

NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY



FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY
MANAGEMENT

INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY

MASTER THESIS

**CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISION-
MAKING PROCESSES: EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN GHANA**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master
of Philosophy degree in Human Development, Institute of Psychology,

Norwegian

University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.

May 2012

Author

Evans Osei Bediako

DECLARATION

I, **Evans Osei Bediako**, hereby declare that except for references to other people's work, which have been duly acknowledged, this work was conducted by me under the supervision of **Dr. Berit Overå Johannesen** at the Institute of Psychology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, during the 2011/2012 academic year. This work has neither been submitted in whole nor in part for any degree in this University or elsewhere.

Signed:

.....

Evans Osei Bediako

Date

(Student)

This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Mphil degree at the Institute of Psychology, NTNU with my approval

Signed:

.....

Supervisor

Date

Dr. Berit Overå Johannesen

(PhD: Associate Professor)

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to:

- God Almighty for his divine guidance and protection throughout the period of studied
- My mother; Faustina Boakye and my father; Mathew Osei Bediako. Mum and Dad, I really love you for the rest of my lives. Daddy, thank you very much for your resources spent on my educational career. I grant you long life.
- My wife: Effah Benedicta, you are the wheel that carries me along. I love you sweetheart.
- All children whose fundamental rights have been subverted.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First of all, my sincere thanks go to Almighty God for his guidance, protection and love for me throughout the study.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to the Norwegian Government for providing me financial support through Norwegian State Educational Scholarship, Lånekassen; to enable me achieved such academic laurels. I am grateful for granting me this space in studying abroad, Norway.

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor and advisor, Dr. Berit Overå Johannesen, whose constructive criticisms, comments and guidance have been rewarding in the successful completion of this research. Thank you very much for your remarkable propositions, constant reminders and motivation for this area of research. Berit, I will forever remember you for your motherly care at the Institute of Psychology, NTNU. Once again, 'Tusen Takk' (in Norwegian means: Thousand Thanks), 'Medaase' (in Akan means: Thank you thousand times) for your unparalleled supervisory métier.

Prof. Birthe Loa Knizez, I thank you for your insightful criticisms and comments during the master's seminars. Your role in these seminars has contributed enormously to the success of this work and you deserve special mentioning for such roles in this research. Dr. Osafo Joseph, Department of Psychology, University of Ghana, I owe you tons of appreciation for your fatherly care both spiritually and academically during your stay in Norway. Daddy, you deserve special mentioning. Prof. William A. Corsaro at the Department of Sociology, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA. Thank you for your Advice and directions.

Dr, Gabriel Eshun of the Department of Geography of University of Leicester also deserves special mentioning. Big Brother, you are the termitarium in the guinea grass and

your viva-voce had sounded in this research. Thanks Gabriel, for the mentorship provided for me to be your research assistant in your PHD research.

My innermost thanks also go to Bishop Nsoah of Jesus Miracle Center Inc, Lowell USA and Apostle Oduro Baffoe of Apostles Reformation Church, Ghana. Daddies, I serve you a double portion of my thankfulness, for your spiritual guidance, prayers, and encouragements in my academic career.

I owe debt of gratitude to my wife Effah Benedicta, for the patience, endurance, support and understanding throughout the seasons of separation by distance during my studies in Norway.

My unlimited thankfulness goes to my siblings- Mavis Yeboaa and Isaac Boadum: Your sense of attachment and epitome of conviviality ensured a sound mindset at home for the study. My next thankfulness goes to my best friends-Augustine Amankwah, Enoch Osei Asibey and Silas Adom Christopher; you deserve special mentioning for your assistantships during my fieldwork in Ghana. Ernest Osei Amoh, Department of Geography NTNU. Thank you for your friendship, encouragement and Assistance in my stay and studies in Norway. I say cheers to all my colleagues at the NTNU.

Finally, I am very grateful to the study community, the entire Techiman Traditional Council especially, Nana Stephen Akumfi Ameyaw and the staff and students of the Techiman Ameyaw JHS for the co-operation during the interviews process. I say thanks and God bless you all.

