

INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCE OF RURALNESS AND RURAL EDUCATION: A  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PERCEIVED IMPACTS ON ACHIEVEMENTS  
AND FUTURE PROSPECTS IN RURAL GHANA

by

Robert Tsitey

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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### Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the rural school experiences and post-school outcomes of students from rural Ghana. This study examined rural Ghanaian students in the lenses of in-school and post-school lives in terms of their academic achievements, educational continuity, careers, and ability to cope with life through knowledge gained from their education. Qualitative, first-person research method and hermeneutic phenomenology was used to interpret lived experiences of participants and the texts of life of the concept of the phenomenon. The theories that guided this study were Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory which examines how a child's early development and learning are influenced by multiple systems, including the microsystem (family poverty level), mesosystem (home-school partnership), exosystem (community type, early education policies), and macrosystem (rural culture), and students' efficacy grounded in Bandura's social cognitive theory. A total of 13 past rural students were recruited to describe and interpret their lived rural educational experiences, and the perceived impacts on participants. Data-collection techniques included audio-recorded, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, open-ended, semi-structured, focus group interviews, and notes from a projective technique. Data analysis was done through thematic isolation via data immersion by the researcher using open coding and meaning units approaches. Themes that emerged were (a) family socioeconomic status (SES), (b) parental lack of interest/apathy, (c) lack of essential amenities/scarcity, (d) lack of support and collaborations, (e) teacher recruitment and retention, (f) culture, values, and misunderstandings, (g) student hardship, apathy, and poor performance, and (h) adult life and career prospects.

*Keywords:* Bronfenbrenner, Ghana, ruralness, rural education, achievement, prospects, educational attainment.

## **Copyright**

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this manuscript to my mother, Felicia M. Maku, my wife, Victoria Tsitey, and my children, Zaneta Y. Tsitey, Zsanette S. Tsitey, and Robert D. Tsitey Jr, for being there for me all these whiles, the ups, and the downs. I could not do this without them.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my brother Eric T. Attarah and his wife, Hannah Attarah, for their love and support.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)

Basic School (BS)

Primary School (PS) is equivalent to the U.S elementary School.

Junior High School (JHS) is equivalent to the U.S Middle School.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Pre-tertiary Education (PTE)

Senior High School (SHS)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Chapter One provides the framework for the research study involving the perceived impacts of ruralness and rural education on rural Ghanaian elementary students and their future prospects. Rural education in South Africa and in many countries such as China, the United States of America, Malaysia, Iran, Ghana, Mali, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Uganda, to mention a few, continue to face enormous challenges (Myende, 2015). This has made it difficult to maintain quality standards in rural schools that are comparable to urban counterparts (Li et al., 2017; Norviewu-Mortty, 2012). The chapter begins by describing the historical, social, and theoretical contexts of rural education. My motivation for undertaking this study and my paradigm and assumptions are then examined in the following section. A statement of the problem is provided as well as the purpose statement for the study. The significance of the study addressing theoretical significance, empirical significance, and practical significance is then identified. The research questions that guided the investigation of the lived experiences (realities) that possibly influence rural students' achievements and future prospects are then presented. This chapter concludes with a list of key definitions and a summary of the chapter.

### Background

The terms *rural*, *deprived*, *underdeveloped*, and *remote*, are commonly used in the Ghanaian context to describe a place that lacks the very characteristics of urban settings (Anlimachie, 2019). Ghana's basic education policy framework is controlled by its 1992 constitution that guarantees all children at least free basic education (Basic School-BS), which includes up to two years of kindergarten, six years of primary school, and three years of Junior High School (JHS) (Anlimachie, 2019). However, inadequate funding, weak monitoring and

evaluation, insufficient relevant curriculum, inadequately trained and poor distribution of teachers, and poor school-community engagement remain the major obstacles to Ghana's realization of the overall educational goals, especially those relating to quality and equity outcomes (Anlimachie, 2019; Edzii, 2017; UNESCO, 2015).

An analysis of educational, economic, and demographic trends shows that in rural areas in general, working populations are shrinking, economies are declining, and students are not competing well in college attendance and completion (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Jones & O'Neill, 2016; Li et al., 2020; Pužulis & Kūle, 2016). Also, the decreasing labor force participation can significantly destabilize families not only through the loss of income but also through increased risk of suicide (Monnat, 2017), impacts on children's education outcomes, and lower rates of participation in a variety of community organizations.

For more than 85% of rural students, a college education culminating in a professional career remains out of reach (Bright, 2020; Farrigan, 2019; Herzog & Pittman, 2003; Provasnik et al., 2007). Another basic problem that rural students face is the preponderance of negative attitudes toward rural people and places. There is an argument that modern societies do not value ruralness; prejudices against rural people and places are strong (Qian, 2018; Shi et al., 2017; Zhou, 2017). Rural students seem to have internalized those prejudices, and they exhibit an inferiority complex about their origins (Herzog & Pittman, 2003). Accompanying the relative decrease in the rural population, the proportion of the different age groups has changed. The working-aged segment of the rural population (ages 18 to 64) has increased. Rural areas are often neglected in politics and academia, isolated from resources, and coping with increasing economic and social problems on their own (Hawley et al., 2016). Almost half of the world's population is rural (The World Bank, 2018), and around 50-80% of all schools are located in



rural settings in many countries, including the U.S. (Aud et al., 2013; Coady, 2020), Australia (Halsey, 2017), Russia (Sinagatullin, 2001), and Kazakhstan (Mussina, 2018). Multiple international studies reported that rural students are less likely to participate in higher education than their urban counterparts (Amankulova, 2018; Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013; Byun et al., 2012; Chankseliani et al. 2020; Masaiti et al., 2020; Provasnik et al., 2007; Sparks & Nunez, 2014; Walker. & Mathebula, 2019; Zhao, 2020).

### **Historical Context**

Historically, rural communities and rural characteristics have existed and continue to exist around the globe. As such, rural characteristics have continued to impact rural education and rural students negatively. Marx (1906) acknowledged that unequal resource distribution accounts for gaps in education, giving economic power to the rich. Marxian conflict theory (Marx, 1906) suggested that control over the means and relations of production as well as political power influence higher socioeconomic success in the bourgeoisies than in the proletariats in the society (Uddin, 2015). Historically, the student population has determined funding allocations, and smaller numbers mean fewer dollars, and fewer dollars mean fewer teachers and fewer advanced or specialized courses, thus putting students in rural schools at a disadvantage (Brenner, 2016; Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; McFarland et al., 2017). The population which has never attended school in rural Ghana is twice of that of urban Ghana, that is, 33.1% for rural as against 14.2% for urban (GSS, 2010). About 10% of basic school-aged children in Ghana remain out of school, with rural areas being the highest (UNESCO, 2015). Ghana is experiencing an educational divide characterized by widening rural-urban inequalities and low learning outcomes in pre-tertiary education, creating development deficits of slow and

inequality in socio-economic development (Amoako-Mensah et al., 2019; Ghana Education Sector Analysis -ESA, 2018).

### **Social Context**

Rural communities and schools have unequal resource distribution; family poverty, which stems from low levels of parental education and limited economic and financial resources, putting rural students at disadvantage. With the numerous challenges facing the rural student, one must have strong self-will to succeed. Per Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive theory, self-efficacy is an individual's faith in his/her ability to successfully demonstrate behaviors required to attain an expected result (Bandura, 1993; Yu & Luo, 2018).

The abysmal educational outcomes outside urban areas have created a chain of problems of low productivity, high poverty, high rural-urban migration, high unemployment rate, widening rural-urban inequality, and general underdevelopment (Anlimachie, 2019; Lo et al., 2018). Schools operate at the nexus of socio-cultural, political, and economic events, which also interact at myriad levels of community that impact on and influence schools. The foregoing position explains the reason behind inequalities in societies, and more importantly in rural education. Marx's (1906) conflict theory gives more weight to resources distribution (income or socioeconomic status) because it appears as the most powerful rural characteristic that drives all other rural characteristics.

### **Theoretical Context**

Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory emphasizes the multiple systems that impact children's development; each system is embedded within and impacts the others in reciprocal ways (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Merton's (1968) theory supplements Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory in the sense that an individual is likely to take to

unapproved alternatives and behaviors in life if he/she fails to cope with structured and standard routes to life such as excelling in school. Parallel to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological and Merton's (1968) theories, Bandura (1977, 1996) maintained that self-efficacy is an engine that propels one to continue working hard without giving up, even in the face of known and perceived setbacks. This study builds on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), examining how a child's early development and learning are influenced by multiple systems, including the microsystem (family poverty level), mesosystem (home-school partnership), exosystem (community type, early education policies), and macrosystem (rural culture). It looks at how the various systems (micro-, meso-, and macro) manifest in a rural context (exosystem). To understand how participants experienced rural and rural educational phenomena, it is very imperative that one examines the ways in which participants and context characteristics influence proximal processes over time.

There is also the need to look at the extent to which ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably affect rural students and their future lives. Self-efficacy relates to one's feelings about him/herself and how one can perform any work utilizing their abilities. Bandura (1995) maintained that self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities in order to perform work in an ambiguous or difficult situations. Low student self-efficacy advances negative feelings about students' abilities and responsibility for academic work and performance. Conversely, a high degree of students' self-efficacy promotes the perception that the students are responsible for their destiny and that they can do what they want to do educationally.

### **Situation to Self**

My name is Robert Tsitay, and I grew up in the eastern region of Ghana. The inner motivation driving this study is that I hold a strong belief that ruralness and its characteristic

problems remain huge obstacles that prevent chunks of rural students from reaching their educational goals. Not attaining one's desired educational goals means that one cannot compete well in this competitive world in terms of education, career advancement, and many other opportunities that come with good educational attainments (Anlimachie, 2019; Bright, 2020).

While I lived in Koforidua, which is the capital of the eastern region, my home was on the outskirts of the regional capital. It was a neighborhood without electricity: basic amenities were missing. For my education, from elementary to senior high school, I had to study without electricity and no pipe-borne or potable water. We, students living in these nearby villages, had to commute miles to and from school each day. My family ate from our subsistence farming activities, and I had to work on the farm each day before or after school, including Saturdays. I suffered issues ranging from the provision of poor school uniforms, late payments of school fees, not having the requisite reading and exercise books, hunger, long commutes, low self-esteem, lateness to school, and occasional truancies. Eventually, I lost interest in the school because of the long commute coupled with the teacher's use of words that embarrassed me before my classmates. As a result, some students teased me and made unpleasant comments about me. I lost a term of my school years during my elementary level. I would leave home but never go to school but hid around until my mother met one of my schoolmates who told her that I had not been to the school for over three months. Fortunately, my parents got me back to school, and I completed my elementary and senior high school successfully.

After my completion of senior high school (SHS), I went to a teacher education college and became a certified teacher. After college, I was posted to Akuapem Ntronang, a rural farming community in the eastern region. The access road to the community was terrible, and there was no portable water or electricity. The community only had a small church and a public

mission JHS school. I spent two years teaching in that community. Attendance was extremely poor as most students would farm with their parents. Mondays and Thursdays, which are the market days in the area, were the most difficult days as most of the students would not go to school. The students accompanied their parents to farms to convey farm produce to the market. I embarked on home visits to engage students and families on the need to keep their children at school. This effort yielded significant strides and improved enrollment and attendance.

Occasionally, the teachers motivated students with school uniforms, exercise books, pens, pencils, and other materials, aimed at increasing school enrollment and academic performance. Poverty was the key driver of the whole problem in this community as almost all members were peasant farmers. Students suffered from poor school uniforms, poor nutrition, and the inability of parents to provide students' needs such as footwear, school bags, books, etc.

Using qualitative research within the interpretivists paradigm (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019), I explored the lived experiences and interpreted the text of life (Creswell, 2013) of rural past students to gain a firsthand understanding of the realities of rural challenges and how they impact their achievements in school and beyond school. My own encounter with the realities of rural education and my teaching experiences in the rural community gives me a deeper exposure to appreciate how harsh rural characteristics negatively affect rural students' achievements, during and after school. Ontologically, I appreciate the rural characteristic problems but hold the assumption that education should be equitably distributed regardless of distance or place, social class, or any perceived barriers. Rural students should not suffer because of rural characteristic problems. Epistemologically, I am approaching this study knowing the strengths and limitations of the rural phenomenon. While rural characteristics may be obstacles preventing many rural students from reaching their academic goals and future prospects, it is a known fact that resilient

students can still make it to the highest level academically. Finally, while my own experiences as a rural student and educator add credibility to this study, I see biases and unethical trends against rural education. Equity and quality are essential to bridge the rural-urban educational gap.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that generally, historically, and globally, rural students have not competed well academically, and future prospects look grim in relation to their fellows in urban areas due to the challenges such as remoteness and inaccessibility, low socioeconomic status (SES), high rural-urban migration, high unemployment rates, widening rural-urban inequalities, and general underdevelopment in infrastructure and amenities (Amoako-Mensah et al., 2019; Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Johnson & Lichter, 2020). The rural-urban disparity in living conditions is the major constraint on attracting teachers to rural areas (Shikalepo, 2020). A lack of qualified teachers is a gigantic challenge in the provision of rural education in Africa that leads to low educational attainment and stands out as one of the key constraints in eradicating poverty (Callahan & Azano, 2019). As a theoretical construct, (Rasheed, 2019) posited that place informs rural constructions of giftedness.

It is argued that students examine the opportunity cost for staying in school based on these proximal variables, and this analysis guides their decision to remain in school or drop out (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). On the demand side of education, rural children may be less interested in attending school due to the high opportunity costs and low returns. Tradeoffs become necessary. Hlalele (2012) elaborated on the negatives of rurality; poverty, fiscal incapacity, low levels of adult education, and low levels of learner achievement run in the same mutually reinforcing circles in rural areas. Hlalele (2012) concluded that rurality and poverty are two inseparable issues. Contrary to the above, Myende and Hlalele (2018) argued that rurality

has nothing to do with backwardness and propose the strength-based approach toward creating learning ecologies that are sustainable, provided there is willingness from those who lead educational institutions to transpose their power and accept others as leaders. There is the need to assess the similarities and differences in social, economic, and other contextual factors and the way they interact with educational processes and outcomes in different places beyond an “urban-rural” dichotomy (Burdick-Will & Logan, 2017).

While education remains a basic human right that is globally recognized and documented even among sub-Saharan African countries, it is not equitably available to all people to enable them to survive and develop to their maximum potential due to neglect of rural areas in terms of social and economic services provision (Chakanika et al., 2012). Chakanika et al. confirmed that the majority of rural African citizens are denied access to education in general due to a myriad of challenges ranging from social, economic to cultural, and geographical dispositions of an area. Little research exists involving the general achievements of rural students and how their education carries them through life. This phenomenological study investigates adults who have experienced rural education to understand how they fared in the rural educational system and how the rural education that they received is making or unmaking their lives.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to describe the rural school experiences and post-school outcomes of students from rural Ghana. This study was designed to investigate rural Ghanaian students through the lenses of in-school and post-school lives in terms of their academic achievements, educational continuity, careers, and ability to cope with life through knowledge gained from their education, and take advantage of real-life opportunities, including holding leadership positions. For this study, rural education was defined as education

in an area that has low population density or sparsely populated and small community, low incomes due to inadequate economic activities, small schools with smaller average class sizes, inadequate social amenities (e.g., electricity, potable water, etc.), remote and inaccessible roads, agriculture is the main occupation, etc. (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019). The theory guiding this study is Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory which touches on how environmental factors, including rural characteristics, impact students' achievement and prospects. It aims to understand how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact students coming from rural communities and schools in terms of their academic achievements, educational continuity, career advancements, and ability to cope with life through knowledge gained from their education, and take advantage of real-life opportunities, including holding leadership positions. It seeks to understand how rural characteristics perceivably impact rural students' achievements and discover how these rural students fare after they complete or drop out of school in rural Ghana.

I define *student achievement* as doing well academically in terms of attaining the required pass mark or grade, mastering the required skills to perform a task or function in real life, and giving back to the community by becoming a productive citizen. Academic achievement relates to acquiring the needed knowledge or skills to function in society, and it forms an integral part of the educational purpose, and overall educational outcomes. For the purpose of this study, prospect means a "view or outlook." Educational prospect is the possibility that something fabulous will happen after undergoing a specified training.

Rural schools face severe challenges that are unique to their environment (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, which guides this study, places an emphasis on the multiple systems that impact children's development; each system is embedded within and impacts the others in reciprocal ways (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The theory



posits that learners' backgrounds, including family and community support structures, socioeconomic status (SES), language, and learner's attitudes and abilities, account for the largest source of variation in learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). This qualitative study was conducted through a phenomenological lens, investigating the lived educational realities of rural communities in Ghana in the face of the numerous rural challenges as they sailed through the rural educational system. The study also assessed rural students' gains from their rural educational experience; how they are doing in terms of their well-being, career snapshots, and future possibilities.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has significance on many levels. First, to build on the existing literature and further the research on the rural phenomenon and how the ruralness and rural educational phenomena perceivably impact rural education as well as rural students. Little is known about how rural students thrive after passing through the rural educational system in terms of school continuity, career choices, advancements, and other life prospects that are achieved through quality education. This is because rural education is often ignored in policies and academia (Bright, 2018; Byun et al., 2012; Ganss, 2016; Hawley et al., 2016).

Secondly, with family, socioeconomic status (SES), and poverty being the leading drivers of rural education, the study aims to explain and describe how family and socioeconomic status influence academic success and life prospects to suggest policy recommendations, especially to combat rural poverty (Li et al., 2017). Finally, with rural Ghana accounting for about 80% of Ghana's poverty incidence (Anlimachie, 2019) and rural poverty increasing with low educational attainments among households (GSS, 2018), the study establishes and explains the ongoing rural educational trends and outcomes in order to help improve educational quality, relevance, and

equity in basic education, design, and implementation of new educational reforms, including competency-based curriculum.

The study, therefore, aims to use bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) and Bandura's (1993) efficacy theory to explain how the environment (family background) and individual beliefs have a great influence on students' school achievements. It should be noted that emphasis on success goals and the striving for the realization of continuously higher targets are culturally-induced because of limited access to opportunities, as in the cases of rural students. Therefore, there is a need to understand how ruralness, rural educational experiences, and the pressure to succeed as academically influence the behavior of these rural students.

### **Research Questions**

In order to fully describe the rural school experiences and post-school outcomes of students from rural Ghana, three research questions are given to guide the research of this study. The first was the central research question (CQ) and then there were two sub-questions (SQ) that further developed the understanding of ruralness, rural education, and the impact on adult lives.

**CQ1.** How do ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the long-term adult lives of rural students?

Sustainable careers with good incomes are products of quality education and skills acquisition. There is a direct link between low educational attainment and future life prospects (educational and career advancements, opportunities, etc.). These lower educational aspirations accompanied lower values for making a lot of money, and higher values for simply making good incomes, having secure jobs, and maintaining friendships. Many in individual rural communities had to battle generational poverty, including government neglect and oppression (Azano & Stewart, 2016).

**SQ1.** How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students' learning and efficacy?

In line with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive perspective, students' efficacy-related beliefs are hypothesized to be a critical determinant of the influence of family socioeconomic status and geographic or demographic preferences. That is, individual and environmental influences shape students' educational achievements and aspirations. The bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000) and cognitive theories (Bandura, 1977, 1996) give credence to the influence of environment, essential resources, and motivation on students' achievement, and how their absence can perceivably affect students' achievement and future prospects. Efficacy and motivation relate to resilience. A resilient student is more likely to withstand challenges focusing on future goals. It is the belief in one's capabilities to produce a certain outcome that is seen as the foundation of human agency (Bandura et al., 1999). Again, those who are self-efficacious are also more likely to reject negative thoughts about themselves or their abilities than those with a sense of personal inefficacy (Bandura et al., 1999).

**SQ2.** How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students' post-school outcomes?

Rural settings and their schools are characterized by massive out-migration, remoteness and inaccessible roads, income inequality, abject poverty, predominantly farmers, declining student enrollment, poor academic attainment, low graduation rate, inadequate staffing of teachers, indigenous populations and curriculum relevancy remain huge barrier which negatively impacts the rural students and their future educational and career advancements (Reid, 2017). In the Ghanaian context, only a handful of rural students who complete basic education continue to senior high school in comparison with their urban counterparts. In Ghana, the majority of these

students go into informal trades or apprenticeship training programs such as carpentry, tailoring, hairdressing/making, masonry, welding, and painting. Some take to farming, taking after their parents.

### **Definitions**

The following terms pertinent to the study are defined below.

1. *Achievement Gap* – A break in academic performance, particularly in reading and mathematics, between urban and their rural counterparts and low-income and affluent students (Anlimachie, 2019).
2. *Basic School* – In Ghana, Basic Education or School comprises the Primary, Junior High School (JHS), and Senior High School (SHS). Ghana currently operates on a 6-3-3-4 system for its basic education. This means Primary School is six years, Junior High School is three years, Senior Secondary School is three years, and four years of university bachelor’s degree (WES/WENR, 2019).
3. *Rural* - In Ghana, communities with a population of less than five thousand (5000) people are rural or of a low population density, combined with family isolation and community remoteness that uniquely characterizes rural areas (GPHC, 2012; Redding & Walberg, 2013).
4. *Rural Characteristics* – These are the key characteristics that differentiate or define rural areas from other geographies. These may include, but are not limited to, low population density or sparsely populated and small communities, low incomes due to inadequate economic activities, small schools with smaller average class sizes, inadequate social amenities (e.g., electricity, potable water, etc.), remote and inaccessible roads, agriculture is the main occupation, etc. (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019).

5. *Phenomenology* – A study of lived experiences (van Manen, 1997, 2014).
6. *Socioeconomic Status (SES)* – This refers to an individual’s position within a hierarchical social structure, which is one of the important determinants of health status. Composite scales are generally used to measure the SES, which has a combination of social and economic variables (Singh et al., 2017).
7. *Urban* - Relating to population density, location/geography, demographic composition, resources, and social and economic context. (Welsh & Swain, 2020).

### **Summary**

Rural students have not historically competed well academically, and their future prospects look grim in relation to their fellows in urban areas due to the challenges such as remoteness and inaccessibility, low socioeconomic status (SES), high rural-urban migration, high unemployment rates, widening rural-urban inequalities, and general underdevelopment in infrastructure and amenities, the purpose of this study is to describe the school experiences and post-school outcomes of students from rural Ghana. Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) bioecological theory aids in understanding the various systems that affect a child’s development. Learning how to excel in these challenging conditions is best understood by utilizing Bandura’s (1995) self-efficacy theory, and Merton’s (1968) anomie theory that explains the deviant behaviors that often accompany the rural challenges. Having personally experienced many of the challenges of rural living in Ghana, I am motivated and compelled to understand the experiences of others.

This study investigated how the rural challenges perceivably impact rural students’ achievements and life after school. In Ghana, and many parts of the world, rural students fall through the cracks, with limited life skills, missing their academic paths after their basic school due to harsh conditions in the rural areas. Poverty appears to be a rural phenomenon. If rural

Ghana constitutes 80% of Ghana's poverty incidence, then definitely there is a need to investigate and know how these rural students perform academically in the school system and how the school experience is helping them cope with life (relevance in their communities, career advancements, life opportunities, etc.).

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Chapter Two examines the current literature and research investigating how individuals experience ruralness and rural education and how those experiences impact their academic achievements and prospects. This body of knowledge, while relevant to researchers and entities trying to understand and appreciate rural problems as they relate to rural students' achievements and future goals, highlights the literature gap that exists in connection with the extent to which ruralness and rural characteristics impact rural students, and their future lives. First, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory, which primarily frames this study, and is supplemented by Bandura's (1977, 1996) social cognitive theory, are discussed; these theories are relevant to rural education, students' achievement, and prospects. This is followed by a synthesis of recent literature regarding characteristics and challenges of rural settings and how these rural characteristics impact rural students' achievement and future life prospects. Finally, literature related to rural education policies, decisions, and ways to close achievement gaps of rural students is discussed. In the end, a gap in the literature is identified, presenting a viable need for the current study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework provides an explanation of a certain set of observed phenomena in terms of a system of constructs and laws that relate these constructs to each other (Gall et al., 2007). This literature review examines how the phenomenon, ruralness or rurality, impacts the constructs. Constructs, constitutively defined, are descriptive labels that refer to phenomena of interest (Gall et al., 2007).

While many studies have spelled out the impacts of ruralness and rural characteristics on school achievements of rural students (Azano et al., 2017; Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Schafft, 2016; Stelmach, 2011), it must be understood that ruralness by itself has no impact on rural students, but the interactions of the rural characteristic problems that are associated with ruralness, such as poor infrastructures, low socioeconomic status (SES), low parental education, limited rural school budgets, high teacher turnover rate, and inadequate social amenities, are the impacting factors that truly affect the rural student academically (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016; Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003).

