in motion which may manifest as recurrent irregular attendance, poor performance and repetition, if no intervention is introduced at any stage, the first outcome is that

the child becomes a sporadic dropout and from there, proceeds to event dropout, and subsequently long-term dropout.

Often, what starts as temporary withdrawal from school eventually results in permanent termination. The complexity of the process is reflected in the difficulty school authorities face in defining dropout and consequently, their inability to deal with the phenomenon.

Apart from the lack of a coherent definition of dropout among teachers, parents or children, there is no clear locus of responsibility for the prevention of dropout. Moreover, the overwhelming number of children; combined with the extent of those overage in a class that is not designed for multi-grade teaching; as well as issues related to conflict between teacher and pupil encourage dropout.

As a result, pupils who are disadvantaged and at risk of dropping out of school are often left to their fate. Such children become disaffected and eventually disappear from school. In view of the above, policy on dropout prevention should target disadvantaged and disaffected children before they disappear from school. This could be done by establishing and empowering the three pillars of retention at both the school and community levels to support children.

The solution to dropout prevention also lies in addressing the concerns of parents and children on the quality of education. Disadvantaged pupils should neither be ignored nor be rendered 'invisible' at school on account of their isolation. Moreover, the basic school practice whereby pupils of different ages are taught together in one grade using a single approach and learning from the same curriculum should be reformed.

This study has shown that dropout is an outcome of a process. The moment the process manifests as recurrent irregular attendance, if nothing is done by way of prevention, the first outcome is that the child becomes a sporadic dropout and from there, proceeds to event dropout, and subsequently long-term dropout. In theory, what often starts as temporary withdrawal from school

eventually results in permanent dropout. If the pupils who are 'at risk' are ignored and rendered 'invisible' at school, they may go through the process and drop out to become tomorrows out of school children. It is only when we address the problem of school dropout by preventing it together with getting all out of school children to school will the broader goals of education for all and the UN declaration that education is a human right will be realised.

### **Implications for Further Research**

This study has explored the dropout experience of basic school children in a rural Ghanaian context focusing on the various types of dropout, the process leading to it, and the causes of dropout and drop-in. During the study, a number of critical themes emerged that affect school attendance at the basic education level but which remain under-researched. Such areas include:

- How school discipline shapes access.
- The manner in which the progression of basic school graduates to post-basic education and their position in terms of the job market shapes the aspirations of school children. That is a study on the how the judgement of future employment prospects by gauging current local labour market trends shapes education decisions.
- An extended longitudinal study tracking cohorts of pupils and dropouts (e.g. over a decade). For example tracking dropouts and drop-ins over a decade to explore where they are and what they are doing would be interesting.
- How do family–community–school–local authority relationships interact to shape patterns of access? How have these been changing and why? What local level initiatives have been taken to improve sustained meaningful access? What higher level initiatives (local government, national policy etc.) have had an impact and why?



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Reasons for having Overage Pupils

	Reason 1		Reason 2		Reason 3	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>Abonko</b>	Poverty	Poverty	Child labour	Poverty	Poverty	Child labour
<b>Akobima</b>	Repetition	Repetition	Drop out and Drop-in	Drop out and Drop-in	Late enrolment	Late enrolment
<b>Holiness</b>	Peer pressure	Peer influence	Ignorance of parents	Ignorance: not aware children's age	Poverty	Poverty
<b>Kormantse</b>	Late enrolment: go fishing	Late enrolment: help mothers to sell	Lack of commitment to school	Take care of siblings	Repeaters	Poverty
<b>BMK Nurudeen</b>	Because of Arabic studies	Because of Arabic studies	Repetition	Late enrolment	Late enrolment	Repetition
<b>Narkwa</b>	Late enrolment	Late enrolment	Lack of interest	Poverty	Normal to start school late	Child labour
<b>Saltpond</b>	Repetition	Repetition	Late enrolment	Late enrolment	Lack of parental care	Poverty
<b>Smerbu</b>	Dropout/Drop-in	Repetition		Dropout/Drop-in		-

Source: ComSS data

## Appendix 2: Problems arising from Overage Children in Class

	Problem 1	Problem 2	Problem 3
<b>Abonko</b>	Bullying of younger ones	Indiscipline	Poor academic performance
<b>Akobima</b>	Indiscipline	Bullying younger ones	-
<b>Holiness</b>	Indiscipline	Poor performance	-
<b>Kormantse</b>	Indiscipline	Bullying	Absenteeism, truancy, drop out due to teasing and poor academic performance
<b>BMK</b>	Truancy	Drop out	Bullying younger ones
<b>Nurudeen</b>			
<b>Narkwa</b>	Indiscipline	Bullying	Find it difficult to learn
<b>Saltpond</b>	Drop out due to poor performance and feeling ashamed	Do not fit in class: don't contribute	Indiscipline
<b>Smerbu</b>	Do not perform well in class	-	-