ABSTRACT

Looking at the scientific research data lacunae in the area of children's participation in community decision-making processes in the context of festival and community forum in Ghana, this research was aimed to bridge the gap. The research was conducted in Techiman municipal of Ghana, using qualitative methods of interviews and focus groups to explore the traditional leaders' and junior high school children's perspectives on socio-cultural tenets and rights towards children's participation in community decision-making. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and content analysis approach were used to analyse the data from the experience of the (11) participants; 10 children and 1 traditional chief. The results from these analyses indicated that age (gerontocracy) and religiosity with their values such as respect and obedience, influenced children's perceptions of their participation in community Apoo festival and community forum for decision making. It also revealed that children are aware and have knowledge about their legal rights, but their knowledge are mixed up and are limited in scope. In all, community Apoo festival appeared in the results as holding a special potential to children's liberty rights and helps to break the hierarchy of powers between elders and children as well as cultural norms affecting children. Implications for community psychologists and actors in the field of children's rights and policy were offered on how festival can be used to influence and to teach children about participatory rights.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	I
Dedication.....	II
Acknowledgments.....	III - IV
Abstract.....	V
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Background to the Study.....	1 – 3
1.2. Statement of the Problem.....	3 - 4
1.3. Research Questions.....	5
1.4. Research Aims.....	5
1.5. Relevance of the Study.....	6
1.6. Thesis Structure and Organisation.....	6-7
CHAPTER 2: THEORIES, CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK.....	8
2.1. Theoretical Underpinning.....	8
2.1.1. Theory of “The Big Three of Morality.....	8-9
2.1.2. Autonomy.....	9 - 10
2.1.3. Community/Communalism.....	10 – 11
2.1.4. Divinity/God.....	12 - 13
2.2. Review of Related Concepts.....	13
2.2.1. Children’s Rights Discourse and Dilemmas.....	13 - 14
2.2.2. Convention on the Rights of the Child.....	14 - 18
2.2.3. The ACRWC.....	18 - 21
2.2.4. Respect.....	21 - 22

2.1.5. A Situational Analysis of Children’s Rights in Ghana.....	22 - 24
2.1.6. Typology and Spheres of Participation.....	24 - 26
2.3. Analytical Framework.....	27 - 28
2.4. Operationalization of Key Concepts.....	29
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	30
3.1. Study Context.....	30-32
3.2. Research Design.....	33 - 34
3.3. Target Population and Sample size.....	34
3.4. Sample Technique.....	35
3.5. Procedure.....	35
3.5.1. Focus Group with Children.....	35 - 36
3.5.2. Personal Interviews with Children.....	37
3.5.3. Personal Interviews with Chief.....	37-38
3.5.4. Choice of Language.....	38 – 39
3.6. Materials.....	39
3.7. Reliability and Validity.....	39 - 40
3.8. Data Analysis.....	41
3.8.1. Data Transcription.....	41
3.8.2. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Content Analysis.....	40-43
3.8.3. Data analytic Strategy.....	43-44
3.9. Ethical Considerations.....	45 - 46
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....	47
4.1. Children’s awareness and Knowledge about Legal Framework.....	47 - 49
4.2. Liberty Rights: Contribution of Apoo Festival.....	49
4.2.1. Apoo Festival.....	50-52

4.2.2. Contribution of Apoo Festival to children’s Rights.....	53 - 55
4.3. Gerontocracy in Community Decision-Making.....	55 - 58
4.4. Duties/Roles and Responsibilities of Ghanaian Child.....	58 - 61
4.4.1. Rights and Responsibility.....	61 - 63
4.5. Religiosity and its Influence on Children’s Rights.....	63-65

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....66

5.1. Overview	66
5.2. The Processes of Participation in Community Decision-making.....	66-67
5.3. Dialectical Relationship of Children’s Rights and Responsibilities.....	68-72
5.4. Limitations of the Study.....	72
5.5. Strengths of the Study.....	73
5.6. Implications and recommendations for Future Research.....	73
5.6.1. Community Psychological Praxis.....	73 – 75
5.6.2. Research on Children’s Participation in Community Decision-Making.....	75-76
5.7. Conclusion.....	76