This study therefore draws from bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) which touches on how environmental factors, including rural characteristics impact students' achievement and prospects. Though many theories and literature gave credence to the existence of rural phenomenon and had different perspectives on rural problems, rural education, and students' achievements (Azano et al., 2017; Marx, 1906), little has been done about the extent to which rural characteristics impact students and beyond the school. The study examines the relative importance of rural education, rural poverty, other socio-economic challenges faced by rural students. The construct, for this study is based on rural realities to frame a universally dynamic model concerning unequal education, income distribution and unequal resource distribution, which could be used to explain other rural characteristics such as remoteness and inaccessibility, poor infrastructures, limited school budget and their resultant effects on the rural student.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (1974) considers the influences on a child's development within the context of the complex system of relationships that form his or her



environment. It posited that contextual influences are mediated by proximal processes, with proximal processes having more powerful impacts on children's development than contextual factors, and the effect of contextual and proximal processes vary as a function of child characteristic and developmental outcome. Urie Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory is a response to fostering development, the development of the human being, especially children. As a result, there is an inseparable link between educational development and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory. The ecological environment, unique to each child's situation, is considered as a series of interconnected structures, with the innermost structure being the child. The theory suggests that children possess developmentally personal attribute characteristics that invite, inhibit, or prevent engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with and activity in the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory aims to improve our understanding about the conditions and processes that influence a child's development (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015). The effects of contextual factors; macro- and microsystem variables (SES, neighborhood social capital, and family and parenting stress) on child social development are partially mediated by proximal processes (parent-child interactions) (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015; Samara & Ioannidi, 2019). The foregoing suggests that a child's development is a product of a variety of critical dimensions including context, process, time, and the individual's attributes. The bioecological theory amplifies the joint function that personal attribute and environmental characteristics have in influencing an individual's development. Concisely, the Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights the construct of development and the multi-system layers of the environment that influence child development, describing the nature of the processes within the child's environment that influence development. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory is broad in scope, providing a framework

for identifying and conceptualizing the multisystem factors that influence development. It considers an individual's topology, the child's setting, and how he/she and external forces interplay to influence development.

As a result, this study primarily builds on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000), which examines how a child's early development and learning are influenced by multiple systems, including the microsystem (family poverty level), mesosystem (home-school partnership), exosystem (community type, early education policies), and macrosystem (rural culture). The bioecological framework considers the multiple systems that impact children's development; each system is embedded within and impacts the others in reciprocal ways (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The study focuses on how the various systems (micro-, meso-, and macro) manifest in a rural context (exosystem) (Iruka et al., 2019). Bronfenbrenner (1974) maintained that ecological theory is the study of human development in context or enduring environments. A child's ecology is, then, the enduring environments in which the child lived, consisting of two concentric layers, the upper and the supportive and surrounding layers (Velez-Agosto et al., 2017). The immediate settings (home, school, street, playground, etc.) have three dimensions: a physical one, the people and the roles they played in the child's life; as well as the activities in which these people and the child are engaged; and the social meanings of these activities. The supportive layer was an adjacent one to the immediate encompassing system that determined what can or cannot occur in the immediate context (Bronfenbrenner, 1974).

The exosystem refers to the social environment that indirectly influences a child's development through a community's geographic locale (rural, urban), density, demography, transportation, and economy. It refers to environmental influences that do not directly involve

the developing person, but even so indirectly influence the setting. Values, norms, customs, and policies exhibited within the exosystem represent the macrosystem (Iruka et al., 2019). The macrosystem, refers to societal and cultural ideologies and laws that impinge on the individual.

The microsystem, the most immediate setting in which a child is situated, and it is proximal to children's advancement and incorporates the quick setting of home and school/preschool programs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a, 1995a). The child's microsystem: the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular material and physical features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics, personalities, and systems of belief (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner defined the microsystem as the most proximal setting, with particular physical characteristics, in which a person is situated, such as the home, childcare, playground, and place of work, and in which the developing person can interact in a face-to-face way with others (1974, 1979b). Microsystemic factors include family destitution level, portability, and the youth learning condition, particularly pre-K (Iruka et al., 2019).

The mesosystem is the association across microsystems, connections among families and their children's educators and other connections between home and school (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). The mesosystem contains society's blueprint for a particular culture or subculture. The Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory looks at the life of the student holistically to assess all influencing factors that impact rural student achievement (including but not limited to values, norms, culture, socioeconomic status, upbringing, and parent-teacher engagements). The premise of ecology systems theory is that different levels are always influencing each other (Bouzayani & Jlassi, 2020). The supporting and surrounding environment, which is the immediate setting is embedded, limits and shapes what can and does occur within the immediate setting: geographic

and physical, for example, a housing project in which people live; institutional-the social systems which affect what can occur in the immediate setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Bronfenbrenner (1994) added that learners' backgrounds, including family and community support structures, socio-economic status (SES), language and learner's attitudes and abilities, account for the largest source of variation in learning (Samara & Ioannidi, 2019).

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

The significant factors affecting the educational gap include learning motivation, educational aspiration, learning efficacy, future aspiration, aid of private education, and the economic status of the family at the student level and after-school activities, the physical and psychological environment, teacher's competence, and the location of the school at the school level (Seung-IL & Sang-Ki, 2011). In line with Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, students' efficacy-related beliefs are hypothesized to be a critical determinant of the influence of family socioeconomic status and geographic or demographic preferences. Malinauskas (2017) defined self- efficacy as one's belief in one's capability to successfully direct one's actions to achieve the set goals and succeed in carrying out a particular task. Malinauskas (2017) added that self-efficacy refers to a person's perceived ability, as distinct from practical ability, to perform a specific action or course of action. Thus, individual, and environmental influences shape students' educational achievements and aspirations.

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Self-efficacy is people's belief with their ability to do something per the objectives to be achieved (Zarkasyi & Partana, 2020). Students with high academic self-efficacy are confident in their capacity to meet academic requirements, to plan and organize their learning, to avoid distractions, and to persist in

their efforts (Bandura, 1997). There is a strong relation between resilience and self-esteem (Sart et al., 2016). Hence, the increase in self-esteem increases the resilience of an individual (Kapıkıran & Acun-Kapıkıran, 2016). Correlational analyses have indicated that self-efficacy is positively correlated with optimism and organizational commitment (Rand, 2018; Saleem et al., 2012). Again, multiple regressions revealed that self-efficacy emerged as a significant predictor while optimism was not a significant predictor of organizational commitment (Saleem et al., 2012; Yu & Luo, 2018). A possibility is that self-efficacy moderates socioeconomic status and deprivation effects on school misconduct.

Students' beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their learning and to master academic accomplishments. Self-efficacy breeds resilience and optimism serve as a predictor of student success. Low self-efficacy promotes negative feelings about one's abilities and responsibility for one's performance. A high degree of self-efficacy promotes the perception that one is responsible for one's destiny and that one can do what one wants to do (Akhtar et al., 2013; Nwanzu & Babalola, 2019). Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to perform work in ambiguous or difficult situation (Bandura, 1995). Students with the high level of self-efficacy commit to survive for achieving the learning goal, compared with students with low level of self-efficacy (Putri & Prabawanto, 2019). The relevance of students' self-efficacy cannot be overemphasized as it enforces students to make consistent efforts, and to and to excel in tasks are given or any given situation, although the task may not be easy accomplish. Self-efficacy therefore becomes a key determinant in measuring students' success, including ability to overcome life challenges while remaining resilient.

Optimism reflects one's positive expectations for the future (Lai et al., 2020). It is argued that if people expect failure, then they put less effort into a task (Hattie et al., 2020). Thus,

optimistic students who are expecting success in their academic endeavors are more likely to be high on self-efficacy which in turn significantly predicts success. Bandura (1993) argued that self-regulatory social, motivational, and affective contributors to cognitive functioning are best addressed within the conceptual framework of the exercise of human agency. Efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, and motivate themselves, and behave. Self-efficacy beliefs produce these diverse effects through cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes (Bandura, 1992). The Bronfenbrenner (1974) and Bandura (1992) theories give credence to the essence of environmental influence and self-efficacy on overall student achievements, and how their absence can perceptibly impact school achievements and prospects. Furthermore, at the nexus of environmental influences and self-efficacy are societal goals and outcomes which, when missing or not met, can trigger students to resort to unacceptable ways such as truancy, absenteeism, robbery, drugs, crimes, etc. Rurality intersects with children's early learning experiences, and there are implications of geographic setting on funding, access, family engagement, professional development, and community resources (Iruka et al., 2019). Therefore, investment in education at both family level and public levels remains a key determinant of rural educational outcome that either closes or widens the rural-urban achievement gap. There is a pronounced link between optimism and self-efficacy as optimism is the generalized expectancy in which good opposed to bad outcomes occur when confronted with problems across important life domains whereas self-efficacy is the belief that one can overcome the obstacles in one's way (Akhtar et al., 2013). The above explains why some students defy all odds to succeed academically while other fail to succeed regardless of the support structure offered them.

Amponsah et al. (2018) found that there is a significantly positive relationship between parental involvement in education, higher expectations, and students' achievement. Samara and

Ioannidi's research (2019) concluded that the parents' role and their partnership with teachers is a contemporary challenge in the field of education, but also a requirement for bringing successful results, since the child belongs to different subsystems simultaneously (family and school) which, without excluding one another, they have a constant interaction and a dynamic communication based on four core elements: process, person, context, and time. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1994, 2007), these elements are considered to be the driving forces of human development.

### **Resilience**

Blanchard (1986) maintained that educational equity is associated with the aspirations of specific groups, resource distribution, and available opportunities (Larkin & Staton, 2001) at various educational system levels. While rural communities conjure rich social cultures such as good family ties, values, and norms that help in the development of children, students from low-income rural families are confronted with countless challenges in their everyday lives. Rural communities have demonstrated resilience and strength through economic downturns, inadequate amenities, and demographic shifts, positive rural culture, and values (Roberts et al., 2017; Roberts & Townsend, 2016). There are positive aspects of rural culture and values from a strength-based approach, as well as the concerns of the social conditions of resilience. The elements of cultural and social capital cannot be overemphasized. These cultures, values, and norms are integral in the growth and development of rural students, and family is the most critical context in which a child develops and learns. Poverty and inequality in rural areas have economic and social causes (Annalakshmi, 2019). While this affects everyone, it has a particular implication for the development of children since socioeconomic status not only influences education but also the attainment of education (Weis, 2008).

Academic aspirations of parents for their children, parents' educational attainment, and value for education in family are limited in families living in poverty since their immediate needs and concerns are more fundamental than education. Economic deprivation often forces the youth to seek employment as a means of survival earlier (Burton, 2007), and this hinders educational success. Despite these numerous rural challenges, most rural students defy all odds to succeed in school through self-regulative mechanisms (Liew et al., 2019). Self-regulation promotes efficacy and optimism to carry on (Toharudin et al., 2019). Some students successfully function despite significant life difficulties (Scoloveno, 2018) by maintaining a developmental process that shifts relative to changes in cognition, emotion, and the social environment (Masten et al., 1990).

Self-regulation is crucial for developmental adaptation in students from deprived backgrounds; those high on self-regulation can control their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to achieve a long-term goal (Artuch-Garde et al., 2017; Makila et al., 2017; Mestre et al., 2017). Resilience is positively related to self-efficacy (Liu et al. 2018a), future time perspective, and social connectedness (O'Neill et al., 2020). Academic self-efficacy represents an integral component of students' mental health and well-being of students that is embedded in the wider social and educational context (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). The connection between efficacy beliefs and level of academic performances depends on the fact that they regulate the anxiety and foster motivation, school engagement, effort, and perseverance of students (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). Perceived self-efficacy is crucial for the engagement, effort, and perseverance in learning and, as a result, those with lower efficacious beliefs are vulnerable to follow a negative spiral in which low expectations lead to less effort, lower success, and lower self-efficacy beliefs (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). Self-efficacy, a key concept introduced by the social cognitive theory, refers



to people's beliefs in their personal ability to achieve the desired results (Bandura, 1997). Such beliefs are important for self-knowledge and play a key role in the process of personal agency.

### **Self-Efficacy**

The idea of self-efficacy as depicted by Bandura (1977) pervades the resiliency among rural students' struggles. The social cognitive theory postulates that human behavior is continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors or determinants. Perceived self-efficacy affects coping efforts and the stronger the self-efficacy, the more active the efforts (Bandura, 1977), and influences the effort and perseverance of students that shape the learning process and subsequently the obtained achievements (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). Therefore, students' coping and resilience with the numerous challenges are related to their characteristics and supportive relationships from their immediate environments. Numerous scholars have showed the importance of self-efficacy for academic achievements (Pajares & Graham, 1999; Usher & Pajares, 2008). Some studies focused on specific academic fields, demonstrating, for example, which perceived self-efficacy in school mathematics or English influences academic performances, irrespective of the level of ability in mathematics or English, respectively (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). It has been demonstrated that perceived self-efficacy predicts more accurate academic performance than the ability level itself (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). It also shapes educational and career choices, motivation, effort of the students, and their response in face of adversity (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). Self-efficacy influences the effort and perseverance of students that shape the learning process and subsequently the obtained achievements (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). Self-efficacy is embedded in the environment in which a person lives.

Family is the most important context in which a child develops and learns (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). The importance of family involvement in education is extensively analyzed and confirmed by a large number of studies aiming to explain school engagement and academic achievements or failure (including dropping out) (Zamfir & Mocanu, 2020). Resilience is positively associated with self-efficacy (Liu et al. 2018a; McBride & Ireland, 2016), an individual's belief in their ability to achieve an outcome (Bandura, 1977), making it an essential component in understanding resilience and one's ability to adapt. Associations between self-efficacy and resilience are well-established (Driver et al. 2016; Sagone & De Caroli, 2016). In line with theoretical frameworks of agentic perspectives (Bandura 2001), which posits that a loss of goal-orientated behavior may ultimately predict a failure of adaptive behavior (conceptualized through low resilience), results indicate strong, positive associations between self-efficacy and resilience.

Such results are important as, if deficits of goal-orientated behavior are present, it follows that resilience could be fostered by improving self-efficacy, a theory supported by a meta-analysis corroborating a bidirectional relationship between these two constructs (Yu et al., 2019). Farsides and Woodfield (2003) and Duckworth et al. (2007) propounded that self-efficacy is a significant predictor of individual performance and motivation in different situations and environments. Self-efficacy is an important part of dealing with unavoidable life changes (Bandura, 1995; Larson & Daniels, 1998). Wäschle et al. (2014) noted a vicious circle relationship between procrastination and self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) emphasized that self-efficacy strongly influences people's choices and efforts that they make while dealing with challenges. Therefore, self-efficacy beliefs have an impact on task choice, effort, perseverance, and success (Britner & Pajares, 2006). Enhancing self-efficacy of rural students may be helpful

to solve problems confronted by the individual because of the crucial impact of self-efficacy on performance (Yılmaz-Bingöl, 2015). Self-regulation promotes the resilience process, which in turn supports academic achievement.

### **Related Literature**

Like their urban counterparts, rural schools face financial inequalities, but they also have uniquely rural problems. The United States' Office of Educational Research and Improvement comprehensive report (Stern, 1994) found high rates of poverty and low levels of educational attainment in rural schools. Variations in income distribution among developing countries in a Kuznets type framework appear primarily as a function of the rural-urban income differential and the share of the population in one or the other sector, which is itself proxied by GDP per capita (Bourguignon & Morrisson, 1998).

The above scenario is not different from Ghana. Rural schools are staffed by a younger, less well-educated faculty and administration who earn lower salaries and benefits than their metropolitan counterparts (Xuehui, 2018). Rural schools depict characteristics such as low enrollment, high staff turnover, limited school budget, poor parent-teacher engagement, and poor academic performance. There exist dynamic educational, economic, and demographic trends that impact every aspect of the rural community (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). Omer and Jabeen (2016) argued that social class inequality is deeply rooted in societies, and that all spheres of life are subjected to this disparity even educational institutions are no exception. Research literature findings on students' learning suggest that learners' backgrounds, including family and community support structures, socio-economic status, language, and learner's attitudes and abilities, account for the largest source of variation in learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; OECD, 2011). Additionally, where society, rural society, fails to adequately provide opportunities for

students to live a normal life and access the needed education, many turn to unacceptable ways and behaviors. For Merton (1968), deviance, and crime are, in large part, a result of anomie, a state of social disorder. There is a link the low educational outcomes among children of ethnic/rural background to the distance between home and school cultures (Halsey, 2018; Lowe, et al., 2019). Rural education is at risk and rural students are the most vulnerable and susceptible (Stelmach, 2011). Chikoko and Khanare (2012) posited that rurality is a multi-layered concept encompassing the farming communities, peri-urban settings, informal settlements, and what is often referred to as the *deep rural*. The concept of *deep rural* according to Chikoko and Khanare (2012) referred to some of the remotest parts of the countryside. They further indicated that due to their location within marginalized places, rural schools are therefore be marginalized and disadvantaged schools. The features presented above suggest that rurality and rural school is only associated with negative aspects of life which are backwardness, underdevelopment, and poverty (Aliber & Cousins, 2013; Sibhatu & Qaim, 2017).

### **Ruralness**

Rural areas are often deprived, lacking so many governmental developmental interventions such as potable water, electricity, good roads, and school infrastructure to improve upon the lives of the people (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019). Rural-urban disparity in economic and social development in Ghana has led to disparities in educational resources and variations in students' achievement in different parts of the country. While most schools around the globe are facing similar issues, rural schools often face the additional burden of being one the few local social institutions in sparsely populated communities, and sometimes also of serving as one of the largest employers (Biddle & Azano, 2016). Rurality and rural schools are conceptualized differently by different people from different contexts (Myende, 2015). There is no

internationally accepted definition for what constitutes a rural area, however, there exist characteristics that identify rural areas from other demographics (Hawley et al., 2016). The U.S. Census Bureau's (2009) distance-based definition considers rural to be the absence of a high population density. In Ghana, a community with a population of less than five thousand people is considered rural (GSS, 2012). Therefore, various definitions of ruralness or rurality are based on perceived characteristics such as remoteness and limited access, inadequate infrastructures, sparse population, predominantly aged population, low-income, limited opportunities for employment, and farming as predominant occupation (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Roberts, 2016; Stern, 1994). The lack of conceptual consensus about what constitutes rural and the diverse nature of rural communities intra and internationally create a barrier to true internationally relevant studies (Cloke et al., 2006). The preponderance of negative attitudes toward rural people and places remains and continues to play against rural students, families, and educators. Anlimachie (2019) stated that a rural setting in Ghana is mostly characterized by main villages (which hosts Basic Schools) surrounded by other smaller settlements (cottages, hamlets, and homesteads). Roughly 46% of the world's population live in rural areas (United Nations, 2015), it can be estimated that nearly 600 million school-aged children are living in rural regions.

There is a problem of deficit thinking concerning rural schooling and recognition of brilliance, and the risk of generalizing rural to all rural places. Although the term rural conjures rich images, many of those images are based on negative stereotypes (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003); society's present generation does not appreciate ruralness and holds strong prejudices against rural people and rural places. Societies, including the media culture, do not value the rurality and portray it to be socially acceptable to stereotype and mock rural individuals and culture (Bright, 2018). These factors illustrate a combination of social status, race, economic

status, cultural marginalization, and media portrayal influencing the development and outlook of the current unique rural identity (Kreiss et al., 2017). For students with marginalized identities, an intensification of factors that create challenges places them at-risk of disengaging and their sense of belonging at school is more likely to be compromised. This may constitute a psychological problem that may affect students' morale and motivation to engage in active learning and participate in other school related activities. Many of them enter the middle years already at-risk of underachieving, and, for some, this is linked to their marginalized identity (Pendergast et al., 2018). Furthermore, nurturing a sense of belonging in school is positively associated with the retention of students who are at-risk of dropping out of school (Pendergast et al., 2018).

Society holds negative images against rural people, causing rural students to internalize these prejudices and exhibit inferiority complex about their origins (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). This is a form of bullying that drives some students away from the school system. In terms of public schools, low population is linked to small school enrollment sizes (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). Rural poverty is a persistent macrosystemic issue related to rural education (Stelmach, 2011), and poverty shapes attitudes toward school, and since race and ethnicity often intersect with socioeconomic status, poverty rates are higher among ethnic minorities (Cernkovich et al., 2000; Stelmach, 2011). In developing country countries like Ghana, the rural child is no doubt subjected to environmental deprivation at the community, home, and school levels. This exhibits in disparities between the rural child and his/her urban counterpart in academic achievement, health status, general living conditions, and prospects. In other words, by his/her location, the rural child in a developing country suffers from limited educational progress, and consequently, have limited opportunities for higher education which in turn limit

his/her chances of employment (Nworgu & Nworgu, 2013). The major obstacles confronting education include a diversity of factors such as child labor, health, location, and gender.

### **Rural Characteristics and Trends Impacting Rural Education**

The phenomena have carved educational, economic, and demographic, and social trends that further affect rural students' experiences with resultant abysmal academic outcomes and prospects. Just as image or perception represent one of the obstacles facing rural education, there exist dynamic educational, demographic, and economic trends that impact every aspect of the rural community and education. Redding and Walberg (2013) stated that rurality is uniquely characterized by low population density together with family isolation and community remoteness. Bright (2018) indicated that rural students face increasing challenges to academic, social-emotional, and career success. Larger social inequalities set limits on what education can achieve (Marginson, 2016). Pendola and Fuller (2018) indicated that most rural schools are small, and they offer narrow a scope of curriculum and less extensive courses. Howley et al. (2009) and Showalter et al. (2017) noted that rurality is characterized by a continuously declining population both in schools and in the community. This population decline mostly happens within the educated members of community and thus it is regarded as brain drain (Howley et al., 2009). Rural schools and communities continue to face substantial challenges with high rates of poverty, diversity, and students with special needs with households living near or below the poverty line (Showalter et al., 2017), and lack of access to technology which also results to limited access to internet and library services for rural students and staff.

Stelmach (2011, 2020) stated that rural education challenges are synthesized into macro-, mezzo-, and micro-systemic level issues. Geographic isolation opposes equitable education and rural students continue to be sidelined in all spheres of opportunities. With high prevalence of

poverty, low socioeconomic status, rural students may not perceive certain careers as attainable. Additionally, lack of visibility of career fields may prevent students from envisioning themselves within entire segments of career fields. Rural students are not likely to visualize career opportunities as possible in their area without direct examples, limiting what they aspire to if they want to live locally (Bright, 2020). Analysis of studies that examined rural challenges and how these challenges impact rural students indicates that none of these studies truly gave a holistic look at how rural characteristic problems impact school achievements and after school endeavors (adult life) (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Stelmach, 2011).

The challenges students face in many rural places are staggering. Lack of adequate resources struggles with teacher recruitment and retention, inequitable funding, a shortage of early childhood services, and other challenges continue to daunt many rural communities (Showalter et al., 2017). While all the rural characteristics impact rural students through their combined effects, low-income (SES) remains the most powerful characteristics of rural settings. Socioeconomic status drives many other factors. Most of the world's poor live in rural areas and are engaged in farming (Aguilar & Sumner, 2019). Developing countries (e.g., Ghana) have conditions that call for drastic innovation when it comes to rural education as they continue to have the most vulnerable segments of populations and are susceptible to this menace. With rural population been dominant part of developing countries, any situation that limits the educational progress of the rural child poses a serious threat to the social, economic, and political development (Nworgu & Nworgu, 2013).

Academic literature generally concludes that rural disadvantages exist due to the interplay of isolation, an average lower socioeconomic status (SES) than other areas, and lower levels of resourcing (Roberts, 2016). Limited economic strength which leads to poverty remains



a key issue, poverty shapes attitudes toward school. Further, family being the oldest social institution has pervasive effects a child's upbringing, behavior, and adjustment across the generations. Hence a family's socioeconomic status (SES) affects the general development of a child, including his/her education. The trends of lower SES characteristics are pronounced in less-developed, rural societies, including Ghana. Although Bankston and Caldas (2002) described it as non-discriminatory, rural poverty intersects with geographic location, race, and ethnicity (United Nations, 2010). Poverty emerges as a macrosystemic issue (Iruka et al., 2019). Exo- and macrosystemic issues pertain to the larger socio-political and cultural forces that influence education. Mezosystemic issues, such as teacher recruitment and retention, have school and community impact.

Students' family background and environment shape the attitudes that the students develop toward learning (Chesters, 2019; Egalite, 2016). When that environment encourages exploration, and curiosity, and provides the resources that can enlarge the student's view of the world, the student's natural motivation to learn is encouraged (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). Students in non-metropolitan areas have less opportunity to continue their education. As a result, fewer dropouts return to complete high school, and fewer graduates aspire to and go on to higher education (Stern, 1994). Those who do, however, persist and perform as well as nonrural graduates. The high incidence of poverty is a controlling factor in much that is reported about rural education outcomes. In rural Ghana, many children do not complete basic education, and speak only their native dialect, and grow up functionally illiterate. Early marriage is a challenge too especially in the northern Ghana. Girls, who sometimes marry as young as 12, are especially vulnerable. Too many drop out of school and almost 30% of women over age 15 cannot read and write (Anlimachie, 2019; Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020).

## **Educational Trends**

Rural-urban academic achievement gap is a global menace. Evidence exists that substantial urban-rural disparities do exist in the academic achievement of pupils at the basic (primary) education level especially in developing countries like Ghana (Nworgu & Nworgu, 2013). Researchers in the United States have confirmed that economically disadvantaged students do not perform as well academically as students from groups of higher socioeconomic status (SES); however, they disagree on what explains this achievement gap (Allington et al., 2010; Lareau, 2011). Also, there are specific characteristics of low-income families that significantly contribute to low academic achievement among students. Parental educational levels are related to whether youths stay in school (Egalite, 2016; Sharma et al., 2020; West, 2007). West (2007) added that less educated parents could contribute to lower achievement levels of their children by the nature of their education or experiences. Limited parental involvement remains a critical issue affecting the academic progress of economically disadvantaged students, citing that parental support is essential and critical but very often lacking. Also, how governmental and educational systems are structured are unfair to low-income families and students. It implies that such systems only perpetuate the usual cycle of being poor and widening the achievement gap. In most systems, things work against the poor and imposes unrealistic hardships on disadvantaged students to obtain good education, and that the generational poor are relegated to their socioeconomic class.