Source: ComSS data

### Appendix 3: Teachers Reasons for Pupils Dropping out of School

	Reason 1		Reason 2		Reason 3	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>Abonko</b>	Irregular attendance parental care	Poverty/child labour	Poverty/child labour	Pregnancy	Poor academic performance	Poor academic performance
<b>Akobima</b>	Migration	Pregnancy	Poverty	Poverty	Poor academic performance	Migration
<b>Holiness</b>	Poverty/child labour	Poor academic performance	Truancy	Absenteeism	Poor academic performance	Poverty/child labour
<b>Kormantse</b>	Poverty/child labour	Poverty/child labour	Lack of parental care	Lack of parental care	Teacher too hard on them	Teacher too hard on them
<b>BMK Nurudeen</b>	Lack of parental control/Irregular attendance	Lack of parental control/Irregular attendance	Lack of interest in school/Poor performance	Pregnancy/Poor performance	Long distance to school	Migration
<b>Narkwa</b>	Poverty/child labour/Irregular attendance	Poverty/child labour/Irregular attendance	Lack of parental care/Poor performance	Pregnancy/Poor performance	Migration	Migration
<b>Saltpond</b>	Poverty/child labour	Poverty/child labour	Transfer	Lack of parental care	Poor academic performance	Pregnancy
<b>Smerbu</b>	Lack of school fees	Lack of school fees	Lack of table and chair	Lack of table and chair	Lack of books/others	Lack of books/others

Source: ComSS data



#### Appendix 4: Precursors of Dropout

	Sign 1	Sign 2	Sign 3
<b>Abonko</b>	Poor academic performance	Irregular attendance	-
<b>Akobima</b>	Lack of basic schooling needs	Poor academic performance	Having affair with opposite sex
<b>Holiness</b>	Irregular attendance	Lateness to school	-
<b>Kormantse</b>	Irregular attendance	Do not bring learning materials to school	Give excuses
<b>BMK Nurudeen</b>	Irregular attendance	Lateness to school	-
<b>Narkwa</b>	Poor academic performance	Irregular attendance	Lack of basic schooling needs
<b>Saltpond</b>	Irregular attendance	Not serious in Class	Financial problems
<b>Smerbu</b>	Disrespectful	Lack of basic schooling needs	Irregular attendance

Source: ComSS data

## Appendix 5: Conditions for Readmission of Dropout Children

	Condition 1	Condition 2	Condition 3
<b>Abonko</b>			
<b>Akobima</b>	Must be law abiding	Must be punctual and regular	-
<b>Holiness</b>	Repay admission fee	Must promise to stay in school	-
<b>Kormantse</b>	Will repeat	Promise to be of good behaviour	Name is not written in register for some time
<b>BMK Nurudeen</b>	Will repeat	Will sign a bond	-
<b>Narkwa</b>	Placed on probation	-	-
<b>Saltpond</b>	Will repeat	Must promise to be of good behaviour	Must be punctual and regular in school
<b>Smerbu</b>	Must repent	-	-

*Source: ComSS data*

## Appendix 6: School Attendance Patterns by Grade and Term (2007/08)

		Term 1					Term 2					Term 3				
Status		Pattern 1	Pattern 2	Pattern 3	Pattern 4	Total	Pattern 1	Pattern 2	Pattern 3	Pattern 4	Total	Pattern 1	Pattern 2	Pattern 3	Pattern 4	Total
	Category	0	1-30	31-50	51-72		0	1-30	31-50	51-72		0	1-30	31-50	51-72	
Basic 1	Count	11	9	13	203	236	12	28	57	139	236	8	46	85	93	232
	% Class	4.7	3.8	5.5	86.0	100	5.1	11.9	24.2	58.9	100	3.4	19.8	36.6	40.1	100
	% Term	31.4	60	33.3	30.1	30.9	48	66.7	26.8	30.1	31.8	57.1	69.7	35.3	21.1	30.5
Basic 4	Count	9	2	17	170	198	1	4	62	107	174	2	12	70	122	206
	% Class	4.5	1.0	8.6	85.9	100	0.6	2.3	35.6	61.5	100	1.0	5.8	34.0	59.2	100
	% Term	25.7	13.3	43.6	25.2	25.9	4	9.5	29.1	23.2	23.5	14.3	18.2	29.05	27.7	27.1
Basic 6	Count	12	0	5	133	150	10	5	63	90	168	1	7	39	104	151
	% Class	8	0	3.3	88.7	100	6.0	3.0	37.5	53.6	100	0.7	4.6	25.8	68.9	100
	% Term	34.3	0	12.8	19.7	19.6	40	11.9	29.6	19.5	22.6	7.1	10.6	16.2	23.6	19.8
Basic 7	Count	3	4	4	169	180	2	5	31	126	164	3	1	47	121	172
	% Class	1.7	2.2	2.2	93.9	100	1.2	3.0	18.9	76.8	100	1.7	0.6	27.3	70.3	100
	% Term	8.6	26.7	10.3	25.0	23.6	8	11.9	14.6	27.3	22.1	21.4	1.5	19.5	27.5	22.6
Total	Count	35	15	39	675	764	25	42	213	462	742	14	66	241	440	761
	% Class	4.6	2.0	5.1	88.4	100	3.4	5.7	28.7	62.3	100	1.8	8.7	31.7	57.8	100
	% Term	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: CREATE School tracking data from CRIQPEG