REFERENCES.....77 - 84

APPENDICES.....85

Appendix A: Semi-structured Interview Guide.....	85-88
Appendix B: Informed Consent form.....	89 - 92
Appendix C: Letter of Informed Consent to Parent/Guardian of Student.....	93 - 94
Appendix D: Letter of Ethical Clearance from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), Norway.....	95

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: The Structure and Organisation of the Thesis.....	7
Figure 2.1: Analytical Framework	28
Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model for Dialectics of Children's Rights and Responsibilities.....	68

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Rights, Children and Adults.....	16-27
Table 2.1: Level of participation.....	25

LIST OF MAP

Map 1.1: Techiman in National Map.....	32
--	----

ACRONYMS

ACHPR	African Charter on Human and People's Rights
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CHRAJ	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
DA	District Assembly
DSW	Department of Social Welfare
GNCRC	Ghana NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child
JHS	Junior High School
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
MTDP	Medium Term Development Plan
NTNU	Norwegian University of Science and Technology
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child

“Adults miss the point. When is a child considered skilful enough to contribute and participate actively? If you do not give them the opportunity to participate, they will not acquire the skills. Give us the chance early and see how we fly.”

(17-year-old Khairul Azri, a Malaysian delegate to the UN Special Session on Children)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The introductory aspect of this chapter briefly provides an overview of children's rights in general and zeros it down to the practices of children's rights in Ghana. The sub-sections identified and addressed in this chapter include background to the study, the problem statement, research questions; research aims; relevance of the study, organization and structure of the thesis.

1.1. Background to the study

Can children ever just 'be' or are they always in a state of 'becoming'? (Kellett, 2010)

The United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which came into force in 1990, gives children right to 'express (participate) their views freely' in all matters affecting them (UN 1989: article 12.1). The UNCRC also declares the human rights of children as individuals in their own right and their right to participate in decisions that affect them, as stipulated in article 12. In the same vein, UNCRC recognizes that children may be vulnerable by emphasizing children's right to participate alongside their need for protection and provision of service (Lansdown, 1995).

Generally, the UNCRC is seen as a universal and so therefore the Africa charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children (ACRWC) was drafted and signed by African member states of the organization of African unity in 1990 (now called African Union) to serve as a complementary to UNCRC and to meet the important socio-cultural and economic realities of the African experience which was missed out in the drafting of the UNCRC (Thompson, 1992).

In pursuant of both UNCRC and ACRWC, the children's Act (Act 560) was passed into law in 1998 in Ghana and the Ministry of Women and Children affairs (MOWAC) was set up to ensure successful implementation of children's rights.

Even though, the children's rights ideology has been legalized by successive government in Ghana, still there has been a pitfall and serious challenges to the total transformative paradigm shift of this ideology. The practical constraints to the implementation of the children's rights bring to fore issues such as what constitute the best interest of a child and to what extent can children exercise these rights in practical terms (Lansdown, 1995). Such issues have been militated against the commitment of carrying out the effective implementation of these rights in Ghana. Casas (1997), argues that "the convention offers a new framework; it is the opportunity to build up a new psychosocial context (attitudinal, representation) for children".

Welch and Jones (2010) have explicitly discussed how different societies practice and prioritize their rights. To them, rights discourse has predominantly developed within the West with different societies placing weight to one type of right rather than another. A practical example can be found in social democratic societies such as Norway which tend to emphasize welfare rights, whereas liberal societies such as the United States tend to emphasize liberal rights. In contrast to the focus on humans as pivot of discussion, communities with religious beliefs or with strong hierarchical structures according to Welch et al (2010) may have a different focus, namely: some divinity or supreme ruler. In these communities, the western concepts of welfare or liberty rights can be seen as subservient to the concept of duty: the duty of individuals to follow the teachings of the religion or the dictates of the leader of the hierarchy. The possible welfare rights or liberal rights of children in such communities may not be fully recognized. Adults are perceived as being at the apex of the hierarchy and children learn their overall duties from adults and may have specific duties to adults, for instance, to obey their instructions and carry out specific tasks. When such hierachical

positions are bound up with religion, and inequalities in status are seen as part of a 'natural' or god-given' order of duty, a rights discourse is very challenging (Welch et al. 2010, p.34)