### **Academic Achievement**

Educationally, success is measured by academic performance or how well students deal with their studies, how they cope with or accomplish different tasks given to them by their teacher, and the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their educational

goals (Ankomah, 2002). There is a significant difference between rural and urban students in terms of academic achievement, which verifies the existence of educational gap between rural and urban areas (Seung-IL & Sang-Ki, 2011). In examining rural-urban differences in college attendance patterns, rural youth, compared to their urban counterparts are less likely to attend a selective four-year institution and to enroll in college continuously, and instead, are more likely to delay entry to postsecondary education. Many of these disparities in college attendance patterns were explained by rural/nonrural differences in socioeconomic status and high school preparation (Byun et al. 2017). Rural-urban gaps in academic performance generally disappear after accounting for socio-economic status and rural students are less likely to expect completing a university degree than city students, but this gap in expectations persists even when rural students have a similar socio-economic status, on average across OECD countries (Echazarra & Readinger, 2019). Educational attainments to a great extent dictate prospects. It should be noted that the perspective of anomie is compatible with several other theories of crime and delinquency. In sum, Merton (1968) maintained that given the dominance of the success theme in human society, individuals who are blocked from reaching the wealth goals of society often employ illegal methods for attaining monetary success. The foregoing implies that it is the social structure that is postulated to be putting pressure on individuals to commit crime. The above is not different from students' educational expectations. The only desired and expected outcome of education is success. This is because, educational attainments or success correlates with good prospects.

The foregoing educational inequality between the rural and urban areas remains a global phenomenon with dire consequences for human capital development and accumulation. Education is one of the most widely used indicators of SES and is considered by many to be the

established element of SES because it influences later income and occupation (Assari & Lankarani, 2016). It has become well known that most rural areas on average have lower social indicators, including education, compared to most non-rural areas (Roberts, 2016). Historically, students from low-income families have performed poorly in school and on standardized achievement tests when compared to their more advantaged peers (Lareau, 2011; OECD, 2011; Sharma et al., 2020; West, 2007). This achievement gap remains one of the core challenges facing educational leaders.

Research suggests that a wide variety of factors interact together in different ways, cultures, and contexts to produce levels of inequality that in turn affect student achievement (Allington et al., 2010; Lareau, 2011). Rural students from low-income families consistently trail behind their peers in retention and degree attainment, and students from poor, rural schools experience disadvantages in college attendance and graduation (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). These are major blows to rural students, and with numerous negative implications, including dwindling interest in education. Moreover, over 40% of students in OECD countries only reached reading proficiency level (Schleicher, 2018). It is highly likely that those lacking basic skills at this age either drop out from the education system and not finish upper secondary school, entering the workforce with low skills and unprepared, or continue studying but struggling more than their peers and needing additional (and more expensive) support (OECD, 2012). This means that the changes in the education field and labor market has some negative impacts on the educational decision of whether children of rural families would continue to high school (Chunling, 2015).

The commitment to academic and career success often appear disconnected from future goals and plans for many students, suggesting the need for improved social support networks that

promote academic achievement and career opportunities. Literature suggests that the huge achievement gap between urban and rural education is embedded in the disparity in educational investment, children's educational attainment, school quality and the return to education (Zhang, 2017). Absence of strategic planning also remains one of the dynamics that are putting the sustainability of rural education programs at risk (Andrew & Taylor, 2017). In the past 60 years, the urban-rural gap in education opportunities has continued to exist, and the size of the gap can be called a chasm in education (Chunling, 2015).

The urban-rural achievement gap has existed and persists, and it is a pressing challenge because past approaches and efforts of at least narrowing if not closing the gap have been largely urban biased in nature, leaving rural communities and students at disadvantage.

Rural students are less likely to participate in higher education compared to their urban peers due to several factors, such as lower quality schooling, lower socioeconomic status, lower parental expectations, financial hardships, and geographic isolation. Even when they access higher education, they face untold challenges in transitioning and integrating into university and urban life (Amankulova, 2018). However, there is considerable disagreement regarding the causes of that gap. The research suggests that several dynamics contribute to the gap, and that addressing the gap requires taking multiple or holistic factors into account.

### **Rural-urban Gaps**

There exist dynamic educational, economic, and demographic trends that impact every aspect of rural community (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). Omer and Jabeen (2016) argued that social class inequality is deeply rooted in societies, and that all spheres of life are subjected to this disparity, educational institutions are no exception. Marx (1906) acknowledged that unequal resource distribution accounts for gaps in education, giving economic power to the rich, and

schools operate at the nexus of socio-cultural, political, and economic events, which also interact at myriad levels of community that impact on and influence schools (Stelmach, 2011). Marx (1906) added that the education system is reproducing social classes. Bowles and Gintis (2013) supported his argument that education reproduces the attitudes and behavior for divisions of labor. The education system supports the wealthy in society, and teaches people how to accept their position, to be exploited, and to show the rulers how to control the workforce (Marx, 1906).

The majority-minority paradigm suggests that disadvantaged socioeconomic status and further unequal distribution of resources, power, prestige, and presumed worth differentially influence the socioeconomic status attainment (the ranked values on dimensions of scarce societal rewards, including educational attainment, occupational status, wages, earnings, household income, and wealth) among the racial and ethnic groups in a given society (Nouman, 2019). Bourdieu (1977) added that powerful social positions and higher education in stratified societies led to social reproduction by honoring the cultural capital of elite classes. As a result, students who possess the valued cultural capital are rewarded with high academic achievements and be involved in high paying jobs at the end.

This gap existing between urban and rural students around the world in terms of school achievements and prospects necessitates an investigation of the menace. While the rural and rural educational challenges remain historical and agelong, the fact remains that the overall achievements of rural students and their prospects look very bleak and uncertain (Schaefer & Meece, 2009). Also, socio-economic data driven by regions in Ghana indicates a strong correlation between low educational attainment, high poverty rates and regional/rural-urban inequality (World Bank-GALOP, 2019). Amoako-Mensah et al. (2019) observed that the rural-urban gap in pre-tertiary education (PTE) and development in Ghana has created a development

deficit termed *double jeopardy of rurality*. The 2014 national Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results indicated that rural Basic School pupils are two times less able to achieve basic competencies in numeracy, literacy and life skills upon completion compare with their urban counterparts (ESPR, 2015). Differences in teacher-student ratios, human resource capacity, provision of educational infrastructure, and other facilities have also led to rural, urban, and regional differences in educational opportunities in different parts of Ghana (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013).

### **Achievement and Opportunity Gaps**

There are both achievement and opportunity gaps for low-income rural students compared to their economically advantaged peers; and, for rural students, these gaps may be even more pronounced (Azano et al., 2017). School success and prospects, including workforce, continue to suffer in rural settings. Uddin (2015) suggested that social, political, and economic factors are the best predictors to perpetuate disparity in family status attainment (FSA) between the majority and minority ethnic groups, and that unequal distribution of social-political-economic resources perpetuates 10%-14% disparities in family status attainment between the majority and minority groups in Bangladesh. Findings from six public SHS in Kumasi, two each in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas, revealed that urban schools perform better than rural and peri-urban schools because they attract and admit junior high school graduates with excellent Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) grades, have better infrastructure, more qualified teachers, prestigious names, and character that motivate their students to do well (Uddin, 2015). This suggests that bridging the rural–urban gap in educational resources could promote quality teaching and learning, and thereby raise academic achievement for SHS students in Ghana (Opoku-Asare & Siaw, 2015).

An extensive body of accumulated evidence testifies to the strong correlation between educational attainment and economic outcomes, both for economies as a whole as well as for individuals (Eslake, 2015). It is noted that for every additional year of schooling added to the adult population, economic growth is augmented by between 0.25 and 0.75 of one percentage point per annum, which is to say between 6% and 19% in the long term, after controlling for other factors shown to impact on long-term economic growth (Eslake, 2015). This implies that the consequences of student dropout are severe, not only for the individuals themselves but for the larger society and economy as a whole. The above situation does nothing but widens the achievement gap and worsen the situation. Manzeske et al. (2016) stated that there is an established link between teacher quality and student academic achievement. The 2014 national Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results indicated that rural Basic School pupils are two times less able to achieve basic competencies in numeracy, literacy and life skills upon completion compare with their urban counterparts (ESPR, 2015). Inadequate funding, poor monitoring and evaluation, insufficient relevant curriculum, inadequately trained and poor distribution of teachers, and poor levels of community involvement, are major obstacles, especially those relating to quality and equity outcomes (Edzii, 2017; UNESCO, 2015). These point to the fact that rural students are at risk and disadvantage and cannot fairly compete with their urban counterparts.

### **Teacher Shortages**

Rural areas and schools by the remote nature have high teacher turnover rate compared to those of urban areas. Rural schools also depict characteristics such as high staff turnover (Kaden et al., 2016), unqualified teachers, limited school budget, poor parent-teacher engagement, and poor academic performance (Li et al., 2019; Samara & Ioannidi, 2019; Sindelar et al., 2018;



Stelmach, 2011; White, 2019). Teacher shortages have historically been critical in primary schools and rural communities (Cobbold, 2015). It is also difficult to recruit well-qualified teachers for inner cities and rural communities, where working conditions are poor and pedagogical demands are far greater (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019; Aragon, 2018).

Again, rural areas and rural schools have high teacher turnover, limited school budgets, limited teaching and learning resources, poor parent-teacher engagement, and low enrollments with resultant poor educational achievements. Consequently, schools serving these communities and students often lack quality teachers and educational resources that more wealthy school districts may provide. Gorski (2012) argued that teachers and school officials may have lower expectations of economically disadvantaged students, which plays into the bias that people from low-income circumstance cannot learn, so there is not a pervasive reason for expecting them to achieve. Cobbold (2015) maintained that the rural-urban gap in educational outcomes relates to access to quality teachers. In assessing the attraction and retention of teachers in rural Ghana, Cobbold (2015) added that rural remoteness is the main factor for the high teacher turnover in rural basic schools in Ghana. The percentage of trained teachers in Ghana's basic schools that are in rural and deprived districts is 60% as against 90% for urban and non-deprived districts (ESPR, 2015). Teacher attrition is the most common in rural high-poverty areas where students are more likely to have less experienced teachers (Rumschlag, 2017). Low teacher salary, poverty, resource shortages, and feelings of isolation are all major factors contributing to the hiring of teachers in rural communities (Azano & Stewart, 2016). The issue of poor teacher pay is serious in Ghana. Teachers remain in rural, low-income school districts because of relationships with students, safe environments, recognition of a job well-done, support from parents, and the challenge of the teaching position (Ulferts, 2016).

## **Socioeconomic Background**

Socioeconomic status (SES) with other combined rural difficulties is likely to plunge students into a state of apathy and to exhibit deviant behaviors. Durkheim (1951) argued that “no living being can be happy or even exist unless his/her needs are sufficiently proportioned to his/her means” (p. 246). Socioeconomic status (SES) with combined rural difficulties is likely to plunge students into a state of apathy and deviant behaviors. Studies confirm that economic strains contribute to delinquency (Cernkovich et al., 2000; Demanet & van Houtte, 2019; Jiang et al., 2020; Lo et al., 2018; Martinez, 2017; Sogar, 2017). Many rural communities, particularly those with significant populations of minority groups, have had poverty rates of over 20% for decades, often accompanied by oppressive local political economies that make improvements difficult (Weber & Miller, 2017). Typically, it is common to witness students saddled with challenges such as from low-income backgrounds (poverty), abysmally performing in school, etc. becoming truant, absentee, stealing and some even perpetrate crimes. Research during the past decade shows that social class or socioeconomic status (SES) is related to satisfaction and stability in romantic unions, the quality of parent-child relationships, and a range of developmental outcomes for adults and children, including the personal adjustment of adults and children (Conger et al., 2010; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017). Findings reported during the past decade demonstrate support for an interactionist model of the relationship between SES and family life, which incorporates assumptions from both the social causation and social selection perspectives (Conger et al., 2010; Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017).

Socioeconomic background has consistently been increasingly found to be one of the most important variables in educational success (Coleman, 1988; McLoyd, 1998; Mukonyi & Itayo, 2020). Parental education has persistent influence on predicting children’s educational

achievement since it tends to remain the same level over a child's lifetime, and it strongly predicts parents' income level (Egalite, 2016; Erola et al., 2016). For rural school principals, school closures and enrollment declines also imply a shrinking labor market with lessening demand for rural principals (Kinkley & Yun, 2019). With family socioeconomic status being a huge determinant of educational attainments and student prospects, students from such disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to develop apathetic attitudes towards their education and eventual dropout of school or graduate with poor grades (Uddin, 2015). Student efficacy and motivation are key to learning success, and they are heavily drawn from family and socioeconomic sources.

### **Educational Infrastructure**

Rural schools in Ghana lack good infrastructure and facilities, they have low enrollments, less qualified teachers, and inadequate textbooks, and other teaching and learning materials, whereas urban schools are generally overstaffed with qualified teachers, are overenrolled, better funded, and monitored, have better infrastructure and adequate resources to work with (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). Jamil et al. (2018) argued that teaching quality, electricity, gas, and school building improve school performance in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, our results do not find a role for science lab and playground in school performance. Our findings show that the impact of electricity, gas and building construction is more pronounced in rural schools. Academic facilities of the school are considered as a key determinant of school performance (Gibson, 2012). Essential school facilities such as laboratory, classrooms, and library are significant determinants of the performance of schools. Rural Ghanaian schools are hard hit by infrastructural challenges, ranging from non-availability to dilapidated school structures. As of 2021, some schools hold classes under trees, keeping multiple and different year grades in the

same classroom because of inadequate classrooms and other infrastructural resources. In some cases, existing schools are not well maintained; therefore, the buildings are not safe enough for children and teachers to conduct the teaching and learning process. Some schools have no room for the basic school components to manage the resources and its facilities. The literature related to the achievement gap reflects agreement that the achievement gap exists, and it is problematic.

### **School Dropout and Misdemeanor**

School dropout is most common due to poor socio-economic structures of rural families. Poverty, child labor, teenage pregnancy and distance to school are the major causes of dropout (Adam et al., 2016). It was also found that teacher's attitude, corporal punishment, death, and sickness of parents lead to dropouts in schools (Adam et al., 2016). Data indicates that 10% of BS-age children (4–13) remained out of school (Ghana Education Sector Analysis-ESA, 2018). Besides, about 26% of children who start school drop-out. Only 40% of JHS students transition to SHS [by 2017]. Two thirds of the children who do not achieve success in PTE in Ghana come mostly from the rural communities and the deprived districts (Ghana Education Sector Analysis-ESA, 2018). Merton (1968) has seen lower classes as more vulnerable to pressures conducive to anomie and deviance than the upper classes. Merton (1968) emphasized that pressures lead to high rates of deviance and more acute anomie in the lower strata. Deducing from Durkheim and Merton, societal culture and expectations exert pressure on its members to excel in their endeavors. Strain theories expect socio-economically disadvantaged students to be overrepresented among perpetrators of school-deviant behavior. School or student delinquency is related to socioeconomic factors such as poor parental upbringing, poverty, and broken homes. Anomie is a state of mind and set of attitudes beliefs and personal feelings to the individual that his surrounding is full of confusion and chaos which does not stand any regularity and organized

rules (Bashir & Singh, 2018). Strain theories expect socio-economically disadvantaged students to be overrepresented among perpetrators of school-deviant behavior (Demant & van Houtte, 2019). In a twist, Demant and van Houtte (2019) argued that school misconduct is more strongly, and also more consistently across contexts, linked to a higher sense of deprivation than to a lower socioeconomic status. Leaving school early has important social and economic implications, being one of the significant factors which contribute directly to social exclusion in later life (Tecău, 2017). In recent times school dropout has become a serious canker in Ghanaian societies, especially in the rural areas (Adam et al., 2016). As a solution, significantly decreasing the number of young people leaving school early is considered an essential investment for strengthening equity, future prosperity, social cohesion (OECD, 2012). Garner (2019) maintained that learners of all ages are more motivated when they can see the usefulness of what they are learning. Similarly, humans are driven to exercise control over their activities, and children are more likely to be motivated to learn when they believe that their actions are intrinsically initiated and when they have opportunities to regulate their actions or make choices (Filgona et al., 2020). Learners who do not believe that they have control or choice are less likely to expend the effort necessary to learn (Bandura, 1977).

### **Post-school Endeavors/Accomplishments**

Educational attainments dictate prospects (Marx, 1906). After students graduate or leave school, for example, their job prospects may look great or otherwise depending on certain factors. All things being equal, education is expected to help students to do more, or at least be better, than they would without education. Generally, developing a successful career and good earning may take decades to achieve. The few that can climb the educational ladder, acquire skills, and build a strong career are more likely to earn a higher income and eventually achieve

future financial freedom (Friedman & Laurison, 2020). In the same way, those who leave the school system early or not acquiring the necessary education end up doing menial jobs and thereby achieving extraordinarily little in life. That is, there is a correlation between educational attainment and economic outcomes.

### **Economic Trends**

The importance of economic considerations in defining the challenges for rural education extends beyond population shifts. Marx (1906) suggested that control over the means and relations of production as well as political power, influence higher socioeconomic success in the bourgeoisies than in the proletariats in the society. Opoku-Asare and Siaw (2015) maintained that education is one of the most powerful instruments known for reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth. An individual student's individual and family features have greater influence than school-level factors on the educational gap between rural and urban areas (Seung-IL & Sang-Ki, 2011). The significant economic considerations in defining the challenges for rural education extend beyond population shifts. Marx (1906) considered society as an arena of social conflict. He added that function and role of social institutions can be best understood by their economic systems. Students from poor, rural schools experience disadvantages in college attendance and graduation (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). Economic deficiencies at home and institution affect academic achievement. Allington et al. (2010) agreed that limited access to financial assets within the family (such as technology, books, or education-rich experiences) affects performance. Additionally, characteristics of low-income families that influence children's performance include the inability to afford healthcare and high mobility/absence rates as parents move from place-to-place following work/job opportunities (Iruka et al., 2019).

Persistent and chronic poverty remains the single most significant social issue facing rural communities in around the globe and, therefore, poverty must be at the forefront of any overview of challenges in these areas. There is a significant rural–urban disparity in poverty, with consistently higher poverty in rural counties since the 1970s (Brooks & Voltaire, 2020). The median family income in rural areas is about three-fourths that of metropolitan areas and metropolitan areas have a proportionately greater share of professional and upper-level managerial positions. Urban jobs pay more than rural, and given their concentration in metropolitan areas, income differentials between rural and metropolitan areas are made worse. In contrast, rural areas have a higher proportion of the working poor who are stuck in low-wage, low-benefit jobs with most being farmers (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). The economic and demographic challenges in rural contexts may be further demonstrated by their effects on families and intergenerational relationships. Family life in the rural U.S. indeed reflects these unique challenges through the constraints and opportunities parents regularly experience in their attempt to raise and provide for their children (Brooks & Voltaire, 2020). In the current economic landscape, earning a college degree is imperative for financial stability and long-term employment (Byun et al., 2017). In examining family characteristics, the level of parental education is significantly associated with enrollment patterns for rural youth (Byun et al., 2017).

Gaps in wages based on education level perpetuate poverty rates with numerous families stuck in this restrictive cycle for many generations. Limited family resources lead to educational disadvantages for children, evident in early childhood and compounded over time with deficits at the school and community levels (Brooks & Voltaire, 2020). It is established that while parents often aspire to be involved in their children’s education, some face barriers that prevent this. Studies recognized economic constraints as a barrier, presenting a steep gradient whereby the

richer households are, the higher their parental involvement levels (Cashman et al., 2021). Again, while wealth is considered an enabler of parental involvement in children's learning, deprivation, or family financial strain, has been extensively empirically linked to disrupted parenting in existing literature (Cashman et al., 2021).

The concept of geographic isolation is linked to an average lower socio-economic status, and as such is rooted in the dominant paradigm of socio-economic status as the cause of disadvantage (Roberts, 2016). Stelmach (2011) added that, "rural poverty is a persistent macrosystemic issue related to rural education" (p. 35), which influences educational outcomes significantly and provides a layer of perspective on the impact of the economy on the challenges to rural education. Rural poverty is severe and more prevalent in both the general and the school-aged segments of the population. In many rural communities the local populations are aging more rapidly than in cities, as suburban and urban baby boomers relocate to amenity-rich rural places and the rural poor, unable to move, age in place. Male and Wodon (2016) linked poor educational outcomes in rural Ghana to socio-cultural practices such as child marriage (including forced marriage) to culture, religion, and poverty.

### **Education Reduces Poverty and Inequality**

Because education is an effective tool in raising living standards, mitigating, and preventing of various phenomena that have negative impacts on children and young people, and offering alternatives to poverty, social exclusion, discrimination it is critical to bridge the rural-urban achievement gap. The basic school attendance rate for rural schools is 48% compared to urban school attendance which is 55% (GSS, 2015). For basic school gender parity index, the rural and deprived districts' rate is 0.93 as against 1.3 for urban and non-deprived districts (ESPR, 2015). This implies that rural girls have slimmer access to education than their urban



counterparts. Basic school completion rate for rural/deprived districts stands at 64% compared to 84% for urban school districts. Also, the higher the education, the higher the earning potential it represents, all things being equal. White collar jobs, including managerial and technical jobs requiring higher education have shifted increasingly to urban centers. As lower social strata individuals likely perceive such goal blockage, they are predisposed towards crime. It drives the fact that the overemphasis on success goals and the striving for the realization of continuously higher targets are culturally induced. Because of limited access to opportunities, the lower classes become more vulnerable to pressures conducive to anomie and deviance than the upper classes. Studies showed that experiences of economic hardship are more important for rule breaking than objective conditions of socioeconomic status (Ajdukovic et al., 2018; Bernburg & Krohn, 2003; Bernburg et al., 2009; Demanet & van Houtte, 2019).

### **Economic Deficiencies at Home and Schools**

Poverty is a global challenge and impacts families and communities, including schools. Plucker and Peters (2018) argued that regardless of how poverty is conceptualized, evidence suggests that U.S. childhood poverty rates are indeed high, both in absolute terms and relative to other countries, and that income-related achievement disparities are similarly large. Plucker and Peters (2018) again suggested that most aspects of children's physical, cognitive, and affective health and development are affected by poverty, primarily due to the effects of deleterious environments, lack of access to quality education and other human services, and lack of resources. Perceived economic hardship is associated with behavioral engagement in school in two ways. First, there is a direct positive link from perceived economic hardship to engagement (i.e., the motivational pathway) (Ansong et al., 2018). Second, the perceived economic difficulties are negatively associated with participants' participation in academic work, but only

through the inconsistent mediating role of students' future intentions (Ansong et al., 2018). The differences in life history traits and behavior between disadvantaged and advantaged groups are not exclusively driven by 'deficits' in ability but by responses which are appropriate in particular environments (Frankenhuis & Nettle, 2020).

### **Persistent and Chronic Poverty**

Poverty is rife in many developing countries, and this has serious implications for the provision of quality education. Up to 70% of Ghana's population is rural, lives under the national poverty line and predominantly depends on agricultural activities as their main source of income (Anlimachie, 2019; Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020). There is a strong linkage between agricultural development, and innovation and rural poverty reduction efforts in the Ghanaian context (FAO, 2020). Rural areas are found to have high rates of poverty and low levels of educational attainment (Cosby et al., 2019). It is also found that rural schools are staffed by a younger, less well-educated faculty and administration who earn lower salaries and benefits than their metropolitan counterparts (Stern, 1994; Tieken, 2016; Tieken & San Antonio, 2016). An age-long trend is that most of the world's poor live in rural areas, and are engaged in farming (Aguilar & Sumner, 2019). Tieken (2016) added that rural youth may be witnessing declining economies and widespread shifts in local employment opportunities that may lead to the adjustment of their career and educational expectations. Accelerated learning programs may be beyond the financial reach of high poverty schools, many students may be unable to attend such programs outside their neighborhood if transportation is required, and internet-delivered programs may also be impracticable for students lacking the technology to access them (Plucker & Peters, 2018). Marx (1906) conceptualized and explained how social class, unequal distribution of resources, power, prestige, cultural identity, segregation, and discrimination induce variations in status attainment

between the social and racial/ethnic groups in an industrial society. The foregoing position explains the educational inequalities in our society today, and more importantly in rural education. Universally, control over the means and relations of production as well as political power influence higher socioeconomic success in the bourgeoisie than in the proletariat in the society (Marx, 1906). With family socioeconomic status being a huge determinant of educational attainments and students' prospects, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are prone to academic pitfalls and likely to develop apathetic attitudes towards their education and eventual dropout of school or graduate with poor grades (Iruka et al., 2019).

### **Family Characteristics – Education and Wages**

Research has demonstrated that well-educated parents have deeper understanding of education and take it as more important, when parent's education is lower than, because of their limited understanding or low-income with which only can barely support the family, they could not get any utility from their children's education (Assari, 2018; Long & Pang, 2016; Samara & Ioannidi, 2019; Sharma, et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2008). The foregoing situation impacts parent-teacher engagement and community-school engagement which eventually impacts students' achievements. Again, a student's family background and environment shape the attitudes that the students develop towards learning (Samara & Ioannidi, 2019; Sharma et al., 2020). Parents in rural areas often have a relatively low level of education, and as a result, they may attach low value to schooling and be less able to help their children acquire the education they may need (Chakanika et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2020). In general, well-educated parents have deeper understanding of education and see it as more important, but when parents' education level is lower, because of their shallow understanding or low-income with which they can barely support the family, they cannot get any utility from their children's education (Jaiswal, 2018). Family

socioeconomic factors and public funding of rural schools remain the biggest challenge to rural education. Several circumstances make rural students vulnerable to poor schooling outcomes and lower educational aspirations.