## Appendix 7: School Terms and Economic Activities that Disrupt Children's Schooling

Academic Year	Month	Seasonal Activities of Dropouts	Gender of Child	Effect on Schooling
Second Term	*January	Fishing (Penga <sup>42</sup> ) Farming—clearing farm lands	Boys	Irregular attendance
	*February	Farming—clearing & planting and Fishing (Penga)	Boys	Irregular attendance
	*March	Farming—planting and Fishing (Penga)	Boys	Irregular attendance Sporadic dropout
	*April	Farming—planting maize & cassava, Fishing (Penga)	Boys	Vacation
Third Term	*May	Building/Mending of Canoes, fishing nets Fishing (Penga) and Farming—weeding continues	Boys	School begins with children (especially boys) not reporting early for re-opening
	+June	Building/Repair of Canoes, fishing nets Fishing (Penga) and Fishing (Wrekye & Ahyakow) <sup>43</sup> begins, Farmland—clearing cassava, Early maize harvest	Boys	Sporadic dropout of boys begins with intermittent attendance
	+July	Migration & Settling in Half Assini to fish and Sell and Farming—planting begins	Boys	Sporadic dropout of boys intensifies, children miss end of term examinations
	+August	Migrant children settle in Half Assini to Fish (Wrekye & Ahyakow) and Sell, Farming continues—weeding under crops, harvest of cash and food crops (cassava, citrus, palm fruits, pineapple)	Boys & Girls	Vacation
First Term	+Sept	Fishing (Wrekye & Ahyakow) activities and selling slows down -- Migrants children return, Fishing (Penga) continues Farming—harvest season of cash and food crops (cassava, citrus, palm fruits, pineapple).	Boys & Girls	Temporary dropouts return to school Sporadic dropouts enter a full cycle of one year dropouts, Children may not report to school (journey to drop out begins for some)
	<sup>44</sup> *Oct	Fishing (Wrekye & Ahyakow) ends Last batch of migrant children return, Minor Fishing (Penga)	Boys & Girls	Late arrivals enter school Parents visit school to negotiate return of temporary dropouts to school

<sup>42</sup> Penga is a small fishing canoe used by small scale artisanal fishermen during the minor fishing season. They are not built to travel very far at sea and they do not migrate unlike the bigger ones.

<sup>43</sup> Wrekye and Akyekow are bigger fishing canoes used by small scale artisanal fishermen during in the major fishing season. These canoes are built with the capacity to travel on the sea to neighbouring countries

<sup>44</sup> The annual local festival is celebrated from 20<sup>th</sup> October onwards

	*Nov	Migrant Parents return and Minor Fishing (Penga)	Boys & Girls	Parents visit school to negotiate return of temporary dropouts to school
	<sup>45</sup> *Dec	Fishing (Penga) Clearing of Farmlands (Minor Farming)	Boys	Vacation

Source: Field notes

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<sup>45</sup> The local annual festival is celebrated in early December