### **Geographic Isolation and Lower SES**

A key observation is that rural communities and schools are sparsely and remotely located. Also, most rural Ghanaian families are peasant farmers and historically have low incomes. Those from low socioeconomic status (SES) often lack access to public space and, when they have access, they are often discouraged from using public space (Trawalter et al., 2021). Scholars from human geography and related fields have argued that this limits engagement in civic life and undermines sense of belonging in one's community. Compared with higher-SES students, lower-SES students use public space on campus less, iconic public space in particular and this can mediate the relationship between socioeconomic status and sense of belonging at the University (Trawalter et al., 2021).

### **Ghana Specific Economic Trends**

Inadequate funding, poor monitoring and evaluation, insufficient relevant curriculum, inadequately trained and poor distribution of teachers, and poor levels of community involvement, are major obstacles, especially those relating to quality and equity outcomes (Edzii, 2017; UNESCO, 2015). These point to the fact that rural students are at risk and disadvantage and cannot fairly compete with their urban counterparts. Investment in education at both family and public levels remains a key determinant of successful rural educational outcomes but these are lacking due to high rate of poverty or low socioeconomic status (SES), thereby widening the rural-urban achievement gap (Biddle & Azano, 2016). A great number of rural communities in

Ghana only have primary schools, and students had to commute long kilometers to a neighboring village to attend junior high school (JHS).

### **Demographic Trends**

Geographic isolation opposes equitable education and rural students continue to be sidelined in all spheres of opportunities. While all the rural characteristics affect rural students through their combined effects, low-income (SES) remains the most powerful characteristics of rural settings (Anlimachie, 2019). Socioeconomic status drives many other factors. Most of the world's poor live in rural areas and are engaged in farming (Aguilar & Sumner, 2019). Assessing family-school connection in a rural setting, Semke and Sheridan (2012) found context, both geographical and the cultural, relates to where child's home or school is located, and is a significant determinant of educational outcomes. Anlimachie (2019) and Gaddah et al. (2015) have linked the rural-urban gap in educational outcomes in Ghana to geographical distance and remoteness associated with rurality. Remoteness and longer travelling distance in rural communities in Ghana impact negatively on school enrolment, attendance, and dropout rates (Anlimachie, 2019; Gaddah, et al., 2015). Anlimachie (2019) found that longer walking distance between pupils and schools is associated with lower attendance, high dropout, and poor educational outcomes in rural basic schools in Ghana (Anlimachie, 2019). Further, a longer travelling distance in rural Ghana is linked to poor quality supervision in rural basic schools. Edzii (2017) also linked the educational inequality in Ghana to low community/parents' participation in school, especially in rural Ghana.

### **Occupations – Primarily Farmers**

Almost all rural Ghana dwellers are farmers. Mostly peasant farmers with low incomes. This explains the rationale behind the high poverty among rural communities and schools.

Because these demographics are remotely located, the schools are smaller with low enrollments (Kim et al., 2020). The above situations also meant little to zero funding for school development and to attract well-qualified teachers (Alexander & Jang, 2019).

### **Out-Migration of Young People and In-Migration of Older People**

There are two opposing shifts in the rural population that impact rural education. First, an economically driven shift which represents the movement of working-aged adults to urban areas for employment opportunities that do not exist in the rural communities (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003). Some rural communities have experienced intense out-migration of young people in search of economic opportunity in the face of local economic decline (Amoako-Mensah et al., 2019; Petrin et al., 2014). Demographic analyses have consistently shown that, in aggregate, rural out-migrants tend to be younger and more educated than rural *stayers* (Schafft, 2016). Castro-Palaganas et al. (2017) discuss a draining of both population and human resources from rural places. Secondly, the older adults are moving to rural areas to improve their quality-of-life, mostly after retirement. The characteristic challenges of rural areas and rural education is partly defined by these contrasting population shifts. For prospects, if society fails to provide enough jobs that pay a living wage so that its citizens can work to survive, then many are likely turn to criminal ways of earning a living (Merton, 1968).

### **Crime Rate/Deviancy Factors**

Strain theories address how we expect socio-economically disadvantaged students to be overrepresented among perpetrators of school-deviant behavior. An overrepresentation of socio-economically disadvantaged students among the deviant would instigate more social inequality in society (Demant & Van Houtte, 2019). It is found that socioeconomic status (SES) is negatively associated with school expulsion, skipping school, and smoking cigarettes, but

positively linked to smoking marijuana, shoplifting, and drinking alcohol. However, some studies found higher SES-students to be more likely to commit school-deviant behavior (Demagnet & Van Houtte 2011, 2014). Social rule requires one to conform and comply with established norms and values including doing what is right. However, where the environment (rural challenges) presents unique challenges that make it difficult or impossible to conform to those norms and values may result in disobedience, rebellion or misdemeanor, and resultant dropout from the school system (Humphrey & Schmalleger, 2019; Merton, 1938). Again, while there is societal pressure to achieve success in our endeavors, including school achievements, there is minimum pressure to play by the rules. Under this circumstance, an individual is most likely to choose efficient or easy way to reach their goal. The result is higher levels of predatory crimes such as robbery and others. Rural students facing severe rural characteristic challenges (long commuting, poor SES, etc.) may lose interest in school and choose alternative paths for survival. Typically, there is a general imbalance between cultural goals and the legitimate ways to achieve those goals when students fail the normal progression of life/academic endeavor. This leads to unsatisfied aspirations. Individuals with unsatisfied aspirations resort to crimes and other deviant behaviors such as robbery, misdemeanor, and other unapproved societal issues (Alvarez & Bachman, 2019), which is consistent with Merton's (1938) belief that rules are known to the rule violators, but the emotional supports of these rules are largely vitiated by cultural exaggeration of the success-goal. It captures the extent of the individual's readiness to disregard the rules or to use the technically most efficient and available means for monetary success (Zhao & Cao, 2010). Merton (1968) maintained that individuals failing to attain valued goals through legitimate means are likely to turn to deviant behavior. Merton (1938, 1968) presents a strain theory of deviant behavior that holds that people are more likely to pursue illegitimate means to

attaining culturally prescribed goals when they are blocked from accessing the institutionalized means to these goals. Merton (1968) posited that individuals failing to attain valued goals through legitimate means are likely to turn to deviant behaviors. It should be noted that all persons have the potential and the desire to move up in life and to succeed in life.

### **Ghana Specific Demographic Trends**

Herzog and Pittman (1995, 2003) argued that rural population is decreasing at an alarming rate. In comparison with metropolitan areas, there is a relative decrease in the proportion of the working-age population. Rural Ghana has limited opportunities and modern facilities. The general outlook of rural education in Ghana is not attractive; poor or inadequate infrastructure, schools are understaffed, enrollments dwindling, teaching and learning materials are either unavailable or inadequate. Rural communities are predominantly farmers. Poverty is very extreme in rural Ghanaian communities. As a result, the mass of Ghanaian youth continue to migrate to urban areas in search for better living conditions, even without any requisite education or skills. They added that the older segment of the population is also increasing; that is, the rural population is becoming smaller and changing age while urban population gains (Anlimachie, 2019; Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Johnson & Lichter, 2020). Furthermore, the rural to urban migration is primarily due to working-aged adults moving for better employment opportunities (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Lo et al., 2018).

### **Environmental Factors**

Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) being the primary theory framing this study, considers the influences on a child's development within the context of the complex system of relationships that form the child's immediate environment. It maintains that a child's development is a result of a variety of critical dimensions including context, process, time, and



the individual's attributes. The theory highlights the combination of personal attribute and environmental characteristics influencing a child's development. It explains the construct of development and the multi-system layers of the environment that influence child development. It further describes the nature of the processes within the environment that influence development (Lewthwaite, 2011). The environmental factors play at the macrosystemic level. It is very common in rural Ghanaian communities to see parents forcing their children to go to the farm. On market days, the children help cart farm produce and other items meant for sale to the market or a nearby lorry station. Darko and Solomon recalled going to farm to fetch firewood and farm produce after school. These and many other challenges affected the participants ability to learn.

### **Microsystem-Family and School**

Microsystems include a child's immediate relationships and entities the child interacts with, such as, the family, peer group, or school setting. Neighborhoods, parenting, and family factors are associated and impact a child's development (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Rural Ghanaian parental education, family income, and school, local neighborhoods present a unique environment for how the rural child develops. Most rural Ghanaian families are farmers, with limited incomes as discussed by the participants. As a result, there the conflicts among some parents to use their children as farm helps on their farms. This problem of using their children on farms has over the years affected students' performance and has created a disengaged relationships between some parents and the teachers. The low-socioeconomic among rural Ghanaian families further deepens the woes of rural students as some parents are unable to provide the school needs of their children and meet other school requirements such as attending PTA meetings and playing active roles in their children's education. The forgoing challenges were expressed by most of the participants in this study. Most of the participants experienced

unsupportive microsystems. For instance, the negative impacts of multiple household chores, farming activities, and running of errands on their school attendance, concentration in class and overall academic achievements. The above are consistent with participants' expression of feeling tired from tasks such as fetching water, long commutes to-and-from school, cleaning and selling for their parents resulting in low academic, and general educational attainment.

### **Mesosystem-Home-School Partnership**

The mesosystem emphasizes interrelationships between different microsystems. Parental involvement in children's schooling can have a positive influence on children's academic competence through children's valuing of academics (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). In Ghana, the key social environments (home, school, and peers) and the interconnected social relationships have implications for students' personalized learning and behavior in the classroom. While there has been a significant improvement in past years, most rural Ghanaian parents still do not involve themselves in their children's education. More participants in this study admitted that their parents could not provide their school needs such as food, footwear, school bags, school uniforms, and even engaging with their school/teachers. In this study, most of the participants admitted not properly equipped from home to excel at the school. These have created and continue to create disconnects between the rural Ghanaian homes and the rural schools. This rural interconnectedness asserts enormous influences upon the rural students and affects the overall school experiences of the rural Ghanaian student. A significant number of rural Ghanaian parents do not participate in their children's education as was the cases of David, Richard, and Daniel, to mention few. Some of these Ghanaian rural parents who are predominantly farmers, attempt to influence their children to take to farming instead of education as was the case of Daniel. Richard recalled, "My parents had no interest in my schooling and

never attended PTA meetings.” David also shared, “My parents did not help me, and I don’t know why.” There is a disconnect between the rural community and their school which stems from the hostile relationships that exist between some parents and the teachers. Daniel recalled, “my father was hostile to my teachers.” There is, however, synergies in rural Ghanaian communities and among rural parents as they share common culture and values.

### **Exosystem-Community**

The exosystem has indirect effect on child’s developmental outcome and refers to the setting in which the child does not actively participate. The exosystem may include the parents’ workplace. What takes place at the workplace can affect children through how parents interact with their children. A child’s exosystem includes the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the developing person lives (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). In the Ghanaian rural educational setting, the elements of family poverty, inadequate teaching and learning resources, burnouts from students’ long commutes, poor nourishment, understaffed schools, poor parent-teacher engagements turn to have a rippling effect on students’ lives. The setting or the environment has indirect effects on students’ motivation and academic achievements (Anlimachie, 2019).

### **Macrosystem-Rural Culture/Economics**

In the context of this study, a developing child’s environment (rural) is where the developing person is living (e.g., occidental world). The power of developmental forces operating at any one system level of the environment depends on the nature of the environmental structures existing at the same or higher levels of the system. The macrosystem in a child’s development looks at the society and including cultural values and describes the economic

conditions under which families live (Bronfenbrenner, 1976), along with material resources, and opportunity structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). It also includes laws, rules, information, and ideology. The interrelations among these nested environments allow for examination of how patterns of interactions within these systems influence each other and affect individuals' developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The Ghanaian values, norms, customs and policies severely subject rural education to the disadvantage. The foregoing is due to political, economic, geographical, health and demographic factors. Ghanaian rural schools are understaffed, underfunded, have inadequate infrastructure and limited teaching and learning resources. Additionally, communities in which these rural schools are located are farming communities characterized by high level of poverty. These challenges were manifested in participants rural educational journeys.

### **Policy Decisions and Interventions**

There is a compelling need to gain a holistic view and an assessment of rural students in the face of rural characteristic challenges, during and after their school experiences, to close the gap in knowledge about how these challenges impact students' achievements and prospects. The rural gap is primarily a problem of social inequality and, politically, it has turned from being considered as a question of economic development, to being seen as an issue of social cohesion (Camarero & Oliva, 2019). The challenges of rural education are numerous, complex, and intertwined. This calls for robust understanding to craft the needed rural education policies and strategies control the menace and provides useful insights for policymaking to reduce rural–urban education inequality and assist human capital accumulation in Ghana and globally. Educational reforms and interventions must reach out to the most vulnerable groups such as the rural folks and uplift them from exclusion and poverty through at least equitable access to quality

education (Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020; Thamminaina et al., 2020; Tuparevska et al., 2019). Finally, to reform rural education and improve rural educational outcomes, it is necessary to understand the theoretical concepts underlying a child's development and how environmental influences can greatly determine a child's school success.

Understanding rural students' feelings and perception is critical for policy decisions that may focus on low-performing disadvantaged students, and to identify the best policy strategies to support their efforts in reducing school failure. This starts by analyzing what the specific rural challenges exist in rural schools. Developing and supporting specialized rural school leadership; fostering a positive and supportive school environment; training, recruiting, and retaining competent rural teachers equally requires holistic understanding of rural educational problems as experienced by rural students.

The school cancelation and consolidation policy that was meant to concentrate educational resources and increase educational efficiency did improve the transition rate and educational quality of a minority of key schools, but in other villages, JHS schools lacked resources and had low-quality education, poor grades among students was widespread, they lost interest in studying, and teachers let students do as they wished (Chunling, 2015). Understanding how ruralness and rural education impact students coming from rural communities and schools will help to establish educational policies that are most effective in boosting rural academic productivity, creating opportunities, and motivating students to have a deep interest in education and ensure an equitable allocation of educational resources. Rural education suffers poor planning and ineffective policy implementation characterized by low school enrollments and consistent abysmal performances. Unequal distribution of education resources, including infrastructure have led to disparities in all spheres and measures of education (Bayer et al., 2019;

Montez, et al., 2019). There is the need for stakeholders to understand the issue of rural phenomenon, develop effective rural school leadership to support the rural school environment. Resiliency and self-efficacy are key ingredients in any human endeavors and should be built and instilled in rural students both at home and school through good leadership and motivation. Training and incentive-based recruiting can help in retaining rural teachers, school cancellation and consolidation policy, and equitable distribution of educational resources are the way forward.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on literature by examining the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory and Bandura's (1977, 1996) social cognitive theory that guide and frame the study to understand the foregoing phenomena; ruralness and rural education. Literature indicates that ruralness and rural characteristics greatly impact school achievements of rural students and prospects (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019; Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003).

Rural education is plagued with issues including but not limited to teacher training not keeping up with growth in education, unfavorable living conditions, unfavorable working conditions for staff, long commuting distance to school, lack/inadequate teaching aids, dilapidated infrastructure, lack of social amenities, gender issues, limited access to information, electricity, recreation and public facilities, problem of accommodation, and perception of the value of education among some local communities and indigenes. There are also declining rural school enrollments due to out-migration to urban areas as well as gaining population in rural communities causing economic decline in rural areas (Amoako-Mensah et al., 2019; Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Johnson & Lichter, 2020).

Aside from the unique characteristics associated with rural communities and rural schools, including but not limited to low population density together with family isolation, and community remoteness, rural poverty, small school, and class sizes, declining population (Cernkovich et al., 2000; Howley et al., 2009; Redding & Walberg, 2013), the phenomena have carved educational, economic, and demographic trends that further affect rural students' experiences with resultant abysmal academic outcomes and prospects. The foregoing development warrants the need to study how rural students experience the phenomena.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

Chapter Three depicts the methods and procedures used to investigate the perceived impacts of ruralness and rural education on rural students' academic achievements and the long-term adult lives of rural students. The purpose of this study was to investigate how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the achievements and prospects of rural students through digging into the lived experiences of past rural students (participants).

### **Research Design**

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach is the most ideal methodology for this study (van Manen, 1997, 2014). This approach is centered on the participants' lived experiences with no regard to social or cultural norms, traditions, or preconceived ideas about the experience (van Manen, 1997, 2002). Data from the participants was obtained via semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and a timeline creation, while honoring and respecting the confidentiality of all participants. Following data collection, I provided an analysis of the examination of data and a description of how I established trustworthiness for the study. The interpretative aspect of hermeneutical research is to find justifiable modes through which my experience and comprehension of the phenomenon being researched can serve as a bridge or access for elucidating and interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon (van Manen, M. (1997). As the researcher, I have lived experiences, both as a student and a teacher, that justify the choice of the hermeneutic design. This design allows me to use students' own lived experiences and responses to explore, investigate and interpret the rural phenomena (van Manen, 1997), in a retrospective fashion.



### **Research Questions**

**CQ1.** How do ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the long-term adult lives of rural students?

**SQ1.** How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students' learning and efficacy?

**SQ2.** How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students' post-school outcomes?

### **Setting**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study was conducted in the eastern regional capital of Ghana, Koforidua. Each region within Ghana has rural communities and rural schools that are sparsely and remotely located, with some schools holding classes under trees, inadequate number and quality of staff, high staff turnover, students commuting long kilometers to schools, poor/low enrollments, low graduation rates, dilapidated school structures, bad road networks, absence of basic amenities such as electricity, potable water, and telephone service. It must be noted that all the sixteen regions of Ghana have rural communities and schools and share the same rural characteristics. Participants were recruited from the rural communities within the eastern region.

### **Participants**

To recruit potential participants for the study, I began with convenience sampling then used snowball sampling to further select participants for the study. The snowball method occurred through recommendations from other participants who bore similar characteristics and possessed relevant knowledge (Cohen et al., 2009; Welman & Kruger, 2001). In addition to the snowball sampling technique, the headteachers and teachers in the rural school communities were valuable resources in locating potential participants for the study. The 13 participants have

experienced and lived in a rural community and have experienced rural basic education (Cohen et al., 2009; Welman & Kruger, 2001).

A total of 13 participants were selected, after reaching thematic saturation of findings. Participants have attended rural basic school and have graduated, progressed to senior high school (SHS), attended college, or dropped out of school. While there was no age limit, participation was opened to all *past rural basic school students*. With over 46 dialects in Ghana, participants came from varied backgrounds and cultures, had varied educational levels, and lived within different locations within the eastern region of Ghana. Participants might have completed their rural education in any rural community within the eastern region of Ghana, but they had to be a resident with the eastern region at the time of the study. Each participant was given a pseudonym to safeguard their privacy. Participant demographics can be found in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Participants by Name, Rural School Attendance, Gender, Education, and Years in Rural School*

<b>Name (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Rural Prim, School Attended</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Final Level of Education (PS/JHS/HS, etc.)</b>	<b>Years in Rural School</b>
Alex	PS/JHS	M	Bachelor's	14
Amiyoo	PS	F	Primary School	12
Caxton	PS/JHS	M	Bachelor's	14
Daniel	PS/JHS	M	Bachelor's	13
Darko	PS/JHS	M	JHS	13
David	PS/JHS	M	Junior High School	12
Francis	PS/JHS	M	Bachelor's	13
Gifty	JHS	F	Bachelor's	3

Michael	PS	M	Primary School	10
Prosper	PS/JHS	M	High School	13
Richard	PS/JHS	M	Junior High School	14
Solomon	PS/JHS	M	Junior High School	14
Victoria	PS	F	Primary School	9

*Note:* Names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

PS = Primary School, JHS = Junior High School, HS = High School; M = Male, F = Female.

### **The Researcher's Role**

My name is Robert Tsitey, and I am the researcher of this study. I am a former JHS teacher in a rural community in the Akwapim North municipality in the eastern region of Ghana. I was involved in teaching, assessments, student enrollments, co-curricular activities, and engaging with parents and our rural school community. For some years now, I have worked as an accountant with the U.S Department of Defense after serving in the U.S Army. Though I have been away from the field of education for over fifteen years, I have always felt fulfilled and satisfied with my time teaching in the rural community and I am happy that I chose teaching/education as my first career. The reflections of impacts that I have observed in the lives of students and parents at that time are still fresh, and they return to me each time that I meet those rural students and parents.

Willis (2007) and Merriam (2009) stated that the data collection and analysis processes depend on the researcher; the researcher is therefore the primary tool. My role as the principal researcher is to observe behavior and go beyond it to inquire about meaning of phenomena and then apply the primary data collection tools to gather data about participants' lived experience and document responses. Finlay (2009) stated that applied to research, phenomenology is the

study of phenomena: their nature and meanings. The focus is on the way things appear to us through experience or in our consciousness and where the phenomenological researcher aims to provide a rich textured description of lived experience (van Manen, 1997).

In a hermeneutic study, lived experiences and beliefs are valued, therefore my own experiences as a rural student and a teacher position me in an interpretive role for this study. An important aspect of this study is for me, the researcher, to understand how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact students coming from rural communities and schools in terms of their educational continuity, career advancements, and ability to cope with life through knowledge gained from their education, and take advantage of real-life opportunities, including holding leadership positions. The foregoing position prompts the question “How does the education that rural students receive make them wholly developed, capable of doing all things in life, per the purpose of education in the face of adverse rural characteristic problems?” My own life experiences (as a rural student and a teacher) are immediately accessible to me in a way that no one else's are (van Manen, 1997), they enriched the study, and gave credibility to the thematic interpretation and judgment. I had no authority or relationship to the participants outside of this study and I put any biases or assumptions aside during data collection and analysis.

### **Procedures**

After receiving IRB approval from the Liberty University (see Appendix A), I moved forward to find potential participants from the eastern region of Ghana. All participants completed an informed consent form (see Appendix B) before the data collection. Participants' participation in the study was purely voluntary and they could withdraw at any stage of the study, none did. The initial potential participants helped recommend other potential participants for the study (Cohen et al., 2009; Welman & Kruger, 2001). I first piloted the study with group

of two of the participants to test my data collection tools (interviews, focus group, and projective technique). The pilot trial helped me plan and strategize to conduct the actual data collection more efficiently and accurately. While the actual study plan did not change after the pilot study, it allowed me to prepare adequately in terms of meeting at locations with least noise or disturbance. I also put aside an additional audio recorder as a backup. I continued to work with the participants to inform and educate them about the study and their role and expectations ahead of the data collections. Participants were required to meet the criteria of being past rural students who have lived in a rural setting, have experienced rural and rural school characteristics, attended rural basic schools, and have graduated or dropped out of school.

After the pilot study, I moved forward with the study. The collection of data included individual interviews, focus groups, and projective technique (timeline creation). I scheduled individual interviews with each participant per the convenience of his/her time and place to meet for the data collection. The 13 participants remained consistent throughout the study to meet the required number of participants needed to achieve data saturation (van Manen, 1997, 2014). As I complete the data collection from each of the categories (interviews, focus groups, and timeline creation), I transcribed the data. I then begin the process of thematic analysis of the collected data. For privacy and protection, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant, and code each participants' responses to a category that describes his/her response that I identified as similarities and commonalities present in the data (Surmiak, 2018).

### **Data Collection Plan**

Multiple data collection techniques, including individual interviews, focus groups, and a projective technique (timeline) was used to gather the research data, and interpret participants' lived experiences of ruralness and rural educational phenomena. Multiple methods of data

collection are encouraged to acquire a greater variety of perspectives, meanings, and experiences (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1997; Willis, 2007). By triangulating data, the researcher attempts to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility (Flick, 2018; Noble & Heale, 2019). By examining information collected through different methods, the researcher can corroborate findings across data sets and thus reduce the impact of potential biases that can exist in a single study. According to Creswell (2013), triangulation helps the researcher guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's bias. The fieldwork data collection process took about two months, covering selected rural communities within the eastern region of Ghana.

Before the data collection, a pilot study was conducted with two past rural students who are adults. While the rationale for the pilot study was to elicit feedback regarding the nature of the questions and possible problems that may be identified, not problem identified. It however allowed me to plan well in terms of location and recording devices which improved the data collection experience and quality of data. The three data collection techniques were employed to satisfy data triangulation. Analysis of the piloted data collected portrayed themes that reflected and answered the research questions. The proposed plan worked well, hence no adjustments to the research questions or analysis were needed after the pilot study was conducted.

A research log was maintained to track the steps and processes of the data collection (see Appendix F). Three sources of data were used for a triangulation of responses; semi-structured face-to-face interviews made up of 17 questions, six focus group questions, and a projective technique (timeline). Interviews took place at a convenient place and time as agreed by each participant (Appendix F). Four focus groups made up of three participants in each group were constituted. Participants responded to questions presented, focusing on how they experienced

rural schooling and how those experiences are impacting their adult lives. The transcriptions of their responses were also verified by the participants. After reading the participants' responses multiple times, words and phrases were utilized as codes that are explained in the subsequent section. These replies mirrored many of the sentiments expressed in the individual interviews and the focus group interviews. The participants passionately shared similar ways that they have made meaning of their lived rural educational experiences. Within a week after our meetings (i.e., for the interview and focus groups), the participants completed their timelines. The focus groups presented an opportunity for participants to meet colleagues who have equally experienced rural education and discuss common rural educational issues. Each participant agreed and verified the transcription of their responses within a week.