\*Minor season

+Major season

## Appendix 8: Photographs of Activities that Disrupts Children's Schooling



**Photograph 1:** A Girl Bagging Cassava While Other Children are in School



**Photograph 2:** A Girl Gathering of Palm Fruits instead of going to School

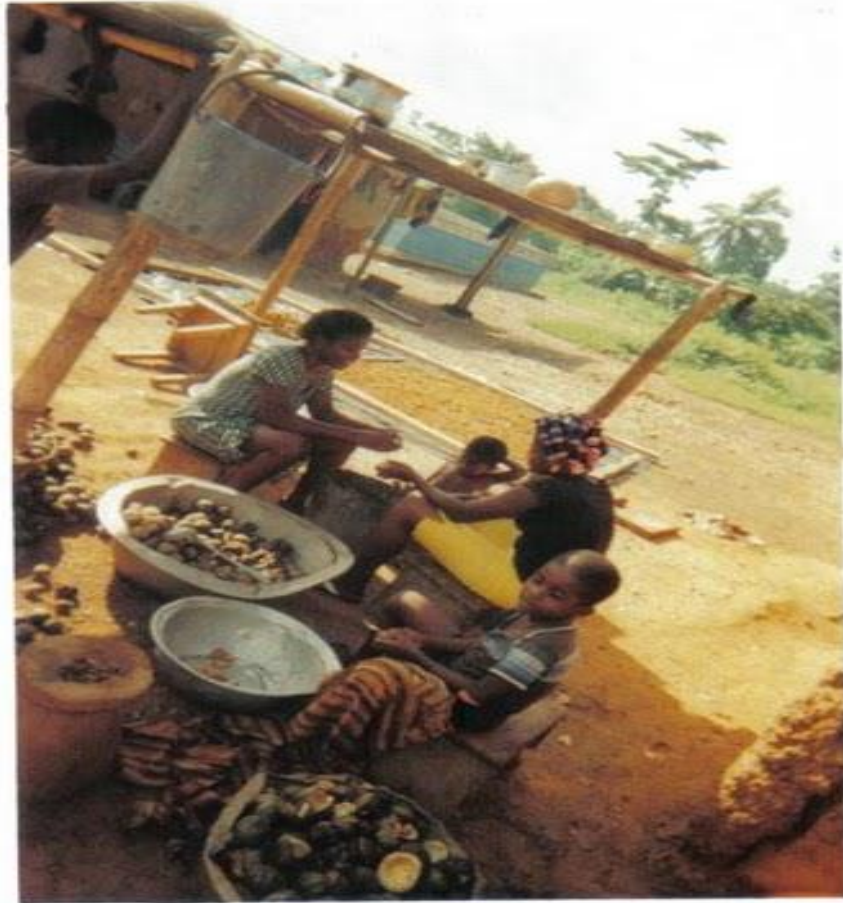




**Photograph 3:** A Dropout Boy Weaving Basket instead of Schooling



**Photograph 4:** Younger Children who did not go to School



**Photograph 5:** A Dropout Child Cracking amadamfoa Seeds



**Photograph 6:** School Children watching Video in the evening in the Village





**Photograph 7:** A Dropout Boy entering a video Centre in the Village



**Photograph 8:** School Children Boarding vehicle to migrate prior to Vacation



**Photograph 9:** A Dropout Boy (arrow insert) Hustling at the Beach



**Photograph 10:** A Dropout Boy bargaining his gains for the day with a Customer





**Photograph 11:** Younger and Older Girls Babysit their Siblings



**Photograph 12:** Boy Working at the Beach Instead of Going to School



**Photograph 13:** A Boy who left school to work 'Hours' for Money



**Photograph 14:** Two Pupils Carrying Palm Fruit to Sell before School





**Photograph 15:** Pupils Attending to a Makeshift Mobile Phone Business during School Hours



**Photograph 16:** Pupil Selling during Break time



**Photograph 17:** Pupils Punished to Kneel down at School



**Photograph 18:** Pupils walking long Distance to School

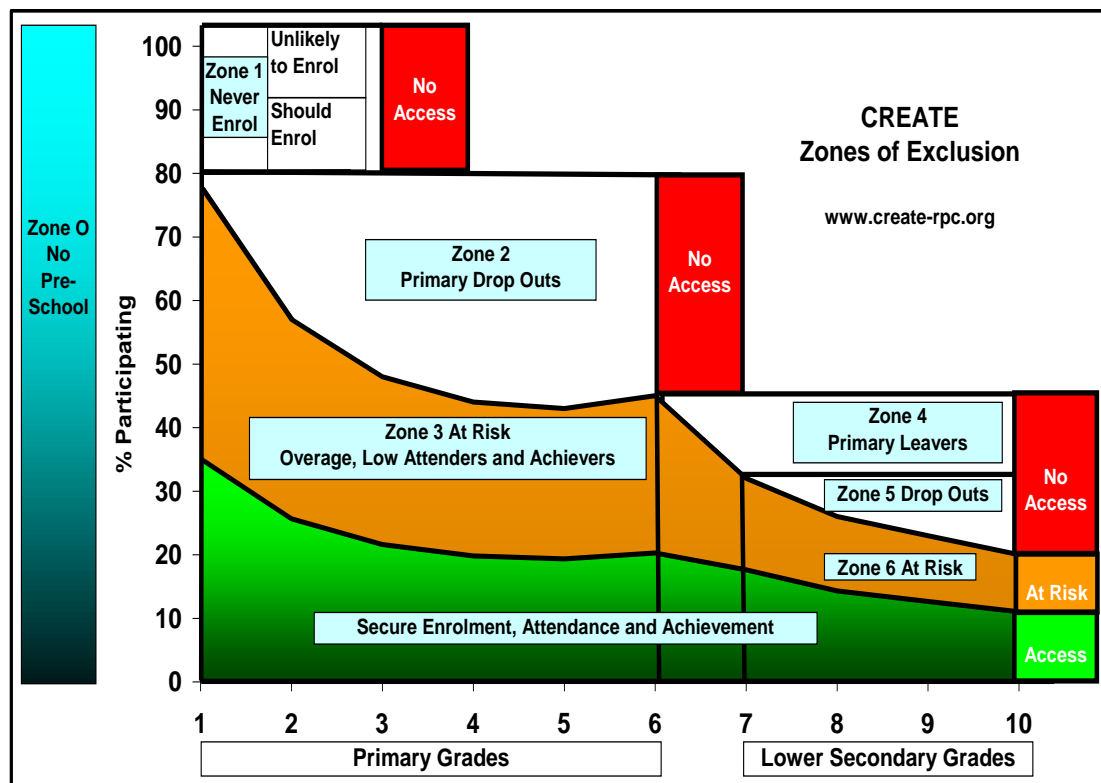




**Photograph 19:** Some Pupils in School Wearing Official (Yellow) and Unofficial Clothes

## Appendix 9: CREATE Model of Zones of Exclusion

CREATE identifies 6 zones of exclusion. Appendix 9 shows a cross sectional model by grade of participation which locates those who are being excluded. The model illuminates how enrolments decline steeply through the primary grades, and how those attending irregularly and achieving poorly fall into “at risk” zones. In the hypothetical model, more than half of all children leave before completing primary school, and about half of the primary completers continue into lower secondary school where attrition continues (Lewin, 2007). The Figure in Appendix 9 presents a schematic illustration of the ‘zones of exclusion’. In this thesis the typology of dropout discussed children who may be located in *Zones 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6* in the Ghanaian context.