### **Interviews**

The primary form of data collection for this study was individual interviews (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were used for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of the rural educational phenomenon, and as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with participants (interviewees) about the meaning of rural educational experience (van Manen, 1997). Interview questions were first be piloted with a group of two of the potential participants. The pilot trial helped me to plan and strategize before the official data collection. In-depth open-ended, semi-structured interviews consisting of predetermined questions, as well as follow-up questions were used during the interviews. Therefore, the interview questions had no specific order and allow the researcher to react to the responses of the interviewees (Merriam, 2009).

Questions were grounded in current research to aid in adding to the research fields of rural education, economic trends, and rural academic success. In collecting conversational

interviews (transcripts) one looks for the emerging themes after one has gathered the material; in collecting anecdotes one has to recognize what parts of the "text" of daily living are significant for one's study while it is happening (van Manen, 1997). Each interview session was scheduled with each participant at an agreed time and place convenient to the participant. Interviews involved personal meetings with individuals or groups (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were done to ascertain how participants experienced ruralness and rural education, and the impacts resulting from their experiences on their academic achievements and adult lives. Each of the selected participants responded to open-ended questions regarding their lived experiences with regards to ruralness and rural education that they experienced, how they did academically, what went right and bad, and how those experiences have shaped their lives.

I assigned each individual a pseudonym to protect their identities and audiotape and document each interview. Perceptions count and add significant ingredients to lived experiences and are regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted. van Manen (1997) maintained that one can closely assess perceptions and generate new perspectives on knowledge from the past, present, and future. I, therefore, develop the interview questions to uncover participants' perceptions of ruralness and rural education, and how these perceptions have affected them during their academic performance, and their adulthood lives today. After each the interview session, I transcribed the interview data, and provide a copy of the transcript to each participant for member checking.

### **Standardized Open-Ended Interview Question (in Appendix C)**

Demographic Information

Participant Name:

School Attended:



Current occupation:

1. Please introduce yourself, including where you were born and raised.
2. Please share your earliest school experiences.
3. How did you arrive in the rural community/school that you attended?
4. How has your education been different from those in urban areas? (rural/rural educational challenges).
5. What values, norms, and principles did you get from home as a student? (macrosystem)
6. What specific helps did you get from home/family which contribute to your educational success, if any? (microsystem)
7. How were, and what were the nature of engagements between your parents and school/teachers? (mesosystem)
8. What strategies kept you out of trouble at school, such as problems with the law or conforming to community/school norms? Please explain these experiences to me.
9. We know that rural living and rural educational challenges are numerous. Tell me how you stayed motivated. What value did you put on your education and future aspirations?
10. Educationally, how do you think you had control over your education or how have attained your educational aspirations? Please explain.
11. What role did your family's socioeconomic and educational backgrounds play in your education?
12. As a student, how were you adequately prepared or not prepared to be academically successful? Please explain.
13. In what ways do you think that those missing opportunities have affected your academic work and/or still affecting your adult life?

14. Please explain how education should bring one to his/her full potential in life.
15. Please explain your perspective on whether you think your teachers were qualified enough to teach you. Please provide examples to support your assessment.
16. What ways do you think that education should benefit the recipient?
17. What else do you think would be important for me to know about rural challenges affecting rural students learning and development?

Questions one, two, and three are introductory and demographic questions (Patton, 2015), and are designed to enable participants get acquainted with the researcher. These questions are intended to be relatively straightforward and non-intimidating and ideally served to help develop rapport between the participant and the researcher (Patton, 2015). Follow up questions were put as necessary for each participant, based on the responses. Question four invites participants into discussing what makes rural education different from that of urban education (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Omer & Jabeen, 2016).

In comparing the differences between rural and urban education challenges participants to come out with the rural educational challenges. Question five calls participants to identify and assess the macro factors that influenced their education (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Questions six and seven are designed to have participants identify and discuss the microsystemic and mesosystemic factors and how they affected their educational lives (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). These questions are intended to discuss the specific supports that participant received from home and family, and that of the engagements between home and school. Questions eight and nine attempt to assess at participants' steadfastness and resilience in focusing on their education in the face of the afflictions from rural characteristic problem (Bandura, 1977; Merton, 1968). Question eight also addresses the possible deviant behavior that

may be seen due to rural living (Merton, 1968). Question ten deals with the self-efficacy and the control participants feel they have over their futures (Bandura, 1977).

Question eleven looks at the socioeconomic background of the participants as one of the most severe rural characteristic challenges (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Roberts, 2016; Sibhatu & Qaim, 2017). Children look up their parents and follow their paths for inspiration and motivation. Unfortunately, some of these parents have no drive to pursue education beyond their rural confines. Questions twelve through sixteen are intended to give broad assessments of their rural educational experiences in terms of the quality of the education that they receive, teacher quality, and their expectations for education. These questions are important because there is an established link between teacher quality and student academic achievement (Manzeske et al., 2016). The study aims to understand participants' evaluation of their education; whether they believe that they have been taught by qualified teachers, their expectation of education is met, what they think is missing from the education that they had, and advice to potential future students. Question seventeen is intended to allow the participants to come up with any additional issues that were not asked or discussed during the interviews.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus group interviews provide a way to listen and gather information on the way participants felt about a particular topic (Krueger & Casey, 2009), and to facilitate consensus regarding participants' lived experience. Interviewing participants in groups provides a social experience for the participants (Patton, 2015), and allows the participants and researcher to gain a better understanding of their views. Focus group interviews help to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experience (van Manen, 1997) that participants had with rural setting and rural education. Morgan (1997) stated that groups of three to five is acceptable for the

phenomenon being investigated. For the total 13 participants, a total of four focus group interviews were conducted to share their lived rural and rural educational experiences. Each focus group met on two separate occasions. The first meeting lasted for approximately an hour. The second meeting lasted approximately thirty minutes where the transcribed data was discussed with each group to instill trust and credibility between the researcher and the focus group members (Appendix H). The focus groups were facilitated by the researcher and were guided by a set of standardized open-ended semi-structured questions (Appendix D).

Groups were scheduled for focus group interviews based on participants' convenience and availability. The use of focus group as a means of collecting participants' lived rural experiences allowed me to follow up on the information gleaned from overall themes of the open response interview questions. Again, use of focus groups, in series, is an effective strategy for exploring topics from different participant perspectives (Hatch, 2002). I also had an opportunity to refine focus group questions to target dominant themes gleaned from the open response question results. The focus group interviews helped to reshape the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, pointing them more towards dominant themes (Hatch, 2002). All focus group interviews and interactions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Pseudonyms were used in the transcription to enhance anonymity of participants. Once transcribed, participants' responses were analyzed using van Manen (1997) six-step process for hermeneutic phenomenology.

#### **Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions (Appendix D).**

How would you describe rural-urban disparity in education? What could authorities do to bridge this gap?

1. What specifics do you think should change at the higher authority to eliminate the gap?

2. As a local community member, what do you think can be done as individuals/community members to improve education locally?
3. Discuss the engagements between family/parents-school/teacher and how it impacted your education.
4. Based on current situation, discuss your role(s) in your communities, and how you can influence future rural students to succeed?
5. What additional comments/suggestions do you have about how to improve rural educational experiences?

Questions one attempts to uncover the perceived disparities in rural-urban education, demographic, and family background of the interviewees (Patton, 2015). Question two invites participants to discuss solutions to the rural educational menace (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, 2003; Omer & Jabeen (2016). Question three challenges interviewees to identify stakeholders of rural and rural educational. Relevance in one's community, and leadership roles come from academic and career satisfactions, and form part of life prospects (Aguilar & Sumner, 2019). As a result, question three challenges participants, the beneficiaries of the rural education to come up with strategies to tackle the menace on their own. This is because indigenes and rural communities have their destinies in their own hands and need to find ways to improve their situation.

Community-school and parent-teacher engagements are key to any educational endeavors (Redding & Walberg, 2013; Samara & Ioannidi, 2019; Stelmach, 2011, 2020). Question four is therefore intended to gain participants' perspectives in this area.

Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through. Therefore, question five charges participants to reflect on the current rural educational challenges to project how they can positively influence the rural

educational challenges in future. Finally, questions six is intended to give participants freedom to add to what has already been said. It is an opportunity to touch on an area that the researcher may not cover during the interview.

### **Timeline: A Projective Technique**

A timeline, in addition to the written answers during the individual interview and focus group interview times, was used to gather data as a projective technique. Projective techniques allow for variety in data collection and allow participants to express “feelings, perceptions and attitudes that can be difficult to access by more direct questioning techniques and can be a rich source of new leads and ideas for researchers” (Catterall & Ibbotson, 2000, p. 247). The use of this technique in addition to the qualitative interviews and focus group interviews add richness and depth to this research and gives another view into the individuals whose perspectives were explored.

After each interview, I asked each participant to create a timeline of his or her life with specific notation of any significant experiences of their rural living and rural educational. The timeline supplemented the semi-structured, open-ended interview methods (individual and focus group interviews) in navigating issues of interviewing rural disadvantaged individuals (Berends, 2011). This projective technique allows participants to express themselves beyond the mere answering of questions (Catterall & Ibbotson, 2000). Timelines were completed as word documents. The participants were asked to complete the timeline within the week following the interview to be collected by the researcher. If clarification of any details in the timeline needed to be addressed, I communicated with the participant again asking/giving clarifications or explanations. I made calls to two participants to complete the timeline. Phone call reminder was made later to one participant who could not complete the timelines within the week.

## **Data Analysis**

In analyzing participants' lived experiences, van Manen (1997) stated that the essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional. It therefore requires that the researcher reflect extensively on data to be able to describe participants' lived experience. Thematic analysis (van Manen, 1997) using a highlighting approach, a recognized human science approach to thematic analysis, was used to analyze the participants' lived rural educational experiences, and their perceived impacts on their academic lives and prospects. van Manen (1997) argued that the meaning of participants' narratives or lived experiences are not always apparent to the participants who produce them but meaning can be made from the narratives produced by them.

With all data considered as parts to the whole (van Manen, 1997), the thematic separation/isolation analyzes the lived experiences in the order below.

1. Holistic approach.
2. Selective approach.
3. Line-by-line approach.
4. Composing linguistic transformations.
5. Determining incidental and essential themes through imaginative variation.
6. Writing and rewriting to describe the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Holistic Approach**

Using the holistic approach allows the researcher to engage in reading the text in its entirety (Hatch, 2002; van Manen, 1997; 2014). The purpose is to find a single statement to describe the meaning of the text, or main significance of the text, as a whole. Then the goal of the researcher is to determine or formulate such a phrase (van Manen, 1997). To arrive at this statement, the researcher must balance, or consider, the parts to the whole (van Manen, 1997).

But before one can look specifically at the individual parts of the data collected, one must first see texts holistically (Hatch, 2002). For the holistic step, open response results were read and reread to immerse in the data, and a phrase describing the meaning of those texts were formulated. Following the focus group interviews, transcripts were read and reread, and audio recordings were listened to several times to immerse myself, as the researcher, in the data collected. A phrase was then formulated that described the meaning of the focus group interview data. Finally, after the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with each participant were conducted, transcripts were read and reread, and audio recordings listened to several times, to immerse myself (as the researcher) in the data collected.

### **Selective Approach**

This process of selective approach entails the reading and rereading of the text and circling or highlighting key phrases that seem particularly essential or revealing of the nature of the text and saving for further deeper analyzation any phrase that seems to be overly evocative of the whole. The researcher read the text several times, or listen several times, asking what statements or phrases seem essential or most revealing about the phenomenon being studied (van Manen, 1997). As the text is read and reread, listened to, and re-listened to, the researcher made notes of these phrases and statements by circling, underlining, or highlighting the statements in the text (Appendix G). After completion of each stage of data collection, and the completion of the holistic phase of data analysis, I read each text individually several times and sought phrases that were most revealing about the experience rural students had when encountered ruralness and rural education (van Manen, 1997). From reading the text transcripts, I underlined and circled key clauses and phrases such as *no money, not tables and chairs, my father did not help me*, etc. The same was done with the audio recordings by noting key words and phrases. These extractions



were then put into categories and from there I was able to build themes for the study. The researcher listened again to the audio recordings of both the focus group interviews and the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews while following along with the transcripts to determine, between the two identical sources, each significant statement that was most essential to the essence of ruralness and rural educational impacts rural students in terms of their academics and prospects. This process enabled data immersion so that the researcher could be as close to the participants' experience with the phenomenon as possible.

### **Line-by-line Approach**

I analyzed each sentence or sentence cluster line-by-line (van Manen, 1997). The researcher moved through the text systematically and asked what insight each sentence or sentence cluster provides about the phenomenon being studied. This process was done carefully, with attention given to each sentence or sentence clusters separately to reveal their meaning concerning the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). To conduct the line-by-line process, each focus group interview, and face-to-face semi-structured interview, and timeline was read and reread and then systematically reviewed line-by-line. Each line of the different data types were analyzed to determine how rural students experience ruralness and rural education. As discussed under Selective Approach, each text data collected from the individual interviews, timeline and the focus group interviews was transcribed. After that, all audio files were listened to slowly and orderly to reconcile them with the transcribed text to catch all aspects of the participants' shared lived experiences. Notes of key words were identified and written down while listening to the audio files. After reconciling the audio files with the text files, line by line, I continued and looked for key words/phrases that echo meanings to the study and participants' lived experiences. These key words/phrases were later tabulated according to groups. I then created

categories by regrouping the identified words/phrases under various headings in alignment with the goals of the research questions. After grouping (categorizing) similar words/phrases to form the codes, I then grouped the codes under categories, and the themes began to emerge. For instance, arriving at the theme *family socioeconomic status (SES)*, the code(s) such as *challenges* which occurred 53 times, *no money* occurred 27 times, *no food* 21 times, *low socioeconomic* 17 times, *poor* 16 times, *poverty* 12 times, *disparity* 5 times, *financial difficulty* times 3 were put into one category to form the theme *family socioeconomic status (SES)*. The groupings and the categorizing continue to develop the remaining themes. These words or group of words are relevant and significant because they lend meaning to the theme and connect to a key characteristic challenge of the rural education in Ghana.

### **Researcher's Reflective Journal**

I kept a reflective journal beginning with participant selection. Journal entries including initial impressions of the phenomenon were taken during data collection and then reviewed (Hatch, 2002). By reviewing these initial impressions, I began to make relational connections between themes and likely developed new impressions (Hatch, 2002). I used a reflective journal (see Appendix E for a sample) to record notes during data collection and analysis (holistic, selective, and line-by-line approaches) to help in development of themes. The examination of the research journal entries taken during data analysis further illuminated those themes most essential to experiencing ruralness and rural education.

### **Development of Themes**

To develop phenomenological themes, the researcher must seek to reveal something meaningful and telling from the varied experiential accounts found in the data (van Manen, 1997). I examined the texts and brought examples of the experience into a reflective

understanding (van Manen, 1997). I sought a meaningful theme gleaned from the lived experience data. Further, by asking what is taking place or what type of example do I have, I can begin to develop thematic formulations (van Manen, 1997). Thematic meaning was first identified in each participant's transcriptions from the focus group interviews, and face-to-face interviews, and projective technique by developing a theme that fundamentally expresses the overall meaning of each text as it pertained to the rural educational phenomenon through van Manen's (1997) holistic approach.

Through the use of selective reading, thematic elements were determined by reading and listening to each text several times. Finally, each data source was read line-by-line, by sentence or sentence cluster, and then meaning behind the sentence or sentence cluster as it relates to the studied phenomenon was developed. I conducted an initial description of the phenomenon by composing linguistic transformations (van Manen, 1997). When analyzing the lived experience data, the focus group interviews, the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, and projective technique, the researcher were developed open codes for theme development. Initial codes were identified during analysis of the participant responses the open response prompts provided.

Approaching the lived experience data (results) holistically, line-by-line, and selectively, revealed open codes and provide initial insight into how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact rural students. These open codes also provided background from which the researcher probed participants more directly during focus group interviews, face-to-face interviews, and projective technique. Analysis of the focus group interviews holistically, line-by-line, and selectively revealed further evidence of the initial codes discovered during open response prompt analysis, in addition to new open codes developed from the focus group data.

Whereas some initial codes more evident during open response prompts, others became even more evident during the focus group interviews.

Further, other open codes were only evident during the focus groups and may not appear in participant responses to the open response prompts. Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were analyzed identically to the open response prompts and focus group interviews in holistic, line-by-line, and selective approaches. Results from the open response prompts and focus group interviews, and the open codes discovered informed the researcher of the themes developing from the data. Using these prior open codes, I was able to further develop the illuminated themes via probing questions. Not all prior open codes were found in the semi-structured, face-to-face interview data provided by participants. However, the most prominent themes found during analysis developed from open codes were discovered to exist across all three data points.

### **Composing Linguistic Transformations**

It is suggested that the researcher captures thematic statements in phenomenological written paragraphs, which should be developed from the meaning clusters revealed during the horizontalization process (van Manen, 1997). From the meaning clusters, or theme-based words and statements found in the data, a description of the phenomenon develops. Therefore, through the use of researcher reflective notes and based on the data readings and other research activities (Hatch, 2002), a description of what experiencing ruralness and rural education is like was developed. Eventually, the process of composing linguistic transformations is the creative aspect of my hermeneutic analysis (van Manen, 1997). Linguistic transformations were composed to capture salient thematic statements to organize and reflect on those themes that are most pertinent to the studied phenomenon: those that most constituted the nature of the lived experiences of ruralness and rural education. This process of reflection allowed the researcher to

find those themes that are salient to the description of the lived (rural educational) experience (van Manen, 1997). Following the development of linguistic transformations and leading to the development of a description of how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact rural students' academic life and prospects, the researcher met with participants again, to discuss the themes identified. These audio-recorded, follow-up interviews with each participant discussed the significance of the initial themes found during the development of linguistic transformations.

### **Interpretation Through Conversation**

Through follow-up interviews and projective technique, reflection on the developed phenomenological themes were discussed. During interpretation through conversation, both the interviewer and interviewees seek to interpret the significance of the initial themes found in the data (van Manen, 1997). Through interpretive conversation, both the researcher and participant ask, "Is this what the experience is like?" (van Manen, 1997, p. 99). Through the use of interpretive conversation, the researcher to determine those themes deemed most salient to the rural educational experience and their perceived impacts. These conversations helped to develop linguistic transformations, leading to a clarification of the essence, or structure of meaning, behind ruralness, rural education their perceived impacts of rural students' academic lives and prospects.

### **Incidental and Essential Themes via Imaginative Variation**

Before the phenomenological description of the essence of the rural educational phenomenon, the researcher must determine those themes around which the description was placed (van Manen, 1997). Because each meaning uncovered may not be essential or unique to participants' experience of ruralness and rural education, the researcher should use the method of free imaginative variation; the process for determining what themes are essential to the

phenomenon, to create the textural descriptions found in the linguistic transformations (van Manen, 1997). This is done by posing the question, “Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?” and “Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?” (van Manen, 1997, p. 107). This process allows the researcher to concentrate on the essential theme developed, those aspects that make the phenomenon what it is or a reality rather than those themes that occur by chance. Imaginative variation requires that the researcher seeks possible meanings by varying their frames of reference and taking different positions towards the experienced phenomenon. This allows the discovery of underlying factors that account for what participants experienced. The analysis must determine what themes are essential based on evidence within the data that directly addresses each one (Hatch, 2002).

### **Writing and Re-writing**

The analysis of lived experience process does not end when the researcher starts writing (van Manen, 1997). While the researcher’s goal is to create the phenomenological text (van Manen, 1997), I must not lose sight of the final texts’ purpose. The researcher should therefore be alert of the guiding research questions, and their writing must always be meant to answer those questions being asked. Writing permits the researcher to reflect on what is known about the phenomenon and describe the lived experience (Hatch, 2002). Writing is a phenomenological researcher’s method (van Manen, 1997) and must be written to make some area of lived experience understandable (Hatch, 2002).

By writing phenomenologically, the researcher can measure what is known and not known about the phenomenon being studied (Hatch, 2002). Writing focuses the researcher’s reflective awareness, allowing the disregard of incidentals and contingencies that compose the

social, physical, and biographical context of a specific scenario (van Manen, 1997). As the researcher reflects through writing, the process allows engagement in more reflection, thereby increasing the ability to see the essence of the rural educational experience as a phenomenon under study. It is therefore imperative that the researcher must write and rewrite to capture the true essence of a studied phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). This allows the researcher to rethink, reflect, and recognize the importance and substance of essential themes (Hatch, 2002). To create an in-depth phenomenological text, the researcher must write and rewrite, moving back and forth between the individual parts and the data as a whole to create a well-developed manuscript (van Manen, 1997). The writing must bring the recollection of texts of lived experience through edits, revisions, and rewrites of that which is significant to the studied rural phenomenon.

The writing and rewriting process is essential to attaining final output for a hermeneutic phenomenological study arrived after determination of essential themes. The use of anecdotal narrative helps describe the essence of experiencing ruralness, rural education and how they perceivably impact rural students. Anecdotes help uncover meanings force us to search out the relationships between living and thinking, provide us with insight into unwritten teachings, provide insight and truth, and help us see things in a specific way (van Manen, 1997). As a result, anecdotes which constitute the nature of the essence was described the experience of ruralness and rural educational impacts on rural students.

### **Trustworthiness**

I held myself accountable for best representing the participants by implementing four accountability standards including credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability throughout the study. Each accountability standard encompassed a specific technique including

triangulation of data, member checking, audit trail, and peer review, which I used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Credibility**

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, member-checks and inter-rater reliability was utilized (Yin, 2002). When analyzing the data from each participant, I accurately represent the voices of each of each participant (Creswell, 2013). Credibility looks at the extent to which the research is believable and appropriate, concerning the level of agreement between participants and the researcher. Therefore, to establish credibility, reliability, and validity, I used the technique of triangulation of data for my method of data collection (van Manen, 2014). Data was collected using three methods of collection: individual interviews, focus groups, and timelines. I used a reflective journal (Appendix E) regularly to provide scheduled details and a venue for my reflections (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking with participants allowed them to clarify what their intentions were and correct errors and allowed the researcher to discuss participants' lived experiences as just as they shared with the researcher (Appendix H). No concerns for any material differences or discrepancies were identified during the member checking.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Research dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study, such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study. Dependability focuses on the process of inquiry and requires the researcher to ensure a logical, traceable, and documented process. Thorough description of the data-collection procedures were provided. The researcher kept a detailed record of the data collection and process to create an audit trail. Dependability is also established through the use of the reflexive journal.



To build consistency and dependability, I gave participants opportunity to continually review and correct my analysis through the implementation of the technique of member checking (Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 2014). Member checking technique was used, and each participant was provided with a detailed description of the study. With this, each participant knew and familiar with the purpose of the study before participation and of all aspects and requirements the study. Participants were provided with copies of data transcriptions to check for any discrepancies after each interview and focus groups, and projective technique. Participants were allowed to suggest and give feedback (Appendix H).

Confirmability relates to the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers. Having agreement or assent of each participant's transcribed data adds reliability of the study and confirmation that participants lived these experiences; rural school achievements and how they are faring with their rural educational experiences well captured and documented.

### **Transferability**

Transferability relates to the degree to which the results of the study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. Transferability increased through the rich details that described the participants and their experiences (Creswell, 2013) as well as the detailed steps taken in the study. I implemented the accountability standard of transferability by describing my study in such a way that it could be replicated by other researchers (Creswell, 2013). The technique of an audit trail was put in place to ensure the transferability of my study (Creswell, 2013), as I document, and audio record each data collection session. To capture and maintain all aspects of the interviews, focus groups, and timeline (projective technique), I have access to review the records and to apply corrections as possible. The detailed documentation allowed me

to understand the phenomena of how rural students perform academically and the rural education that they had is helping them succeed or not.

To increase transferability, I provided the audience with rich, thick descriptions of the experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through holistic, selective, and line-by-line analysis and after having immersed myself in the data through listening and re-listening to audio recordings, reading and rereading transcripts of interviews and focus group interviews, timeline notes, and writing and rewriting of essential themes, I provided the audience with rich, thick descriptions of the essential themes occurring during participants' experience with ruralness and rural education. Descriptions form the basis of my reflections, growing insights, and development of essential themes summed up in my reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Finally, so that other researchers could potentially replicate the study, I provided a complete context of the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Right from the beginning of the study, I openly disclose the purpose and nature of the study with each participant, so they know what to expect. I gave each participant an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved consent form before they participated in the study. The consent form detailed the purpose of the study and provide participants with an option to decline participation in the study at any time. I protected the identity of each participant through assigning each individual a pseudonym and store all soft copies of information on a password-protected computer. Audio and paper data is stored in a locked file and remain confidential until destroyed after a minimum of three years as required by federal regulations. Finally, I reported data collected from the study in an honest manner, respect the experiences of the participants, and truthfully report multiple perspectives and any contrary findings.

### Summary

The primary goal of Chapter Three is to clearly define and describe the methods used throughout the study to investigate how rural characteristic problems perceivably impact participants academic achievements and their eventual prospects (Edzii, 2017; UNESCO, 2015). While it is acknowledged that rural challenges exist and the fact that rural students face arrays of challenges, national educational policies failed to look at the path of rural students from the classroom (studenthood) to adulthood. In this chapter, I provide a descriptive outline and procedures of the intended hermeneutic phenomenological study by giving a detailed description of the research plan and design, the research questions, the participants, the methods of data collection and analysis. I have also described how I added trustworthiness, credibility, reliability, conformability to the study through triangulation of data, member checking, an audit trail, and peer review. I ended the chapter with a description of how I ensured ethical considerations of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the achievements and prospects of rural students in Ghana. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was the most ideal methodology for this study (van Manen, 1997, 2014). This chapter presents and describes the themes derived from the analysis of participants' responses to the face-face semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, and notes from the projective technique. A description of the individual participants is provided texturally. Additionally, the essence of the experience that ruralness and rural education perceivably impact rural students is provided based on the key themes discovered. The themes that emerged during the analysis of participants' lived rural experiences are organized according to the individual research questions that they addressed.