Source: Lewin 2007



Zone 0 - children experience little or no pre-school access.

Zone 1 - children who never enroll and attend school.

Zone 2 - primary dropout children who after initial entry have been excluded. Depending on the age at enrolment and dropping out, the dropout status of children in Zone 2 may be temporary because of the possibility of returning to school.

Zone 3 - over age children, irregular attenders and low-achievers at the primary level who are 'silently excluded' and learn little. These children are in school but at risk of dropping out permanently.

Zone 4 - primary leavers who are not entering lower secondary; In the Ghanaian context, some children may enter Zone 4 because they could not make the transition from primary (grade six) to lower secondary school (grade seven).

Zone 5 - lower secondary dropouts, these children are also characterised by over age in grade, recurrent intermittent attendance and child labour.

Zone 6 - overage children, irregular attenders, low-achievers and those silently excluded at lower secondary level. These children are at risk of dropping out from lower secondary school. They are intermittent attendees and low achievers resulting in the risk of dropping out permanently.

*Source: Adapted from Lewin 2007*

## Appendix 10: Pupils Interview Guide

### 1. Basic data

Date of interview:	
Date interview checked:	
Location of interview:	

Which school(s) did you attend? .....

Approximately how far was the school from where you live? Km(s).....

When did you start primary school? (year).....

How old were you? (age).....

When did you leave school? (year).....

If you are more than six years old why did you not go to school when you were six? .....

How old were you when you left? (age).....

Which grade were you in when you left school? .....

Tell me about your time at school (e.g. missed a lot of school, failed to be promoted to next grade, etc)

### Themes and Possible Probe Questions

Possible Themes to be probed	Possible Questions to guide probes
<b>Understanding and Interpretation of drop out</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The extent to which dropping out is a process</li> <li>The stages in the process</li> <li>How the stages occur</li> <li>The extent to which the perceived precursors of dropping out lead to eventual dropping out</li> <li>How the perceived precursors of dropping out explain dropping out</li> </ul>	<p>How do you understand and interpret dropout?</p> <p>Who is a drop out?</p> <p>How does dropping out occur?</p> <p>To what extent can dropping out be considered as a process?</p> <p>What are the stages in the process of dropping out?</p> <p>How do the stages occur?</p> <p>What signs does a child show before dropping out?</p> <p>At what stage did you drop out of school?</p> <p>Why did you drop out of school?</p> <p>Who decided that you should stop going to school?</p> <p>When you dropped out of school what were you doing at home?</p> <p>Whilst at home were you still interested in schooling?</p> <p>What is your aspiration about school?</p> <p>Would you returned to school?</p> <p>Why have you returned to school?</p> <p>Why have they placed you in that grade?</p> <p>What grade will you prefer if you are asked to choose and why?</p> <p>Who decides about where to place you?</p> <p>On what grounds was the decision based to place you at this grade?</p> <p>If the problem that caused you to drop out emerges again what will you do?</p> <p>If some of your brothers and sisters go to school what are the main reasons they go and you do not?</p> <p>In the last year when you were at school how often were you absent?</p> <p>What was the main reason?</p> <p>Were you absent for one month or more?</p> <p>If so what was the main reason?</p> <p>Were there some days of the week you were absent more than others? Name the days?</p> <p>What was the main reason?</p> <p>Were there some times of the year you were absent more than others? Name the months?</p> <p>What was the main reason?</p> <p>Did you ever find it difficult returning to school after one of these long absences?</p> <p>Did any teachers help you catch up with missed lessons?</p> <p>Do you like school? Why?</p> <p>What is the one thing you do not like about going to school?</p>

	<p>Have you repeated some years at school? Why do you think that was?</p> <p>Who decided you should repeat?</p> <p>Did repeating a year help you with your school work?</p> <p>Were there any particular problems for you in class as a repeater? What are these?</p> <p>Do you think going school is important?</p> <p>If yes what are the main reasons?</p> <p>If no what are the main reasons?</p> <p>How do you think not going to back to school might affect what happens in your life, now and in the future?</p> <p>If you went back to school what grade do you think you could reach?</p> <p>Do you eat before coming to school?</p>
<p><b>OUTSIDE SCHOOL</b></p> <p><b>Social/economic structures in the home and community that conspire or promote pupils decision to stay in or return to school</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the social/economic structures in the home and community that influence/shape decision and pattern of school attendance?</li> <li>• How do the social/economic structure(s) identified in the home and community conspire or promote attendance, retention and re-enrolment?</li> <li>• What are the arrangements in the home and community that promote dropouts decision to return to school?</li> <li>• What are arrangements in the home or community that conspire attendance, completion and re-enrolment?</li> </ul>	<p>Who takes care of you?</p> <p>If you have to pay for anything at school who pays?</p> <p>What is the education level of your parents/caregiver?</p> <p>What challenges do you face outside school that affects your decision about schooling?</p> <p>How do the challenges facing you outside school make you feel about schooling?</p> <p>When not in school what do you do?</p> <p>Do you earn some income to support yourself or parents?</p> <p>If yes what work do you do?</p> <p>For how long have you done this work?</p> <p>How much do you make out of this work?</p> <p>What do you do with the money you make from the work?</p> <p>If you work tell me about events at the place where you work?</p> <p>Who decides that you should go back to school?</p> <p>When you find learning difficult, who helps you at home?</p> <p>Do your teachers ever visit your house to talk about your progress at school?</p> <p>Does anyone else visit your house to talk about your progress at school? If so who?</p> <p>Do your parents / caregiver ever go to the school to discuss your progress?</p> <p>Is there anything that would encourage you to stay at school longer?</p> <p>Do you know any children who are not going to school?</p> <p>Why do they not go to school?</p>
<p><b>SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM</b></p> <p><b>The issues and challenges confronting dropouts in their attempt to access schooling and their experiences in school (explanation of their decision and pattern of behaviour about schooling)</b></p>	<p>How do you see the school environment?</p> <p>How do you see the classroom environment?</p> <p>What challenges do you face at school after returning to school?</p> <p>How do the challenges you face in the school make you feel about schooling?</p> <p>How does the teacher relate with you in the classroom?</p> <p>Is there any difference in the way the teacher relates with you and other children who have never dropped out</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What issues and challenges confront dropouts in their attempt at accessing schooling?</li> <li>• How do the issues and challenges confronting dropouts explain their decision in relation to schooling?</li> <li>• How does the school respond to the special needs of children on the verge of dropping out and dropouts who return?</li> <li>• What are the learning needs of dropouts who return to school?</li> <li>• How does the school meet these special needs of pupils?</li> <li>• To what extent are the schools able to respond to the special needs of dropouts?</li> <li>• How do dropouts who return to school perceive their chances of completing school?</li> <li>• How do the schools responses to dropouts encourage them to stay on or drop out again?</li> <li>• How do pupils who have returned to school perceive their chances of completing school?</li> </ul>	<p>of school?</p> <p>If yes how does this make you feel?</p> <p>Does your teacher have any special attention to you after you have come back to school?</p> <p>Do teachers have remedial with you?</p> <p>How are you able to catch up with other children in the class?</p> <p>What does this mean to you with regards to your aspirations about schooling?</p> <p>In the classroom what do you do?</p> <p>During break what do you do?</p> <p>How often do you participate during lessons in the classroom?</p> <p>Did you find the lessons at school easy or difficult?</p> <p>What were the easiest lessons?</p> <p>What were the most difficult lessons?</p> <p>Did your teachers speak the same language as you do at home?</p> <p>Did you have to do homework when you went to school?</p> <p>If you had to do homework did you have space at home to do it?</p> <p>Have you missed school this term? If yes, what was the cause?</p> <p>If you had to choose between coming to school and doing some work at home or in the community to earn some money, which one would you choose? Why?</p> <p>Is there anything that could prevent you from completing school? Do you have friends who have dropped out from school? Why did they drop out? Could this happen to you?</p> <p>Do your parents give you everything you need to attend school?</p> <p>How do you feel about the way your teacher or head teacher disciplines children in this school?</p> <p>What do you think the school should do to make school more interesting so you always want to come to school?</p> <p>How do you feel about the way your teacher treats you in class when teaching?</p> <p>How do you see the classroom environment?</p> <p>Is there any difference in the way the teacher relates with you and other children who have never dropped out of school?</p> <p>Does your teacher have any special attention to you when teaching?</p> <p>How do are you able to catch up with other children in the class?</p> <p>What does this mean to you with regards to your aspirations about schooling?</p>
<p><b>The critical influences on the daily experiences of dropouts that shape their aspirations in relation to schooling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do dropouts do when they are out of school?</li> </ul>	<p>What do you do in the morning before you go to school?</p> <p>What do you do in the morning when you are not in school?</p> <p>Afternoon when not in school?</p> <p>Evening after school?</p> <p>Are you doing any kind of work?</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does what they do shape their aspiration for schooling?</li> <li>• What are the daily activities of dropouts?</li> <li>• How do their activities explain their decision about schooling?</li> <li>• What type of network do dropouts fall?</li> <li>• How does the type of network that pupils belong conspire or promote attendance and re-admission?</li> <li>• What issues influence the experiences of dropouts in their daily life?</li> </ul>	<p>If you are working how many hours do you work in a day?</p> <p>Do you get paid?</p> <p>If so about how much do you get each week?</p> <p>What kind of work do you hope to be doing in 5 years time?</p> <p>What kind of work do you expect to be doing in 15 years time?</p> <p>Who do you spend most of your time with?</p> <p>If you are spending time with other children, are any of them attending school?</p> <p>Do you go belong to any groups?</p> <p>Would you like to go to school again? If so what are the main reasons?</p> <p>If no what are the main reasons you do not want to go to school again?</p> <p>Do you think you will ever go to school again?</p> <p>If yes, how do you think this will happen? What will you do?</p> <p>Has anyone spoken to you about going back to school?</p> <p>If so who spoke to you?</p> <p>What did they say?</p> <p>Has anyone in your household ever had contact with a school about you going back to school?</p> <p>Has anyone from a school had contact with someone in your household about you going back to school?</p> <p>Is there anything that can be done to help you go back to school?</p> <p>Who are your friends?</p> <p>What do you do with your best friends?</p>
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Child Opinions about being at School Learning and Sources of Support