### **Participants**

A total of 13 adults who experienced rural life and rural education in Ghana participated in this study. Of those adults participating, 10 were males and 3 were females. The participants had previously lived in a rural community and attended rural schools. Participants' rural experiences range from but are not limited to living and attending rural school in a sparsely populated and/or remote locations with inadequate social amenities such as potable water, electricity, library, good road network, inadequate school infrastructure, inadequate and/or lack of well-qualified staff, and inadequate teaching and learning materials. The section below describes the participating individuals, using pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

**Francis**

Francis is a trained teacher currently doing his national service as a teacher. Francis lost his father at a very tender age and had to move in with his uncle who was living in a rural farming community in the eastern region for his education. He recalled, “at my home and school we did not have electricity, no laboratory in the school, not enough teachers to teach us. No textbooks, school bus, and toilet facility in the school.” He complained of waking up each day at 4:00am to perform house chores before going to school. Francis worked with his uncle on their farm after school. Despite Francis’ uncle being a peasant farmer, he paid Francis’ school fees and engaged well with the school and the teachers and attended PTA meetings. Francis was disciplined by his uncle and received encouragement from the uncle to learn hard and excel at school. Francis advised that enough teachers should be posted to rural areas to match the growing rural student population. Francis is against teachers using students to weed school parks. Francis shared his educational experiences:

I could not attain my desired educational goal because of family poverty, there was no money. My initial plan was to go to university but that did not materialize. My family’s economic background was poor because my uncle was a peasant farmer. I believe that not going to school is the sure way of not achieving one’s full potential in life. I know that is the key to attaining one’s full potential in life,

**Gifty**

Gifty is a trained and certified teacher with two decades of teaching experience. Gifty was a city girl until her father lost his job in the city of Accra. They relocated to a rural community in the eastern region of Ghana. She recalled how the school was boring and uninspiring. Gifty lamented:

Our village school was without electricity, good drinking water, the proper toilet was even a problem in the school, teachers report to school late, and paths to school were bushy. There were not enough chairs and tables for students, and teaching and learning materials were lacking.

Gifty further recalled how girls were almost out of the picture when it comes to education. Gifty saw no motivation to be in school. Gifty gave a brief account of her educational experiences in the village:

The perception those days was that girls should be home to learn how to manage the home and cook, that education is for the men and not women. In the village, many held the view that girl child education is not important and that girls are for the kitchen, so few girls in the school did not get any education that relates to our needs as girls, hygiene, and adolescent education.

Gifty's father encouraged her to put in her best in a men-dominated environment. In comparing rural and urban education, Gifty said that "rural is worse, it is a torture of rural students." She recommended that government, civil society and religious groups, and individuals should join hands to properly revamp rural schools to make them attractive to both teachers and students. Gifty, then at 13 years of age, was fortunate to move back to the urban area where she continued her education.

### **Alex**

Alex is a trained and certified teacher with over three decades of teaching experience. Alex was born in a rural community in the eastern region of Ghana. Alex recalled his rural educational experiences:

Due to my poor socioeconomic background, I could not start school early and had to live with many people and relatives to get my education. I commuted a long distance to go to school each day. There were poor road networks, absence of electricity, poor drinking water, not enough teachers, and inadequate teaching and learning resources that affected my education as a rural student. I went to school most of the time without the prescribed school uniform, school bag, or footwear. I had problems studying mathematics and had no help with mathematics due to the weak educational foundation that I had. I revere education and believe in the power of education to make a person a better person. I could not attend senior high school due to rural challenges and had no help from home/family for my education, I had to go through an informal route of taking weekend courses to become a teacher.

Alex remained resilient and motivated to succeed at all costs. Alex, whose father was a JHS graduate and whose mother was an illiterate farmer, believes that his parents' educational and socioeconomic backgrounds affected him significantly. He is of the view that he would have been better than what he is today if things were right during his childhood. Alex, who was usually the number one in his class in the rural schools he attended, suddenly had his performance shift to 12th position when he had an opportunity to stay with an uncle in an urban area. This development confirmed to him that rural schools are lacking essential resources. Alex considered his teachers as people who are knowledgeable and know everything, so he has always wanted to be a teacher. This dream kept him on track and focused.

### **Darko**

Darko is a JHS graduate, and currently a mason/stone layer. He lost his father who was a service member in Ghana Armed Forces when he was six years. Darko was adopted and taken to

a rural farming community in the eastern region of Ghana by his uncle who was a farmer. He grew up and attended a rural community school in the eastern region. Darko gave an account of his lived rural educational experiences:

My school and the community have no basic amenities such as electricity, good roads, a mobile network, a library, or enough teachers and adequate teaching and learning materials. I and my nephews did not have time to study at home because the only lantern available was used by my uncle's wife. I always got to school late because I had work at the house. I go to the farm to help my uncle after school, and I ate boiled cassava/plantain as early as 6:00am before going to school or else I had to come back home to eat during break. . . . this poor diet did not help me as a student. I had a long commute through bushy paths to go to school.

On the extreme side, Darko lamented how their teachers used the students as farm laborers on their farms, especially on Fridays. This took them away from learning as the core instructional hours were used to farm. He added that because he and his siblings had to cross streams to get to the school when it rained, they found it difficult to cross the flowing streams to attend school. Darko is not motivated to pursue school despite the plans that he had. Darko currently works as a mason/handyman constructing houses.

### **Caxton**

Caxton is a trained and certified teacher with over two and half decades of teaching experience. Caxton was born in a rural community in the eastern region where he grew up living with his parents. His parents were farmers without an education, but they never forced Caxton to desert his studies for their farming. Caxton shared his rural educational experiences:



There was the unavailability of electricity and potable water. I had to commute a long distance each day to and from school. I ate the same malnourished food every day. My parents were involved in my schooling, attended PTA meetings, and encouraged me to study hard. When it rains, rivers and streams overflowed their banks, I could not go to school. What I did not like was that some of the teachers forced us to work on their farms all day, especially on Fridays. Our drinking water is not good, it was bad for our health. Because there was no electricity, I relied on the same lantern to study, which my mother also use in the kitchen for cooking.

Caxton walked barefooted and could not afford the prescribed school uniform. His family background affected him as he could not go to university after senior high school due to family poverty and he had to work as a houseboy for a man to get money for his schooling.

### **Daniel**

Daniel is a trained and certified teacher. He was born, raised, and attended his primary and JHS in a rural community in the eastern region of Ghana. Daniel's parents had no education. He holds the view that there are urban educational advantages over rural education. Daniel said that his educational goals and ambitions were to become a lawyer but the situation in the village was so bad. Daniel wants equality in education; those rural students should be allowed to enjoy education just like their urban counterparts. He stated that trained and certified teachers should be posted to rural students, get an equal budget allocation, and other educational resources should be made available to rural schools.

Daniel gave a summary of rural and rural educational experiences:

There was no money, no assistance, no books, no amenities like electricity, potable water, a library, television, phones, especially mobile phones. My parents were not involved in

my education; I paid my fees and bought books. They never attended my PTA meetings but rather were hostile to teachers because they wanted me to join them in their farming. The financial challenges were so hard that I had to walk to school barefoot, without a school uniform, commute a long distance, and suffered hunger at school. The rural school experience has affected me in many ways. Due to the weak educational foundation, I still find it difficult expressing myself smoothly when it comes to the English language. I had to act carefully when to express myself. I believe that some of the teachers were not qualified, and such teachers hardly spoke the English language in the classroom and were verbally abusive; they insulted students a lot.

### **Amiyoo**

Amiyoo is a seamstress, a mother of one, and a JHS dropout. She was born in a rural village in the eastern region of Ghana. She was young when her mother passed on. She was raised by her father. Due to family financial difficulties, the father took Amiyoo and some of her siblings to live with relatives. As a result, Amiyoo moved from one family member to another where she was abused in many ways. Amiyoo gave a summary of her struggles and educational woes:

At some point, I had no parental or guardian control. I got pregnant at fourteen when I was at JHS and that brought an end to my education. I find it difficult attending the rural school; poor roads were bad, dilapidated school structures, some students held classes under trees, and teachers reported to school late due to their long commute. There was no supervision from the district and regional education inspectors. Our school had no electricity, no laboratory, inadequate desks, and tables for students. There were

inadequate teaching and learning materials in the school. Most of the teachers barely stay in the school for long.

She spoke about the stereotypes that her community had against girl child education and the harassment that she and some of her female colleagues faced at the hand of some men. She again recalled poverty at home which made it difficult for her father to provide for her needs such as schoolbag, books, pens and pencils, school uniforms, footwear, and pocket money for food at school. She complained that the long commute to the school caused her to sweat a lot before getting to the school. Amiyoo went into an apprenticeship after she gave birth. Amiyoo is an advocate for girl child education and protection. She is of the view that parents and teachers should pay close attention to adolescent girls and help them as they develop and to be able to stay in school.

### **Victoria**

Victoria dropped out of JHS and that was the end education of her educational life. She is a mother of three and a hairstylist. She lost her father when she was a toddler. Her mother, a single mother, took her to a private school in the rural community. Victoria brightly started her educational life in a bright fashion but dropped out of school when one of her uncles came for her to live with him in an urban area. Victoria gave an account of her rural educational experiences:

In the private school in the village, most of the teachers were not qualified. The classrooms were made of temporal structures and were not safe for us. Multiple classes were held in the same classroom, and it was difficult to get concentration to learn. I walked through bushy paths to school and when it rains, I find it difficult to go to school.

Unfortunately, her uncle never took Victoria to school for years. Later, Victoria was put into a trade apprenticeship to learn hairstyling. She underwent the training successfully. In the private rural school, Victoria recalled issues of teacher shortages, weak school structures, lack of a school library, and inadequate teaching and learning materials. Victoria concluded that there was a general lack of seriousness for rural education.

### **David**

David works as a farm assistant. He is a JHS dropout. He was born in a rural community in the eastern region of Ghana, David complained about not getting an equal opportunity to get a better education. He added that his school had no electricity, no laboratory, library, or toilet for the teachers and students. Family difficulties could not allow him to succeed in school. No help came from his parents as he paid his school fees and all aspects of his education. His parents never attended school PTA meetings. David believes that his parents did not show interest in his education because they never attended school themselves. David gave a brief narrative of his rural educational experiences:

I had a long commute each day, and I was unable to buy the prescribed school uniforms. I and my siblings went to school sometimes without food. We had to come home during a break to eat. Things were not good for my schooling due to financial difficulties.

Teaching and learning in my school were poor; not enough teachers were in the school, there was low student enrollment and attendance, and adequate teaching and learning materials. Because of the difficulties, I dropped out of school many times before I finally stopped the school at JHS level. I know that poverty was the main cause of all the problems because my parents had no money, they were not making enough money from

their farming. My teachers were good, just that they were not enough teachers in the school. I don't like the work that I am doing, he added.

Eventually, David became apathetic towards school and school-related activities. David recalled some of his teachers used students on their farms, and that deprived them of learning. David could not attain his education aspirations due to ill-health and family difficulties that he faced. David said that even at the time that he became conscious and serious about his education, he realized that there was no hope for his future education.

### **Michael**

Michael is an artisan, a carpenter. Michael started school late, at age ten, due to a difficult socio-economic situation. He dropped out of school when he got to the primary school when he lost his parents at that tender age and that brought an end to his educational journey. His uncle took Michael to live with him. His uncle did not send him to school but rather put Michael into a trade apprenticeship where he learned carpentry. Michael had a brief rural educational experience which exposed him to issues, both at home and school:

My school has dilapidated classroom blocks, with no electricity, library, and I commuted a long distance to school. Due to the financial difficulties, I lived on a poor diet and sometimes went to school on an empty stomach. I had the interest to go to school but had no help. At some point, I lost interest in the school because it is not attractive. Our school lacked so many resources, a limited number of classrooms, not enough teachers, no electricity, and inadequate textbooks. The teachers had to combine classes. Some teachers had to teach multiple subjects due to teacher shortages.

To Michael, attending a rural school as a child was more of a punishment as he had to go to the farm after school to weed and get foodstuff from the farm. Apart from food, Michael had no

support and assistance from home; he paid his fees and bought books by doing menial jobs. Michael's parents did not show much interest in his education, and neither did they engage with schoolteachers. Michael was made to wake up early to work before going to school and as a result, he got to school late all the time. Michael was only able to study when at school because he got so busy with chores that he had no time to rest. Michael admitted that he has missed essential opportunities as a result of family's socio-economic background, and he currently is unable to get the kind of job that he wants due to his low level of education. Michael believes that his teachers were good, but there were not enough in the school.

### **Prosper**

Prosper is a high school graduate, currently working as a machine operator to save money for college or join one of the country's security agencies. His father died when he was in JHS. His mother, a single parent, took care of him and his sister through senior high school. Prosper touched on his family and rural educational life:

My journey from primary, then junior high to senior high school was a turbulent one.

Food, school supplies, and many things were not adequate. My family's socio-economic situation was not that favorable. I had to walk home during school break to eat before going back to school. I helped my parents with their quarry and milling business after school. I had no time to rest and study at home. My school had no computers, laboratory, electricity in the classrooms, and no school library. Textbooks were inadequate.

Prosper said that weeding the school park during instructional hours was too much for him because it deprived them of learning. He had to walk a long distance to school through bushy paths which he considered dangerous. Though times were hard, Prosper's parents paid his school fees, provided shelter, and bought school uniforms, a school bag, food, and school supplies. His

parents only attended school PTA meetings because they were busy. Waking up at dawn to perform house chores before going to school was difficult for him. Prosper is of the view that he is yet to attain his educational aspiration as he is saving to go to college. Prosper maintained that his teachers were good and qualified because most of the things that he was taught and the way he was taught at JHS were the same when he got to senior high school. To Prosper, this confirmed that his teachers were good. Prosper holds the view that there are good prospects for employment, leadership opportunities, societal respect, and dignity that come with a good education. He added that education has the power to change one's fortune and make life. Prosper is currently 21 years and working to join the Ghana Immigration Service or Ghana National Fire Service.

### **Richard**

Richard works as a farm assistant. He is a JHS graduate born in a rural community where his parents were living. He shared that though his parents took him to the school, they left everything to him; "I paid school fees, bought my books, provided myself with food at school. I took to menial jobs to raise money to cater for my school needs such as uniforms, footwear, fees, school bag, and books." Richard was not able to learn when he went to school on an empty stomach, and without pocket money to buy food. Richard said that urban schools are far better than rural schools in terms of the availability of computer laboratories, electricity in the classroom, a library, a good pitch for sports, a toilet facility, good roads, good classroom blocks, and potable water. Richard was raised in a system that can be described as a free-range where there was nothing like discipline, control, or norms. Richard shared his rural school experience:

My parents had no time to talk to me and my siblings about how to conduct themselves as children. I cannot get any decent job that pays well because I did not have a good

education, and my grades were also not good to my liking. I could not reach my educational aspirations in life because the family poverty was extreme, and no assistance was coming from anywhere. My parents' socioeconomic situation affected my learning. If my parents had gotten an education, they would have shown an interest in my education.

Richard said that his rural schoolteachers made the students weed their farms, which he did not like this, but unfortunately no authorities intervened to stop this unacceptable act. Richard said that he was determined to complete basic school and senior high school because his dream was to join the Ghana Armed Forces. This dream unfortunately did not materialize for Richard. He added that there were many things that he had in mind and wish to do but he simply cannot accomplish. Richard believes that his teachers were good and trained but the students were suffering because of their family backgrounds and the rural environment that they found themselves in.

### **Solomon**

Solomon is an artisan, a carpenter by profession. He is a former rural student and a JHS graduate. He grew up with his parents living in a rural farming community in the eastern region of Ghana. Poverty was a challenge for Solomon as the family's low socioeconomic background affected his learning. Solomon said that he has missed many opportunities in life due to the poor education that he had. Growing up in a rural school community, Solomon battled with the long commute to and from school, the absence of electricity at home and school, lack of textbooks and laboratory, lack of toilet, etc. His parents never attended PTA meetings and were not engaging with the school/teachers. He admitted that he could not become the kind of person that



he had wanted to be due to numerous challenges from family to the rural environment. Solomon shared:

Apart from the payment of school fees by my father, I never got any help towards my education. I had to perform menial jobs to buy my school bag, footwear, school uniforms, books, and other supplies. I never had time to study at home because I had to go to the farm after school and return home late to help my mum cook dinner. Due to the numerous challenges that I was facing, I lost interest in going to school, but my parents always forced me to go to school. So, I stayed in the school system till I completed Junior High School (JHS). I got tired and sleepy each day after eating dinner, and I was unable to read my notes from school.

Though he lost interest in school along the way, Solomon still believes that education is an essential ingredient in life and can make the recipient very useful. Solomon and his sibling had to cross a stream to get to school, and it is difficult and dangerous to cross the stream when it rains. However, in the dry or lean season, it is difficult getting water to bathe and drink. These challenges affected his school and learning. Solomon's father was a disciplinarian who never allowed him to stay home without going to school. Solomon believes that there were family values and norms that govern their behaviors despite their difficult family situations. He is of the view that his teachers were not punctual and regular because they were living outside the community where there was electricity. "Our teachers refused to stay in our community because there were no amenities such as electricity, potable water, and clinics," Solomon recalled. As a result, they usually skipped some days or reported to school late.

## **Results**

This section provides descriptions of the findings and answers to the research questions derived from analysis of the data collected from the individual interviews, focus groups, and a projective technique (timeline). Additionally, details regarding the methods of such analysis, the development of codes, and then how those codes shaped themes are also included. There is a discussion of how these dominant themes responded to the central research and related questions of this study. It includes specific quotes from participants to offer a more vivid understanding of how these past rural students ascribe significance to their lived rural experiences.

### **Themes**

After transcribing the participants' responses from the three sources of data, I read all the transcriptions again to ensure a solid comprehension of the texts. I began the process of looking for clusters of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018) by highlighting recurring statements, phrases, and quotes. The initial phase was to assign some of the participants' words (NVivo coding) as an initial summary of the collected information (Elliott, 2018). Each data set collected was analyzed using van Manen's (1990) holistic, line-by-line, and selective approaches. Open codes were developed in each data set throughout the participants' texts. Open response prompts produced a limited number of codes based on the prompts given to participants. In some cases, codes used in the analysis of both the focus group interviews and semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were not found in the open response prompts. However, open codes used during the analysis of the open response prompts were examined to be a part of the dominant themes present. This process continued until all emerging themes (i.e., from the respondents' answers) had been exhausted.

Themes were derived through the triangulation of open codes across the open response prompt, focus group interview, and semi-structured, face-to-face interview data. Those themes most prominent had data points across all three data collection items. This undertaking led to

determining which themes were essential to the study as well as those that were incidental. As another layer of verifying the emerging themes, the data was then disassembled according to the natural and verbatim codes of the participants (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This technique assisted in looking at various groupings and possible combinations. Every effort was made to ensure that these designations represented comprehensive thoughts and ideas as opposed to single occurrences.

The semi-structured, face-to-face interview data were analyzed, and open codes were developed. Open codes that emerged through analysis of the semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were determined to support the more prominent themes of this study. For example, when participants talked about parental non-attendance to school PTA meetings, poor parent-teacher engagements, and parents asking students to abandon school and join them in their trade or farming, these comments were grouped under the heading of parental lack of interest in education (apathy). Again, for the interviews, when asked “what were some of the challenges that you may consider extreme and how did you overcome them,” several participants mentioned the phrase “family poverty, hunger, and suffering.” They mentioned how their family socioeconomic backgrounds affected their educational experiences, and eventually influenced their adult life. Specifically, the resulting themes from the face-to-face interviews that were significant to the study were (a) family socioeconomic status (SES), (b) parental lack of interest/apathy, (c) lack of essential amenities/scarcity, (d) teacher recruitment and retention, (e) culture, values, and misunderstandings, and (f) adult life and career prospects. A further reading of participants’ results, highlighting details, and looking holistically at the texts, revealed how the participants’ responses aligned with the inquiries that this study is seeking to answer. In classifying, categories one through six align with the central research question, category seven

relates to sub-question one, and category eight speaks to sub-question two. In general, all classifications address tenets of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. This information was discussed in greater detail in the subsequent findings.

Analysis of the focus group interviews revealed similar codes to those found in the open response prompts, as well as some unique additional codes. Given the nature of the focus group interviews, participants elaborated on specific experiences of rural education. Analysis of the focus group interviews revealed these codes: (a) government responsible for developing rural schools, (b) community has a responsibility as the custodians of the schools, (c) poverty as an obstacle to quality education, (d) government and community have the responsibility to make teachers stay in rural schools regardless of perceived rural challenges. Though different codes emerged in other data sets, family poverty or socioeconomic problems remain dominant in all the data sets. The more prominent codes helped to illuminate the most relevant themes.

Finally, an analysis of the projective technique (timeline) data revealed these themes, (a) breaks and gaps in the school attendance for most of the participants, (b) most rural students were moved or transferred from one guardian to another, (c) most participants dropped out of school several times, and (d) some participants started school at a much older age. A combination of the data analysis from all three data collection methods led to key codes and themes. While each data source (interviews, focus groups, and timeline) uniquely brings out the lived experiences from participants, analysis of the three data sets revealed overarching outcomes that eventually formed themes. Each data collection method probed participants' lives as a whole, looking at family lives, in-school and after school lives in the lenses of their rural educational experiences. It is interesting to note that all the three data sources revealed similar outcomes of lived experiences. For instance, David and Richard's interview revealed massive

financial challenges as they both had difficulties feeding and getting school supplies (socioeconomic challenge). Similarly, their timelines revealed the same theme which led to their constant dropping of school.

The research questions guided the coding of the data. The CQ addressed rural education's impact on long-term adult lives. The SQ1 addressed the perceived impacts on student learning and efficacy. Finally, the SQ2 addressed the perceived impacts on post-school outcomes. The development of the key codes and their connections to the research questions can be seen below in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Key Codes by Frequency and the Connection to the Research Questions.*

<b>CQs</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
How do ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the long-term adult lives of rural students?	Socioeconomic	Challenges (53) No Money (27) No Food (21) Low Socioeconomic (17) Poor (16) Poverty (12) Disparity (5) Farmers (4) Peasant (4) Financial Difficulty (3)
	Teacher quality & high teacher turnover	Attendance (4) Incentives (4) Bonuses (3) Unqualified (2)
	Culture, values, & misunderstandings	Rural (203) Urban (45) Engagement (20) Issues (13) Values (12) Norm (12)
<b>SQ1</b> How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students'	Hardships, apathy & poor performance	School Bags (8) Walked (8) Commute (7) Performance (5) Uniform (5)

learning and efficacy?		Barefooted (5) Difficulties (5) Footwear (5) Weak (5) Grades (5) Hunger (3) Tired (2)
	Parental lack of interest/apathy	Support (16) Contribute (13) Inadequate (10) Busy (8)
	Lack of essential amenities/scarcity	No Electricity (16) No Potable Water (14) Gap (13) No Toilet (11) No Textbooks (11) No Library (11) No Laboratory (5) Bad Roads (5) Healthcare (4) Computer (4) Infrastructure (3) Buildings (3)
	Supports & collaborations	No Help (45) No Support (16) Motivated (16) Encourage (5) Paid Fees (5)
<b>SQ2</b> How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students' post-school outcomes?	Adulthood & career prospects	Opportunities (28) Aspirations (27) Attain (16) Successful (13) Occupation (11) Employment (5) Menial (4) Career (4) Jobs (3)

Notes: CQ = Central Research Question; SQ = Sub Questions; the numbers in the parentheses are how often these codes were found during data analysis.

Looking at the paragraph below from David's interview, the reader can easily see how frequently occurring words/phrases like *financial difficulties*, *poor*, *poverty*, and similar codes emerged which translated into the *socio-economic* theme. Again, codes like a *long commute*,

*without food, no electricity, laboratory, library and toilet, no help, did not get a good grade, dropped out of school,* and similar codes formed the theme of *hardships, apathy, and poor performance*. The process continued till the remaining themes were developed. Below is a typical approach to theme formation. Here is the example from the interview with David with words that became codes in italics.:

Hmmm, it is difficult to talk about my education. It was *difficult* for me as a child. I had *no support or encouragement* from my parents. I couldn't boast of any *school supplies* such as exercise books, school bags, pens, and pencils. *Poverty* was real as my parents couldn't take care of me and my siblings. I *paid my fees* from the *little monies* that I get from people. I *dropped out* of school so many times, and I *did not get good grades*. I have followed people to places because there wasn't control and discipline. At the school, we *didn't have enough teachers*. Sadly, my parents *never attended* any of my PTA meetings. Hmmm, my parents, especially my dad had *no interest* in my schooling and *left me to my destiny*. They *did not put any value on my schooling*. I *can't get a good job*, only *menial work*. Though my parents had *no money*, they should have given me some support and encouragement. I went through a lot of *hardships; money problems, hunger, long walk* to school, and *have no money to buy learning materials*.

These codes were then put into categories that helped to form the themes and then connected to the specific research questions.