Life Events that influenced schooling decision

Please tell me about any events in your life that have prevented you from going to back to school.

Please tell me about any events in your life that is likely to prevent you from finishing school.

What were the events and when did they happen?

### **Daily Activities**

Day of Week	
Date	
Main activity	12.00 am -12.00 pm
Main activity	12.00pm – 12.00 am

### **DROPOUT WHO HAVE NOT RETURNED**

#### **Repetition**

- I see you repeated (some) years at school? Why do you think that was?
- Who decided you should repeat?
- Did repeating a year help you with your school work?
- Were there any particular problems for you in class as a repeater?
- Main problem?

#### **Going Back to School**

- Would you like to go to school again? If so what are the main reasons?
- If no what are the main reasons you do not want to go to school again?
- Do you think you will ever go to school again?
- If yes, how do you think this will happen? What will you do?
- Has anyone spoken to you about going back to school?
- If so who spoke to you?
- What did they say?
- Has anyone in your household ever had contact with a school about you going back to school?
- Has anyone from a school had contact with someone in your household about you going back to school?
- Is there anything that can be done to help you go back to school?

#### **Importance of School**

- Do you think going school is important?
- If yes what are the main reasons?
- If no what are the main reasons?
- How do you think not going to back to school might affect what happens in your life, now and in the future?

## **DROPOUTS WHO HAVE RETURNED**

### **Future Reasons for Stopping Going to School again**

- When do you think you will finish school and leave?
- What will be the main reason you will leave school?
- Do you think you may leave school before finishing? If so what are the main reasons?
- If some of your brothers and sisters have stopped going to school what are the main reasons (Write reason and code later)
- Who will decide when you should stop going to school?
- Help and Support for Staying at School
- Do your teachers ever visit your house to talk about your progress at school?
- Does anyone else visit your house to talk about your progress at school?
- Do your parents / caregiver ever go to the school to discuss your progress?
- Is there anything that would encourage you to stay at school longer?
- Do you know any children who are not going to school?
- Why do they not go to school?



## Appendix 11: Parents and Teachers Interview Guide

### Basic data

Date of interview:	
Date interview checked:	
Location of interview:	

Possible Themes to be discussed	Questions arising from issues
<b>The dimensions and dynamics of dropout</b> Understanding and interpretation of drop out The extent to which dropping out is a process The stages in the process How the stages occur? The perceived precursors of dropping out lead to eventual dropping out	How will you define dropout? Who is a drop out? How did dropping out occur? To what extent can dropout be considered as a process? How does the process occur? What are the stages in the process of dropout? How do the stages occur? What signs does a child show before dropping out? At what stage does a child drop out of school? Why did the child drop out of school? Who decided that the child should stop going to school? When the child dropped out of school what was he/she doing at home? Whilst at home was the child still interested in schooling? Evidence? When did the child returned to school? Why has the child returned (not returned) to school? When the child returns to school, why is he/she placed at a particular grade? Who decides where to place the child? On what grounds was the decision based to place the child at this grade? If the problem that caused the child to drop out emerges again what do you think the child will do? If some of the child's siblings go to school what are the main reasons they go and the child does not?

	<p>When the child has to pay for things for school who pays?</p> <p>In the period when the child was at school how often was he /she absent?</p> <p>What was the main reason?</p> <p>Was the child absent for one month or more?</p> <p>If so what was the main reason?</p> <p>Were there some days of the week the child was absent more than others? Name the days?</p> <p>What was the main reason?</p> <p>Were there some times of the year the child was absent more than others? Name the months?</p> <p>What was the main reason?</p> <p>Did the child ever find it difficult returning to school after one of these long absences?</p> <p>Did any teacher(s) help the child catch up with missed lessons?</p> <p>Does the child like school? Why?</p> <p>What is the one thing the children do not like about going to school?</p> <p>Have the child repeated some years at school? Why do you think that was?</p> <p>Who decided the child should repeat?</p> <p>Did repeating a year help the child with his/her school work?</p> <p>Were there any particular problems for the child in class as a repeater? What are these?</p> <p>Do you think going school is important for the child?</p> <p>If yes what are the main reasons?</p> <p>If no what are the main reasons?</p> <p>How do you think not going back to school might affect what happens in the child's life, now and in the future?</p> <p>If the child went back to school what grade do you think he/she could reach?</p> <p>Does the child eat before going to school?</p>
<p><b>OUTSIDE SCHOOL</b></p> <p><b>Social/economic structures in the home and community that conspire or promote pupils decision to stay in or return to school</b></p> <p>The socio-economic factors/conditions in the home and community that influence/shape decision and pattern of behaviour in relation to</p>	<p>Who takes care of the child?</p> <p>If you the child has to pay for anything at school who pays?</p> <p>What is the education level of the child's parents/caregiver?</p> <p>What challenges does the child face outside school that affects his/her decision about schooling?</p> <p>How do the challenges facing the child outside school make him/her feel about schooling?</p> <p>When not in school what does the child do?</p> <p>Do you think the child earns some income to support himself/herself or parents?</p>