### **CQ1: Perceived Impacts on Long-term Adult Lives of Participants – Derived Themes**

As mentioned earlier, all 13 participants admitted that their current statuses are not what they wished for in their lives. For instance, David recalled, "I don't like the work that I am doing." Richard recalled, "Many are the things that I wish I could do but I just can't." The rural

Ghanaian education that they experienced is the result of their current positions. Financially, the jobs that most of the participants are doing are not well-paying. While the participants wish are not happy with what they are doing, they have no means to change the situation. For instance, working as a farm attendant (David and Richard) does not pay much in Ghana and it is difficult to sustain oneself with such salaries. Even teachers' salaries in Ghana are nothing much. Though Caxton, Alex, Gifty, Daniel, and Francis are teachers, they admitted that they are teaching because they had no option due to the rural education and the background that they had. It implies that if the rural Ghanaian school system were of better quality, Daniel would have become the lawyer that he wished to become. All the participants, just like many humans, have dreams and aspirations for their lives but the rural Ghanaian environment did not make their rural education favorable to attain those long-term aspirations.

### **Family Socio-economic Status (SES)**

The first recurrent theme throughout all the participants is the element of socioeconomic background which includes family poverty. The participants emphatically addressed issues that affected their life and education which were caused by their poor family socioeconomic backgrounds. For instance, Francis stated that his, "goal was to go to university after senior high school but that did not materialize because there was no money to pay for my fees and other expenses. My family's economic background was poor because they were peasant farmers." Alex narrated some of the challenges that he faced as a rural student:

My early education was turbulent as I was moved from one village to another because my parents could not afford my basic education. I had no school uniform. I was not wearing footwear to school. So, I had to walk barefooted to school. I started wearing footwear



when I got to Junior High School (JHS). Poverty was a problem and I had to fend for myself for the most part of my educational life.

This menace forced many parents to use their children for all kinds of work. The negative narratives regarding participants' socioeconomic backgrounds remain the same as they all admitted that their family socioeconomic situations were the cause of their educational challenges. The implications of weak family socioeconomic status (SES) are that these students were deprived of essential needs, both at home and school. School needs such as school supplies, uniforms, footwear, school bags, school fees, and other obligations were woefully met. In the home, parents were unable to provide in terms of adequate and balanced nutrition, and other essential needs for their children. Another serious implication of poor family socio-economic status on students is that it contributed to causing school dropouts among students, taking to negative lifestyles such as school dropout, and teenage pregnancy among girls as in the case of Amiyoo.

### **Culture, Values, and Misunderstandings**

Beliefs, norms, and even misconceptions exist among most rural communities, and they influence how students are educated. For instance, most parents are forcing their children to take farming as their profession because that is what they also inherited from their parents. Parents with this belief may not support their children's education. Parents may have the misconception that there are no alternative professional choices for their children, thereby restricting them to just farming, which does not require an education. Rural schools are undoubtedly governed by the prevailing community culture and values. Where the values and the cultures support education, the community and parents aggressively support the educational efforts of their wards. Talking with Gifty, Amiyoo, and Victoria, they complained about the negative mentality and the

stereotyping that they endured during their school days. Most communities held the position that educating the girl child is a waste of their scarce family resources. This affected the zeal and the morale of these girls in their male-dominated schools. Amiyoo, Gifty, and Victoria suffered rejection and lack of attention as girls in a school system dominated by boys. According to Richard, Daniel, David, and Solomon, their parents were of the view that male children should take up the trade of their fathers, which is farming, instead of going to school. Amiyoo confirmed this when she shared, “I had no support from my family, especially my father and the community because they did not value or appreciate girl child education.” Culture and values are powerful in the sense that, students who buy into negative beliefs and misconceptions may apply such thoughts or mentality to their education. They affect students’ interest in education.

#### **SQ1: Perceived Impacts on Students’ Learning and Efficacy – Derived Themes**

As Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological theory posited, all aspects of development are influenced by a complex system of relationships that form one’s environment. This finding was reinforced in this study of rural Ghanaian students. Family socioeconomic status (which dictates how well a child is fed, if school needs are provided, etc.), the rural Ghanaian community (resources such as electricity, healthcare facilities, access roads, etc.), relationships (neighbors, parent-teacher, school-community, etc.), and the school environment (which may include the rural school infrastructure, learning materials, trained teachers, etc.) collectively affect the holistic development of the student. In this study, the participants anonymously admit that their family socioeconomic statuses, the rural conditions, relationships, and the rural school environment negatively impacted their development and educational successes. These factors affected their learning, and motivation and eventually defined their adulthood lives.

#### **Parental Lack of Interest/Apathy**

Synonymous to a lack of interest in their wards' education, most participants mentioned that their parents have not supported their education and as such did not collaborate or engage with their school and teachers. This remains a major drawback to rural students' education. They rather needed their children to support their trades, which is mostly farming. For instance, Daniel narrated how his father developed a strong hatred for his teachers because he opted to go to school instead of accompanying his father to the farm. Richard, David, Alex, Amiyoo, and Daniel, to mention a few, added that their parents never attended their PTA meetings, or any other required meetings organized by the school. Alex lamented, "I had problems studying mathematics at school and needed help at home, but his parents never responded to all the invitations from my teachers." Richard stated that "my parents did not show interest in my education." Richard stated that "I believe if my father had attended school, he would have had an interest in my education too." The consequences of lack of support and collaboration are that students' problems were not known or if known are left unaddressed, leading to abysmal academic achievements and school dropouts. For instance, Daniel said that "my father was hostile to my teachers because he wanted me to join him to farm." This problem has dire consequences, and it emanates from the value parents put on education as a whole. As the saying goes "you are what you think or believe," some of the parents did not have an education, and as such, they do not value what education brings to the lives of the children. Hence, their apathetic attitudes towards their children's education. Francis, however, had a different narrative, sharing "my uncle attended my PTA, provided my school supplies, and paid my fees." While low socioeconomic is a prominent feature of rural settings in Ghana, some families still do what it takes to see their children get the best education. This may stem from the fact that those parents see the value of education, or their socioeconomic situation may be slightly better.

### **Lack of Essential Amenities and Resources**

Consistent throughout all the participants' responses is the issue of the absence of essential amenities and resources, both in schools and communities. Participants narrated how they suffered hardships as children going to school. These hardships were, but are not limited to, hunger, child labor, long commutes, not having prescribed school uniforms, walking barefooted to school, and not having supplies such as pens, pencils, and books.

Alex reflected, "Our school did not have electricity, fans, safe toilets, libraries, laboratories, adequate teaching and learning materials, and desks and chairs for students." In some places, the school infrastructure is weak and unsafe to house students and teachers. The lack of amenities affected teaching and learning and also affected students' morale and performance. Victoria, Francis, Amiyoo, Alex, Richard, Solomon, and Daniel mentioned the absence of the above essential amenities in their rural schools and community. For instance, Solomon said that "I lost interest in the school because of the challenges." David added that "the long walking, hunger, lack of learning materials affected my learning." The use of a lantern, which is an alternative to electricity that could help students study, was also often not available to the students because their parents had to use the available lantern in the kitchen. The above narratives demonstrate how participants were affected in various forms. Not having light or electricity to study means that participants could not study to be diligent students academically. Richard complained, "I am not able to learn when I am hungry." Solomon, Darko, Prosper, David, Richard, and Francis said that they had to change and go to the farm to weed and get foodstuff right after school. Additionally, the long commute, with hunger, did affect participants physically as they got tired, even before getting to the school, making it difficult to concentrate and learn.

The above situations posed hardships to participants and did affect their learning. Some participants narrated how they had to cross streams to get to school. Some participants had to attend classes on empty stomach. This left them restless and unable to study. Some of the participants complained about some teachers using students on their farms at the expense of learning. Indeed, teachers are very reluctant to accept postings to rural communities due to the poor amenities. Poor road access and poor internet facility make it difficult for staff to pursue further education and other professional development courses when stationed in rural remote communities. Poor healthcare facilities, lack of electricity and telephone/mobile networks add to the rural school problems which affected teaching and learning. These hardships posed by their rural environment, the school, and family made it difficult to succeed academically as a rural student. Eventually, most perceived no incentive for going to school and became apathetic to education. Hardship results in apathy, which in turn affected rural students' motivation and resilience. Solomon, Darko, David, and Richard admitted that they lost interest in going to the school and saw no motivation in doing so. Student hardship, leading to apathy with resultant poor academic output, defeats rural educational goals, as the rural students are unable to match up and compete with their urban counterparts. Where hardships are removed with the necessary resources available, students can have the sound mind to excel academically.

### **Teacher Recruitment and Retention**

Rural schools present unique challenges to all stakeholders, including teachers. These challenges have serious implications on students' learning and future adulthood lives. Teachers not accepting postings to rural communities leaves most schools empty without teachers to teach. Additionally, the high teacher turnover disrupts academic work, affecting students' learning, resulting in poor academic outcomes among rural students.

Most of the participants held that their teachers were good, well trained, and qualified with exceptions such as Daniel who maintained that some of his teachers were not good and were verbally abusive. Participants lamented the high teacher turnover in their rural schools as most of their teachers did not want to stay in the rural community where almost all the social amenities were missing. Darko shared, “Our teachers did not like to stay in our community.” Solomon added that “teachers did not want to teach in the village schools.” As a result, most of the teachers chose to live in the neighboring towns where there was electricity and other amenities and commute to the school each day. Participants also acknowledge instances where national service personnel were often posted to their schools. These national service personnel were usually not trained teachers. Alex, Francis, Caxton, Amiyoo, David, Darko, Prosper, Gifty, and Richard held that their teachers were well trained and qualified, but the problems were with them, the students who were facing a myriad of challenges from home. They were of the view that the environment (rural) and their situations at home such as low parental education, family poverty, lack of support from family/home, the generally elevated levels of illiteracy, and resultant lack of interest in education were the causes of their educational woes.

### **Student Hardship, Apathy, and Poor Performance**

Students can only focus and learn if their basic needs are met. When their needs are not met, learning is woefully affected. All the participants narrated how they suffered hardships as children going to school. These hardships were, but were not limited to, hunger, child labor, long commutes, walking barefooted to school, and not having the prescribed supplies. The above situations posed hardships to participants and did affect their learning. Some participants narrated how they had to cross streams to get to school. Some participants had to attend classes on empty stomach. Richard complained, “I am not able to learn when I am hungry.” Solomon,

Darko, Prosper, David, Richard, and Francis said that they had to change and go to the farm to weed and get foodstuff after school. This left them restless and unable to study. Some of the participants complained about some teachers using students on their farms at the expense of learning. Teachers are very reluctant to accept postings to rural communities due to poor amenities. Poor road access, difficulty pursuing further education and other professional development courses when stationed in rural remote communities, poor healthcare facilities electricity, and telephone/mobile networks are not available in most of the rural communities. These hardships posed by their rural environment, the school, and family made it difficult to succeed academically. Eventually, most perceived no incentive for going to school and became apathetic to education. Hardship results in apathy, which in turn affected rural students' motivation and resilience. Solomon, Darko, David, and Richard admitted that they lost interest in going to the school and saw no motivation in doing so. Student hardship, leading to apathy with resultant poor academic output, defeats the educational goals, as the rural students are unable to match up and compete with their urban counterparts. Where hardships are removed with the necessary resources available, students can have the sound mind to excel academically.

### **SQ2: Perceived Impacts on Students' Post-school Outcomes – Theme Derived**

Surprisingly, all the 13 research participants are of the view that they could have advanced in life in terms of their careers and statuses. David, Darko, Solomon, Amiyoo, Richard, Michael, and Prosper who are currently working as farm assistant/attendant, mason/bricklayer, carpenter, and machine operator, admitted that these are not the jobs that they wanted to do if they had their way. Even Gifty, Alex, Daniel, Francis, and Caxton who are trained teachers are of the view that the rural educational system did not favor them, and that poverty and family situation were disadvantages to them. Daniel recalled, "I wanted to be a lawyer when I was

young.” Participants’ current statuses are the direct outcomes of their rural educational journey. The rural educational landscape with its associated challenges affected their development and learning, hence their career outlooks.

### **Adult Life and Career Prospects**

As the saying goes, “one reaps what he/she sows;” all things being equal, good training and education open doors to good prospects and opportunities. Most of the participants were not in a desired class or professional career at the time of the interviews due to the poor and weak education they received. All participants believed in the power and benefits of education and were of the view that they were currently doing less as adults because they missed many opportunities in life. When asked, “What ways do you think that education should benefit the recipient?” Prosper stated that “I believe education has the power to change one’s fortune and make life more favorable than not getting an education.”

Richard said that “right now I am unable to secure good and high-paying jobs because I did not have a good education.” Participants believe that they could have had good career prospects, with decent jobs if they had gotten good education as their urban counterparts. David stated, “now I can’t get a decent job because I did not get a good education.” The above narratives indicate that the participants are aware of what good education could do to their lives as adults. Another post-school effect of poor education is that most of these participants may not be able to step up to community leadership positions, such as mayor, opinion leaders, etc., due to the limited education that they had. Most of the participants had education below senior high school (SHS).

### **Research Question Responses**



This investigation sought to investigate the perceived impacts of ruralness and rural education on rural students' academic achievements and the long-term adult lives of rural students. Participants' responses in semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and projective technique (timeline) responded to the central research and sub-questions.

### **Central Research Question**

The central research question asked, "How do ruralness and rural educational perceivably impact the long-term adult lives of rural students?" This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined the common significance of encounters shared by a group of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McGrath et al., 2019). The themes of adult life and career prospects, student hardship and apathy, and family socioeconomic status (SES) constituted a reply to this question. The participants were of the view that getting a quality education comes with unlimited life opportunities, especially in service communities, and good career outlooks. David and Richard admitted that they are doing menial jobs because they did not get the quality education that could propel them to be what they wanted to be doing. The theme of family socio-economic status turns out to be cyclical as participants are likely to end up in the very same situations as their parents because they could not make any meaningful careers due to limited education. For instance, Caxton remarked, "my motivation to pursue education to a career level stemmed from the determination to break the poverty chain." Daniel added, "I don't want to be like my parents."

Family socioeconomic status (SES) also contributed to this answer to this question since participants, including but not limited to David, Solomon, Darko, Richard, Amiyoo, Prosper, Alex, and Caxton, attributed their rural educational woes and their current situations to family poverty. Participants acknowledged that rural hardships, not limited to the absence of electricity,

poor diet, long commutes, lack of clean drinking water, inadequate teaching and learning materials, combined with poor family socioeconomic situations formed a synergy that now defines their adult lives.

### **Sub-Question One**

Sub-question one asked, “How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students’ learning and efficacy?” All the themes developed, for example, family socioeconomic status (SES), parental lack of interest/apathy, lack of essential amenities/scarcity, support and collaboration, teacher recruitment and retention, and student hardship affected participants’ learning and academic performance address this question. For instance, Richard, Daniel, Darko, Amiyoo, and Solomon admitted that their learning was affected by the hardships that they endured. Specifically, Daniel lamented, “I walked a long distance through the bushes to school each day.” All the participants acknowledged that they were faced with an array and varied challenges including but not limited to extreme family poverty, hunger, unmet family and school needs, long commutes to and from school, high teacher attrition, inadequate learning resources and facilities such as a library, laboratories, toilets, playgrounds, electricity, and potable water. The foregoing challenges affected learning and eventually marred their academic performance.

### **Sub-Question Two**

Sub-question two asked, “How do ruralness and its characteristic challenges perceivably impact students’ post-school outcomes?” The theme of adult life and career prospects answered this question. None of the participants admitted that he/she is happy and liked the work that he/she is doing currently. Caxton, Daniel, Gifty, Alex, and Francis are trained teachers. Daniel recalled, “I had wanted to become a lawyer.” Alex also lamented that “this is not what I would

have been if I had a good support for my education.” While some of the participants were not explicit about their desired careers, Michael, Solomon, Darko, Amiyoo, Richard, and David admitted that their current state is not what they wanted to be if things had gone right. They complained that the poor-quality education that they had were the result of their present state of doing what they do not like to do if they had their way. For instance, Alex, Caxton, Solomon, Darko, Richard, Amiyoo, Victoria, David, and Michael admitted that they are unable to get decent and high-paying jobs because they did not get the quality education that would have propelled them to that height.

### **Summary**

This chapter began with an overview of rural educational experiences and the perceived impacts on students and adult lives, followed by the purpose of the current study. There was a brief description of the participants’ profiles. In all, 13 past rural students who participated in this study. The results section includes the steps of data collection and the process of theme development. This information included a description of the three data sources; face-to-face semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a projective technique (timeline). To wrap up, the chapter discussed how the participants’ responses informed each of the recurring themes, the central research, and sub-questions for this manuscript.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to investigate how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the achievements and prospects of rural students in Ghana. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was the most ideal methodology for this study as the goal was to dig into the lived experiences of past rural students (van Manen, 1997, 2014). Following this summary of the chapter's content is a review of the study's findings, which includes how these results addressed the central research and sub-questions. A discussion then ensues of the outcomes according to the reviewed literature in Chapter Two and their significance as related to two theoretical frameworks, Bronfenbrenner's (1974, 2005) bioecological and Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theories. The next stage, implications, examines the methodological and practical connotations of the current study. After announcing the study's delimitations and limitations, the chapter then concludes with recommendations for future exploration and a chapter summary.

### **Discussion**

The study investigated how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the achievements and prospects of rural students in Ghana. This section discusses the study's findings in light of the developed themes. The theory guiding this study is Bronfenbrenner's (1974) bioecological theory which considers the influences on a child's development within the context of the complex system of relationships that form his or her environment. The bioecological theory aims to improve understanding of the conditions and processes that influence a child's development (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015). Consistent with the theoretical frameworks governing the study, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) bioecological and Bandura's (1977,

1996) social cognitive theory, participants' responses, formed themes indicating that multiple systems impact children's development; each of these systems are embedded within and impacts the others in reciprocal ways (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). Family poverty, which is caused by multiple factors such as low parental education, broken homes, etc. had dire consequences on students' development and school success. Participants, for instance, Richard stated that "I lost interest in the schooling because there was no motivation and support coming from any quarters." Merton's (1968) strain theory supplements Bronfenbrenner's and Bandura's (1977, 1996), in that some participants admitted dropping out of school to join friends to undertake menial jobs. Some students who fail to cope with underlying environmental factors attempt to take unapproved routes to life (Merton, 1968). David recalled, "I dropped out of school so many times before I finally abandoned the school."

### **Interpretation of Findings**

Considering all participants' responses as parts to the whole (van Manen, 1997), thematic separation/isolation was conducted to analyze the lived experiences holistically, selectively, and with a line-by-line approach. The thematic separation and isolation of participants' responses found that family socioeconomic (SES); parental lack of interest/apathy; lack of essential amenities/scarcity; lack of support and collaborations; teacher recruitment and retention challenges; culture, values, and misunderstandings; student hardship and apathy; and difficult adult life and career prospects were all critical constructs of their rural education in eastern Ghana.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

The current investigation sought to investigate how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the achievements and prospects of rural students in Ghana. This hermeneutic

phenomenological study involved engaging past rural students, who have experienced rural education through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and projective techniques (timeline). Below is the recapitulation of the study findings as related to how the data addressed the central research and sub-questions.

### ***Rural Poverty***

This study supported what had been concluded earlier, that students' academic performance is found to be largely influenced by parental involvement, parental education level, and family socio-economic status (Zhang, 2021). Parents from low-SES families may not be able to afford educational costs. They have limited educational backgrounds and may not be able to actively partake in their children's upbringing, which in turn affects children's academic development. Students from low SES backgrounds often find themselves under intense economic pressure to prioritize paid work over their education (Devlin & McKay, 2018). The study confirmed that most of the participants' parents have little to no education. Again, from the themes developed, almost all the rural educational challenges hinged around poverty or socioeconomic status (SES). The study again added that participants' parents were predominantly subsistence farmers, signaling an economic disadvantage. This financial disadvantage has had significant impact on the overall educational experiences of participants (Devlin & McKay, 2018). Parents lack of involvement in their children's education hinged on their parents' low levels of education and their poor socioeconomic statuses. Family poverty is deep-rooted and cyclical in Ghana; grandparents were in the same situation, parents followed and eventually, children follow the same trend if nothing drastic is done to change the situation.

Consistent with the primary theory guiding this study, Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological systems theory, participants' lived experiences reflect the realities of the microsystem,

the children's immediate surroundings (the child's family, school, peers, and neighborhood). The microsystem remains the most influential level of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, as it is the most immediate environmental setting containing the developing child, such as family and school, and has implications for educational practice (Guy-Evans, 2020). Since participants' immediate rural environment includes their families, peers, rural community neighborhood, and school, these factors had a direct influence on the participants' development and lives. In alignment with the guiding theory, participants' admitted that their family socioeconomic statuses hindered their parents' abilities to provide for their needs, both at home and school. Participants admitted that not having enough to eat, inadequate school supplies, long commutes, poor parent-teacher relationships, and lack of parental support affected their learning. Participants' rural environment imposed unique challenges which also dictated the type of school, teachers, and peers. Family relationships, parental involvement in school and school quality, and individual factors affected participants' level of motivation for school and learning, and their abilities to learn.

### ***Lack of Essential Teaching/Amenities in Rural School Communities***

Learning in rural schools, in many Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, once took place in one-room schools with a single teacher educating, taking care of, and supervising students of diverse ages. Multigrade teaching is still common in many schools across OECD countries today (Ares Abalde, 2018). While not all participants studied in multigrade classrooms, some participants admitted to studying with other students who were either in lower or higher grades. Multigrade teaching results from either inadequate classrooms to accommodate students or unavailability of enough teachers to staff all grade levels.

High-quality educational resources such as trained teachers, quality school infrastructure, sports facilities, tables and desks, computers, and laboratory equipment in the school context remain relatively scarce or are in a deplorable state in rural communities, which may be one of the reasons that the participating students are stagnant in overall academic performances (Sanfo & Ogawa, 2021). Consistent with the above, all participants admitted that the absence and/or inadequately trained teachers, classroom blocks, school pitches, laboratories, textbooks, desks and chairs and computers, and internet service in their rural schools deeply affected their learning and performance.

School facility conditions, environment, and perceptions of safety and learning have been investigated to have impacts on child development. It is important to note that the environment separately influences academic performance and attendance after controlling for school and community factors (Berman et al., 2018). Most of the essential amenities and facilities that make urban areas attractive are missing in rural areas. Most rural communities and schools are inaccessible due to bad roads linking them to urban areas. Electricity, clinics, potable/clean water, internet, and mobile networks are often not available to aid teaching, learning, and research. School infrastructure, toilets, libraries, laboratories, and desks and tables are either nonexistent or in an abject state.

### ***Lack of Support, Collaborations, and Supervision***

The conditions in rural schools and communities already spell doom for the rural student. Student motivation does not and cannot come solely from the time they spend in the classroom. It must also come from the students' life outside of the school (Sorbo, 2020). Parent involvement is critical to unlocking student motivation and helping students to be as successful as possible by offering the support and guidance needed for their educational journey to be a successful one



(Ohio Department of Education, 2016). Parent involvement is a multi-tiered concept that can be implemented in a plethora of methods from basic education. Parents and school communities did not support the growth of the school to promote teaching and learning; most participants revealed that their parents had nothing to do with their teachers and the school. Parent-teacher engagement barely exists in rural school communities. Parental interest and support are primary parts of students' academic success or failure in education (Crosby, 2021). Due to the remote nature of rural schools and communities, education inspectors rarely visited rural schools to supervise teaching and learning, including teachers' performance as well as to become familiar with rural school situations. These situations leave rural schools without control and monitoring, giving way for teachers to adopt all forms of negative habits including truancy and lateness.

### ***Teacher Quality and High Teacher Turnover***

Staffing any school is a complex task; staffing a rural school has added difficulties (Salamondra, 2020). While teacher turnover remains high among rural schools, teacher quality also adds to the menace. In the Ghanaian education system, the education ministry supplements. The high teacher turnover results in filling classes with less qualified teachers who are not professionally trained, resulting in undesirable academic results. Henry and Redding (2020) observed that students who lose their teacher during the school year have significantly lower test score gains than students whose teachers stay. There is the inequitable distribution of inexperienced teachers (Redding & Nguyen, 2020), and as a result, underserved rural students are assigned to new and inexperienced teachers at higher rates (Goldhaber et al., 2018). This trend is partly attributed to how more experienced teachers opt to teach in urban schools and classrooms with higher-performing students and more positive working conditions, leaving less desirable vacancies (i.e., rural schools) to be filled by new teachers (Redding & Nguyen, 2020).

The menace of constant teacher turnover which disrupts teaching and learning in rural schools was also underscored by several participants in your study.

The challenges in rural communities deter qualified teachers from accepting postings to rural communities. The overall effect is poor academic outcomes, low school standards, and poor enrollments.

### ***Misconceptions and Archaic Beliefs***

When rural places are undefined or defined inadequately, they can become mere conceptual contrasts for equally ill-defined cities, suburbs, or towns (Their et al., 2021). Consistent with the above, this study on rural education in Ghana found elements such as an improper framing of Ghanaian rurality. This led to all sorts of misconceptions and ill thoughts about rural schools and people. This study confirmed that most parents held the belief that it is natural and automatic that their children should take after their parents' farming activities as a profession instead of going to school remains a challenge in some rural communities. This study also revealed that some rural Ghanaian parents never prioritized their children's education, rather they focused on earning money, an issue noted by Devlin and McKay (2018). Some parents even get hostile to school authorities for asking students to come to school, which was a typical situation for Daniel, Richard, David, and Solomon. Some families still hold the belief that education is reserved for boys only and not girls. Such families and parents believe that educating a girl amounted to a waste of resources and time and that girls should be in the home and the kitchen helping their mother, confirming the study by Mabiso and Benfica (2019). These archaic beliefs can keep school-age children out of the school system.