<p>schooling.</p> <p>How the social/economic structure(s) identified in the home and community conspire or promote attendance, retention and re-enrolment?</p> <p>What are the arrangements in the home and community that promote dropouts decision to return to school?</p> <p>What are arrangements in the home or community that conspire attendance, completion and re-enrolment?</p> <p>How does the interaction and support of the structures in the home and community explain dropout's decision and pattern of behaviour in relation to schooling?</p>	<p>If yes what work does the child do?</p> <p>For how long has the child been doing this work?</p> <p>How much do you think the child makes out of this work?</p> <p>What does the child do with the money he/she makes from the work?</p> <p>Tell me about events at the place where the child works?</p> <p>Who decides that the child should go back to school?</p> <p>When the child finds learning difficult, who helps him/her at home?</p> <p>Do you ever visit you're the child's house to talk about his/her progress at school?</p> <p>Does anyone else visit the child's house to talk about his/her progress at school?</p> <p>If so who is it?</p> <p>Do the child's parents / caregiver ever go to the school to discuss his/her progress?</p> <p>Is there anything that would encourage the child to stay at school longer?</p> <p>Do you think the child knows other children who are not going to school?</p> <p>Why do they not go to school?</p>
<p><b>SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM</b></p> <p><b>The issues and challenges confronting dropouts in their attempt to access schooling and their experiences in school (explanation of their decision and pattern of behaviour about schooling)</b></p> <p>What issues and challenges confront dropouts in their attempt at accessing schooling?</p> <p>How do the issues and challenges confronting dropouts explain their decision in relation to schooling?</p> <p>How does the school respond to the special needs of children on the verge of dropping out and dropouts who return?</p> <p>What are the learning needs of dropouts who return to school?</p> <p>How does the school meet these special</p>	<p>How does the child see the school environment?</p> <p>How does the child see the classroom environment?</p> <p>What challenges does the child face at school after returning to school?</p> <p>How do the challenges facing the child in the school make him/her feel about schooling?</p> <p>How do you relate with the child in the classroom?</p> <p>Is there any difference in the way you relate with the child and other children who have never dropped out of school?</p> <p>If yes how does this make the child feel?</p> <p>Do you have any special attention for the child after he/she has come back to school?</p> <p>Do you have remedial with the child?</p> <p>How is the child able to catch up with other children in the class?</p> <p>What does this mean to the child with regards to his/her aspirations about schooling?</p> <p>In the classroom what does the child do?</p> <p>During break what does the child do?</p> <p>How often does the child participate during lessons in the classroom?</p> <p>Does the child understand most of the things you teach in class?</p> <p>Does the child find the lessons at school easy or difficult?</p>

<p>needs of pupils?</p> <p>To what extent are the schools able to respond to the special needs of dropouts?</p> <p>How do dropouts who return to school perceive their chances of completing school?</p> <p>How do the schools responses to dropouts encourage them to stay on or drop out again?</p> <p>How do pupils perceived as potential dropouts see their chances of completing school?</p> <p>How do pupils who have returned to school perceive their chances of completing school?</p>	<p>What were the most difficult lessons?</p> <p>What position does the child normally have in class?</p> <p>Has the child missed school this term? If yes, what was the cause?</p> <p>If the child had to choose between coming to school and doing some work at home or in the community to earn some money, which one would the child choose? Why?</p> <p>Is there anything that could prevent the child from completing school?</p> <p>Does the child have friends who have dropped out from school? Why did they drop out?</p> <p>Do the child's parents give him/her everything needed to attend school?</p> <p>How does the child feel about the way teacher disciplines children in this school?</p> <p>What do you think the school should do to make school more interesting so children always want to come to school?</p> <p>How do children see the classroom environment?</p>
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### **Life Events**

Please tell me about any events in the child's life that has prevented him/her from going to back to school. OR

Please tell me about any events in the child's life that is likely to prevent him/her from finishing school.

What were the events and when did they happen?

### **OBSERVATION**

#### **Outside School**

In the home and community

With friends when at play

At work in community

How does that child's participation in work confirm their aspirations towards schooling work and economic wellbeing?

#### **Within School**

In the classroom what do children do?

During break time what do they do?

How do children see the school environment?

How do children participate during lessons at every 20 minutes?

How does their participation in the classroom confirm what they have learn during the week and what they have not leant?