In rural schools, a difficult divide is created when parental attitudes and opinions about the value of education are vastly different from the opinions of the teachers and administrators

(Stelmach, 2011). The foregoing position is problematic because these perceptions are directly imposed on rural Ghanaian students and determined their educational performance and goals. The findings of this study revealed that most parents did not support their children's educational efforts, especially for girl child education. While the parents of Francis, Gifty, and Prosper were supportive of their children's education despite their financial challenges, the remaining participants indicated that their parents did not support or encourage them to pursue their education or excel.

At times girls are secured for marriage by a man's family long before they reach puberty. The girl could be as young as five to eight years old. As soon as the girl reaches menarche, her family gives her in for marriage (Nanyangwe-Moyo et al., 2020). Amiyoo, Gifty, and Victoria suffered neglect and stereotyping in this boys-dominated rural school environment. Gender differences are also noted in the drop-in school attendance rates for young youth, with girls showing a greater drop in percentages than boys (Mabiso & Benfica, 2019). With exception of Francis, all the remaining twelve participants lamented of the absence of motivation, especially from their parents to learn or go to school.

### ***Student Hardships***

While several factors influence rural student engagement, little is known about the predictive role of family economic hardships on rural student engagement, particularly in rural Ghana. In the context of rural Ghanaian students, the main source of student hardship is economic in nature. It paves the way for many other challenges such as parental inability to provide home and school needs of their children. Though long commutes and other factors are challenges affecting the rural Ghanaian student, economic hardship remains the main challenge. As a result, most rural Ghanaian students go to school either without food or are malnourished.

School supplies, including uniforms and school bags, among rural Ghanaian students, remain a challenge. The socioeconomic posture of participants' rural families subjects students to array of hardships. Participants mentioned hunger, long commutes to and from school, not having the necessary school supplies and materials, poor school uniforms, worn-out school bags and footwear, lack of parental support, and poor parent-teacher engagements as some of their challenges. The above situations, collectively subject students to hardships that make it difficult to concentrate and learn, with possible dropout. The prominent factors identified to influence dropouts in this study include poverty, low level of parental education, long distances to school, and corporal punishment. The phenomenon of dropping out of school has serious socioeconomic implications such as unemployment and its related social vices, increased dependency ratio, and child marriages in the rural areas (Abotsi et al., 2018). The foregoing is in congruence with the guiding theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1974) bioecological theory.

### ***Abysmal Academic Outcome and Poor Career Prospects***

On average, psychological variables are often statistically different in people living in poverty compared with people living in affluence (Frankenhuis & Nettle, 2020). Most of the rural-urban learning achievements gap is explained by student background characteristics. Unmeasured characteristics explain much of the proportion of the gap, but the importance of that proportion varies across the distribution (Sanfo & Ogawa, 2021). Narratives from participants are consistent with existing literature, confirming that rural students perform poorly in comparison with their urban counterparts. Daniel recalled, "Though I am a teacher, I had to carefully rehearse the English before speaking." Richard added that "I cannot speak good English, many are the things that I want to in life, but I cannot." These outcomes emanated from the numerous challenges that confronted these rural students (participants). Most students from

low SES families lack parental involvement in their education (Zhang, 2021), a finding repeated in this present study.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Policy and practice implications for rural school improvement should be aimed at satisfying all the multiple systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem that are critical to growth and development. Unfortunately, educational reforms and subsequent innovations have been designed most often for and with urban school settings in mind (Zuckerman et al., 2018). Truly, most of Ghana's educational reforms have not been adequately implemented in most rural areas due to the same rural challenges, including inadequately trained teachers running the schools. For instance, it is common to see rural schools without the adequate number of trained teachers, chairs and tables, and inadequate teaching and learning materials. This is usually not the case in most urban schools. The rural educational menace is robust and has overreaching implications for all in policy decisions and advocacy, and practice for various stakeholders, such as policymakers, administrators, teachers, parents, etc. Poorer performance in rural schools is a worldwide problem and requires all stakeholders to tackle the menace. To adequately address the issues and concerns raised from a policy and practice perspective require a shared solution. The nuanced psychological and behavioral outcomes suggest the need for programs that cultivate educational resilience among young people (Ansong et al., 2018).

### ***Implications for Policy***

While the different definitions of rural do influence resource allocation, grant funding eligibility, and/or research findings, the rural menace is a multi-faceted one. A major policy intervention to bridge the urban-rural gap is strategies to reduce rural poverty. To this end,

policies to boost free rural education, upgrade rural school infrastructure, introduce innovative teaching methods, and promote STEM education, especially computer literacy, will go a long way to promote teaching and learning. Problems of rural inadequate school infrastructure, teaching/learning materials, school amenities such as toilets, playgrounds, and other facilities are related to the limited budget allocations to rural schools. To eliminate the rural-urban academic gap, there is the need to fund rural schools adequately to promote teaching and learning.

Acheampong and Gyasi (2019) argued that the challenges associated with recruiting and retaining qualified teachers are influenced by the lack of access to quality professional development, infrastructure, support, and safety (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019). Rural teacher attrition is attributed to professional isolation, lack of rewards and incentives, burnout, and limited resources. Participants of the study recommended that a certain percentage of teachers' salaries be apportioned as an additional incentive to motivate teachers who serve in rural basic schools. As a long-term strategy, special student training and recruitment strategies should be adopted to recruit and train potential teachers from underprivileged communities to receive training and serve in their communities.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Compared with urban Ghana, public education is worse in rural parts of the country (Anlimachie & Avoada, 2020; Anlimachie, 2019). Policy makers, local and national governments must realize and acknowledge the fact that a huge segment of the Ghanaian population still resides in rural areas which makes it very crucial to give rural education the needed attention it deserves. There is a compelling need to examine several rural educational reforms involving curricular changes and restructuring of teacher education institutions that are tasked with the responsibility of preparing teachers for the basic school level. Although large

urban schools are similar in several ways to rural schools, from socioeconomic status to testing achievement, one area in which the two groups are hugely different is in the amount of funding they receive (Harris & Hodges, 2018). The lack of financial support available to rural school districts has major implications on the lack of access rural schools have to well-qualified teachers (Harris & Hodges, 2018). In practice, small schools, and class sizes benefit students from the lower socio-economic backgrounds, including children with special needs (Adsit, 2011). Alex recalled that he had difficulty studying mathematics and needed extra help, but he did not receive it in his rural school.

### **Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) asserted that children's early development and learning are influenced by multiple systems, including the microsystem (e.g., family poverty level), mesosystem (e.g., home-school partnership), exosystem (e.g., community type, early education policies), and macrosystem (e.g., rural culture). Given the lack of critical resources and associated challenges, which constitute obstacles, ecological systems are linked to children's early learning experiences, with a particular focus on rural students' experiences of how these ecosystems influence students' learning environments and opportunities. Based on the interviews and focus groups with participants, the rural participants experienced different ecological systems that impacted their opportunities for learning and development. Specifically, there were elevated levels of familial poverty coupled with limited early education access, family-school engagement, available community resources, and cultural diversity in these rural communities. Policies and practices must be established to allocate enough resources to support children's early learning in rural communities in light of their unique challenges. Shonkoff et al. (2012) maintain that the brain develops most rapidly in the earliest years and that enriching early

learning experiences are critical for the long-term success of children. Vandell et al. (2010) added that long-term benefits and outcomes both for the child and society are associated with high-quality early learning experiences.

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1974) bioecological theory, Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory considers how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence student learning and behavior. Participants' immediate environment, including family poverty, home-school partnership, community type, and rural culture and values affected their learning in many ways. For instance, Solomon, Richard, Amiyoo, Darko, and David recalled their inability to do well academically due to the environmental issues interacting with their ability to learn. Richard and David added that they had a problem paying attention in class and retaining materials because they usually did not get food to eat before going to school. Michael, Darko, and Solomon added that they had to help their parents with farm work either before or after school. Participants recalled being not motivated to be in school to learn. The foregoing supports Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory which posits that... . Participants indicated that rural suffering impacted their ability to learn to excel academically. The harsh environmental factors affected participants' cognitive characteristics such as motivation and resilience (Bijani & Haghghi, 2020; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). The reality is that the participants' environment significantly influenced their development, school performance, and post-school or adulthood lives. Participants' families, including socioeconomic situations, and harsh rural and rural school challenges were impediments to their holistic development.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The current hermeneutic phenomenological investigation was conducted to investigate how ruralness and rural education perceivably impact the achievements and post-school



outcomes of rural students in Ghana. The limitations of this study must be considered in reviewing and applying its findings on a more global scale. All the participants were past rural students in the eastern region of Ghana, who were 18 years or older. The data were transcribed and reviewed the same with each participant. I sought to increase the accuracy of recurrent themes and the transferability of the study by collecting and triangulating information from three sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the timing of this study and significantly impacted participants' level of commitment. Although none of the participants withdrew, one participant could not participate in the focus group session, but they all completed the individual interview and timeline, and I am pleased with their participation despite the challenges. This study was conducted in eastern Ghana. While all sixteen regions in Ghana share similar rural characteristics, future studies should have representative participants from all the regions. In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, there are some recommendations for future

One delimitation included limiting participants to only past rural basic school students, who are 18 years and older. Some of the participants have been out of school for over decades and therefore may recall some of their lived experiences. Delimitations of this study include the inclusion of any individual who has experienced rural education regardless of their level of educational attainments. An additional delimiting factor is having both participants who have experienced rural education and were able to rise to become professionals and those who could not pursue further education due to the rural educational challenges. Delimited to rural students from Ghana, so given cultural and geographical factors study's findings may not be transferrable to rural students/schools in other countries in general.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study gives a voice to the lived experiences of individuals who experienced rural education in Ghana. In general, as noted in the review of the literature, a gap exists in the research investigating the in-school and post-school experiences of rural students. While this phenomenological study presented data and offered some new insights, it is only a single study and a step forward. A case study on rural students who have supportive parents, and family backgrounds. Additionally, a study may assess a teacher's perspective after teaching in a rural and urban setting.

More studies should be built upon the findings of this study that adds to the body of research in highlighting the need to reduce rural poverty among rural agricultural communities, prioritize rural education by providing enough funding for teaching and learning resources, acquire adequate infrastructure, and reduce teacher turnover through incentive packages. These could include practical studies, such as if the ministry of local government and rural development in conjunction with the ministry of education could help by providing subsidized farming inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, etc. to help boost rural farming. Training programs such as soap and bead making, trades, and apprenticeship programs such as carpentry and welding be offered to the youth, especially the school dropouts. These initiatives will reduce rural poverty in Ghana and increase rural enrollments and improve academic performance. Finally, future studies may seek inputs from rural school authorities, parents, or other stakeholders. This will build a future study that is robust, with findings that apply to varied situations or environments.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study gave voice to the lived experiences of individuals who attended rural schools in Ghana. It investigated how ruralness and rural

education impact the in-school achievements and prospects as perceived by former rural students. Participants shared their lived rural educational experiences through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and creating a timeline. Participants described their lived experiences in attending rural school, the outcomes of their educational experiences, and how those experiences have shaped their adult lives. Detailed accounts of how rural educational experiences, with their associated characteristic challenges, were shared.

Participants also described the perceived impacts ruralness and rural educational experiences had on their schools, achievements and post-school prospects. The findings of this study indicate that family socio-economic status (SES); parental lack of interest/apathy; lack of essential amenities and resources; lack of support and collaboration; teacher recruitment and retention; culture, values, and misunderstandings; student hardship, apathy, and deficient performance; and difficult adult life and poor career prospects are key issues related to rural education. The findings indicate that participants experienced a perceived increase of hardships due to harsh rural conditions such as tiredness and hunger as a result of numerous challenges including long commutes to and from school and helping on farms before and after school sessions.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval

#### Consent

**Title of the Project:** Investigating the experience of ruralness and rural education: A phenomenological study of perceived impacts on achievements and future prospects in rural Ghana

**Principal Investigator:** Robert Tsitey, Graduate Student, Liberty University.

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a past rural student who is now an adult, which is 18 years or older, you must have attended a rural school in Ghana, and must be current resident of Koforidua in the eastern regional capitol and/or its immediate surroundings in the at the time of this engagement. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the rural school experiences in school and post-school outcomes of students from rural Ghana. It assesses rural Ghanaian students in the lenses of in-school and after school lives in terms of academic achievements, educational continuity, careers, and the ability to cope with life through knowledge gained from their education, and take advantage of real-life opportunities, including holding leadership positions. This study is being done to bring to light and create awareness of the rural characteristic challenges that have plagued rural education in Ghana.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in one private face-to-face interview. The interview will take place in a location that is convenient for you and private from distractions. Interviews will be recorded for future transcriptions. It should take approximately two (2) hours for you to complete the procedure listed.
2. Create a timeline depicting any significant events in your life regarding the topic of study. The timeline may be done orally, written, visual representation, audio recorded, graphic representation, or any other agreed upon medium. The timeline will need to be completed within one week following your initial interview and may be picked up by the researcher, emailed to him, or sent via mail. It should take approximately one (1) hour to complete.
3. Participate in a focus group. The focus group will take place in a location that is convenient for the group and private from public distractions. The focus group will be recorded for future transcriptions. It should take approximately one (1) hour to complete.
4. Undertake member checking; transcripts of the transcribed data (both interview and focus groups) will be provided to each participant for participant's validation, credibility, accuracy and

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resonance with their experiences. This review should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

**How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include awareness creation about the rural characteristic challenges affecting rural students in school and after school, leading to policy decisions by government and other stakeholders. Therefore, there will be an increased public knowledge on the topic, and improved learning outcomes for rural students.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. There is no known risk other than if the data collected is lost or stolen.

**How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews/focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is [REDACTED]. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Laura E. Jones at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Subject Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature & Date

## APPENDIX B

### Consent Forms

You are invited to be in a research study of rural students' experience of ruralness and rural education and its impacts on the future adult lives. You are selected as a possible participant because you are a past rural student that has firsthand experience with the subject of rural education and its characteristic challenges. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your involvement with this research will take place during the academic school year 2021.

This study is being conducted by Robert Tsitey who is studying education at Liberty University in the United States of America.

#### **Background Information:**

The central purpose of this research is to investigate how participants experience ruralness and rural education and their perceived effects on achievements and future prospects in rural Ghana.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I may ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in at least one private face-to-face interview lasting about 30 minutes. Additional interviews may be requested, and you may choose to accept the invitation or decline these future interviews. The interview(s) will take place in a location that is convenient for you and private from distractions. Interviews will be recorded for future transcriptions.
2. Create a timeline depicting any significant events in your life regarding the topic of study. The timelines may be done orally, written, visual representation, audio recorded, graphic

representation, or any other agreed upon medium. The timeline will need to be completed within one week following your initial interview and may be picked up by the researcher.

3. Participate in at least one focus group interview lasting about 30 minutes. Additional focus group interviews may be requested, and you may choose to accept the invitation or decline these future interviews. The interview(s) will take place in a location that is convenient for the group and private from public distractions. Interviews will be recorded for future transcriptions.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

The study has few risks that are anything more than would occur in day-to-day life. You may be exposed to ideas that may cause your personal discomfort or stress due to thoughts or ideas that are different from those you usually encounter.

Possible benefits to participation are that you will be helping a future rural students meet their academic goals, and you may learn new beneficial educational strategies.

**Compensation:**

You will receive no payment or reimbursement for participating in this research.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify participants. Research records will be stored securely in a locked safe and only the researcher will have access to the records. All participants will be given a coded name and the data collected will be stored in password protected computer files under the coded name. Data will be kept on file for at least the next 10 years in case other study or related research is completed for which it will be beneficial. Any recordings made will also be kept for this 10-year period and will be stored in a password protected device. No guarantees about confidentiality can be made about comments made in

small group discussions since I have no control over participants outside of the group time, but it will be made clear that no information is to be shared outside of our discussion time.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with your employer or any individuals. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Robert Tsitey. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [rtsitey@liberty.edu](mailto:rtsitey@liberty.edu) or 0548821869. His advisor at Liberty University is Dr. Laura E. Jones and she may be reached at [lejones2@liberty.edu](mailto:lejones2@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502, or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study and to be audio-recorded during interviews.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**IRB Code Numbers:** [Risk] **IRB Expiration Date:** [Risk]

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions

#### Demographic Information

Participant Name:

School Attended:

Current occupation:

1. Please introduce yourself, including where you were born and raised.
2. Please share your earliest school experiences.
3. How did you arrive in the rural community/school that you attended?
4. How has your education been different from those in urban areas? (rural/rural educational challenges).
5. What values, norms, and principles did you get from home as a student? (macrosystem)
6. What specific helps did you get from home/family which contribute to your educational success, if any? (microsystem)
7. How were, and what were the nature of engagements between your parents and school/teachers? (mesosystem)
8. What are some of challenges that you may consider extreme and how did you overcome them?
9. We know that rural living and rural educational challenges are numerous. Tell me how you stayed motivated. What value did you put on your education and future aspirations?
10. Educationally, how do you think you had control over your education or how have attained your educational aspirations? Please explain.

11. What role did your family's socioeconomic and educational backgrounds play in your education?
12. As a student, how were you adequately prepared or not prepared to be academically successful? Please explain.
13. In what ways do you think that those missing opportunities have affected your academic work and/or still affecting your adult life?
14. Please explain how education should bring one to his/her full potential in life.
15. Please explain your perspective on whether you think your teachers were qualified enough to teach you. Please provide examples to support your assessment.
16. What ways do you think that education should benefit the recipient?
17. What else do you think would be important for me to know about rural challenges affecting rural students learning and development?



## APPENDIX D

### Standardized Open-Ended Focus Group Questions

1. How would you describe rural-urban disparity in education? What could authorities do to bridge this gap?
2. What specifics do you think should change at the higher authority to eliminate the gap?
3. As a local community member, what do you think can be done as individuals/community members to improve education locally?
4. Discuss the engagements between family/parents-school/teacher and how it impacted your education.
5. Based on current situation, discuss your role(s) in your communities, and how you can influence future rural students to succeed?
6. What additional comments/suggestions do you have about how to improve rural educational experiences?

## APPENDIX E

### Reflective Journal Sample

This afternoon, June 15, 2021, I met with Daniel at his residence to give him an overview of my study and to schedule our meeting for the individual interview. Daniel is not happy when he discusses his educational experiences. Daniel is visibly angry and puts the blame partly at the doorsteps of his father, a farmer, and the political authorities in Ghana. I scheduled out actual interview to June 22, 2021.

Today, the evening of June 22, 2021, is the second time that I am meeting Daniel. His mood again, is similar to what he exhibited in when I met him at the first time (June 15, 2021). Daniel repeatedly recalled his rural living and rural educational experiences. Daniel made me know that teaching was never his preferred career but because the rural difficulties and the fact that his own biological father refused to support his education. Daniel still not happy with his parents, especially his father because of what he described wickedness on the part of his father. Daniel added that, though he is a teacher, but he struggles with the English language, and he had to carefully rehearse before he speaks due to the weak educational foundation. He laments that things are to a large extent the same as conditions have not improved to eliminate rural educational challenges.

## APPENDIX F

### Sample Researcher Log

05/20/21: Initial contacts made with first potential participants. Other potential participants were referred to me and contacts were made. Call backs and follow ups were scheduled.

05/24/21-05/28/21: Continued reaching out to potential participants, and scheduling meeting times. Continued/scheduling participants who have agreed to participate.

05/28/21: Met with a number of participants for the initial briefing. Initial interviews scheduled.

06/02/21: Scheduled focus group interview with 3 groups. I had to travel 45 minutes to meet Daniel at his village.

06/09/21: Continued with individual interviews. Started receiving some timelines from some participants.

06/15/21: Had first focus group interview with Alex, Caxton, Francis, and Gifty at Koforidua. Later met with Prosper and Richard for their individual interviews.

06/18/21: Had 2 focus group interviews. Scheduled a follow-up date to review transcribed data with the group.

06/23/21: Continued with individual interviews. Continued receiving the timelines from the completed individual interviews.

06/25/21: Had the third focus group interview with Darko, Michael and Victoria. Completed 11 individual interviews.

Daniel could not be available for the focus group.

06/27/21: One participant could not be available for the focus group interview.

07/03/21: Conducted last 2 individual interviews with Victoria and Amiyoo. Met with some

of the participants to review their transcribed data individually. Held last focus group interview.

07/07/21-07/19/21: Met with remaining focus group members to review the transcribed Data (member checking). Followed up with the participants for the remaining timeline reports.

## APPENDIX G

### Theme Development

#### Demographic Information

**Participant Name:** Richard.

**School Attended:** JHS Graduate.

**Current occupation:** Farm Assistant.

1. **Please introduce yourself, including where you were born and raised.** My name is Richard. I am 21 years old. I was born in Asesewa village.
2. **Please share your earliest school experiences.** Hmm, I don't like talking about my school.  
**Follow-up:** Why don't you like talking about it?  
 Because I am not happy, I don't like what happened. I didn't get help. Everything was not easy for me. No books, no money, no food at school, no help from my father and mother.
3. **How did you arrive in the rural community/school that you attended?** My father and mother were in the Asesewa village where I was born. They do farming there.
4. **How has your education been different from those in urban areas?** I didn't go to school in the city but the school in my village was not good at all. We didn't have enough teachers. The school was far from my home. I go farm all the time. We don't have good chairs and tables. Sometimes we are too many in the class. No electricity in the classroom, no computers. We didn't have library, no good place for sports, no toilet in the school.
5. **What values, norms, and principles did you get from home as a student?** My school was important to me because I didn't want to be like my father but there was no help. I want to be a better man but... When I am going to school, no food or money to buy food.
6. **What specific helps did you get from home/family which contribute to your educational success, if any?** Sir, I didn't get anything. He didn't help me. He didn't care about my school. I don't know why. I bought my own uniforms, footwear, school bag, and books. I pay fees.
7. **How were, and what were the nature of engagements between your parents and school/teachers?** No good relationship. My father didn't come to the school. He never. So, my teachers and parents didn't have good relationship.
8. **What are some of challenges that you may consider extreme and how did you overcome them?** I try to survive and go to school but it is hard for me to learn when I don't eat for long time. Sometimes I don't get food at home when going to school. I work with my father at farm when I am not in school.
9. **We know that rural living and rural educational challenges are numerous. Tell me how you stayed motivated. What value did you put on your education and future aspirations?**  
 I want to be a better and a good man in future, so I tried to endure.  
 I want to get a good job in future.

10. **Educationally, how do you think you had control over your education or how have attained your educational aspirations? Please explain.** I could not achieve any good education. I faced **so many problems. Money problems.**
11. **What role did your family's socioeconomic and educational backgrounds play in your education?** They have **no money. They are farmers.** To me, **I think they don't care because they also didn't attend any school.**
12. **As a student, how were you adequately prepared or not prepared to be academically successful? Please explain.** I was serious about my school, and I am ready to go higher but I could not. **I had to help my father at the farm too.**
13. **In what ways do you think that those missing opportunities have affected your academic work and/or still affecting your adult life?** **I cannot get a good job; I cannot do what many youths do. I cannot speak English well. It has affected me.**
14. **Please explain how education should bring one to his/her full potential in life.**
15. Education can give respect. **It can help me get a good job** and I will be happy.
16. **Please explain your perspective on whether you think your teachers were qualified enough to teach you. Please provide examples to support your assessment.** In fact, I don't know. **I don't like some of them because they make us weed at their farms and they don't come to the school to teach but I don't know if they qualify.**
17. **What ways do you think that education should benefit the recipient?** It can help me be a better man than I am now. Now **I cannot do many things that I want to do in life.**
18. **What else do you think would be important for me to know about rural challenges affecting rural students learning and development?** Village schools need road, classrooms, tables and chairs, good teachers.

### Developing the Themes

All data collected from the interviews, focus groups and the timelines transcribed and then were analyzed. In order to develop the themes, I first color-coded key words and phrases which became the codes obtained from the key clauses/phrases identified. After obtaining these codes, codes that were similar were regrouped under various headings (categories) such as *Socioeconomic Status (SES)*, *Lack of Essential Amenities & Resources*, etc. These categories form the themes. For example, codes such as **no money, money problems, poverty, I don't get food at home, my parents didn't help me, I paid my own fees, I bought my own books, I don't eat for long time, not easy for me,** etc. inspired the theme *Socioeconomic Status (SES)*.

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Member Checking**

#### **Member Check Interviews/Timelines Transcripts**

Transcribed data from the face-to-face individual interviews, focus group interviews, and the timelines were returned to participants for their review and accuracy. Copies of the transcribed data were reviewed and discussed with 12 participants, except one participant (Daniel) who opted receive his copy via email. The member checking took approximately 30 minutes for each instance. The process achieved the following:

- ✓ Shared discussion of the interview transcript.
- ✓ Focused on confirmation, modification, and verification/validation of interview text.
- ✓ All data remained non-identifiable.
- ✓ Participant's concerns for safety reduced as the transcribed data presented for review, discussion and corrections.
- ✓ No difference or discrepancies identified.

#### **Member Check Focus Group**

- ✓ Shared discussions among focus group members.
- ✓ Focus groups shared experiences were validated (confirmed or disaffirmed).
- ✓ Gave opportunities to confirm previously given information.
- ✓ Timing was not convenient for one participant (Daniel) due to his work and other commitments.
- ✓ All data remained non-identifiable.