1.2. Problem statement

Children and young people have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes in most part of the world (Kane, 2003 & Cohen, 2005). The obvious example is where children are excluded from participating in voting, or in decision making at the community level. Participation plays important roles in children lives. Participation in decision making may potentially protects children by identifying their relevant needs quickly; help to add value to the service, to the decision-making and democracy in the work. Participation can also help the children to learn the skills of negotiation, how to communicate their needs, make effective decision and eventually, raises their self-esteem (Sinclair, 2004). Including children in decision making may help promote their wellbeing because "children know their situation best, what needs to be changed and often have concrete ideas of how to change it" (Save the Children, 2003, p 49). But more often than not, traditional communal practices limit children's participation in decision making.

Freeman (2000), made this observation about African countries[Ghana], that giving children 'rights' is widely believed to undermine families and the ability of parents to make decision. This understanding of what it may mean to grant children's right has been criticized by Lansdown's comments on what Article 12 does not say;

"It does not give children the right to autonomy. It does not give children the right to control over all decisions irrespective of their implications either for themselves or others. It does not give children the right to ride roughshod over the right of their [leaders]. However, it does introduce a radical and profound challenge to traditional attitudes, which assume that children should be seen and not heard" (Lansdown, 1995).

In line with this, the requirements and the implementation of the new children's law in Ghana (1998 Children's Act) which conforms to the international law on children, has led to a great confrontation with many traditional child rearing practices in Ghana and many parents who cherish traditional values and practices frown on it (Kuyini & Mahama, 2009). Research indicates that Children in Ghana normally participate in areas of family and community activities such as cleaning, preparation of meals, farming (weeding), trading, communal labour, communal rituals and festivals. However, regarding decision making, they are more often than not only "listeners" of the decisions from the heads of the family and that of the community (Sawadong 2010; Ekumah 2008; Kuyini & Mahama 2009).

One line of communal activity that seems to hold a special potential with regard to child influence is the Ghanaian festival tradition. One outstanding festival that plays this role in Ghana is 'Apoo' festival which is celebrated by the people of Techiman municipality. The major significance of this Apoo festival is that it gives the citizenry the right to come out openly and criticise those in authority, with impunity of which children are no exception. This demonstrates democratisation of the rule of law and good governance. It also serves as introspection for those in authority to re-assess themselves and make amends for any wrong doings, in order to promote effective development (Techiman Municipal Assembly-MTDP 2003-2005). This festival holds a potential in terms of ensuring children's rights implementation in Ghana and their participation in terms of self-expressions.

So far, no scientific research has been done on children's participation in the aspect of festival and community decision-making forum in Ghana. This creates scientific data lacunae in these aspects.

It is against this background that this study is earmarked to provide an empirical study for children's rights implementation in Ghana, by focusing on children's participation in community decision-making processes, specifically the in community festival of expressions and in the community decision-making forum.

1.3. Research Questions

The main research questions that the study aims to discuss are;

- What are the perceived rights and responsibilities of children in the community?
- What are children's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about their participation?
- How do children perceive the significance of the Apoo festival with regard to children's rights in Ghana?
- How do traditional political leaders perceive children's participation in community decision-making processes?

1.4. Research aims

The broad aim of the research is to provide an understanding and interpretation of the multiple realities underpinning children's rights implementation in Ghana and is undertaken under two main sub-aims.

The first aim of the research is to provide children's perspectives on their participation in the community festival and in a decision-making platform (forum) in Techiman Municipality, Ghana.

The second aim of the research is to comparatively explore the voices of the traditional political leaders in the community on political and socio-cultural tenets regarding children's rights promotion in Ghana.

1.5. Relevance of the study:

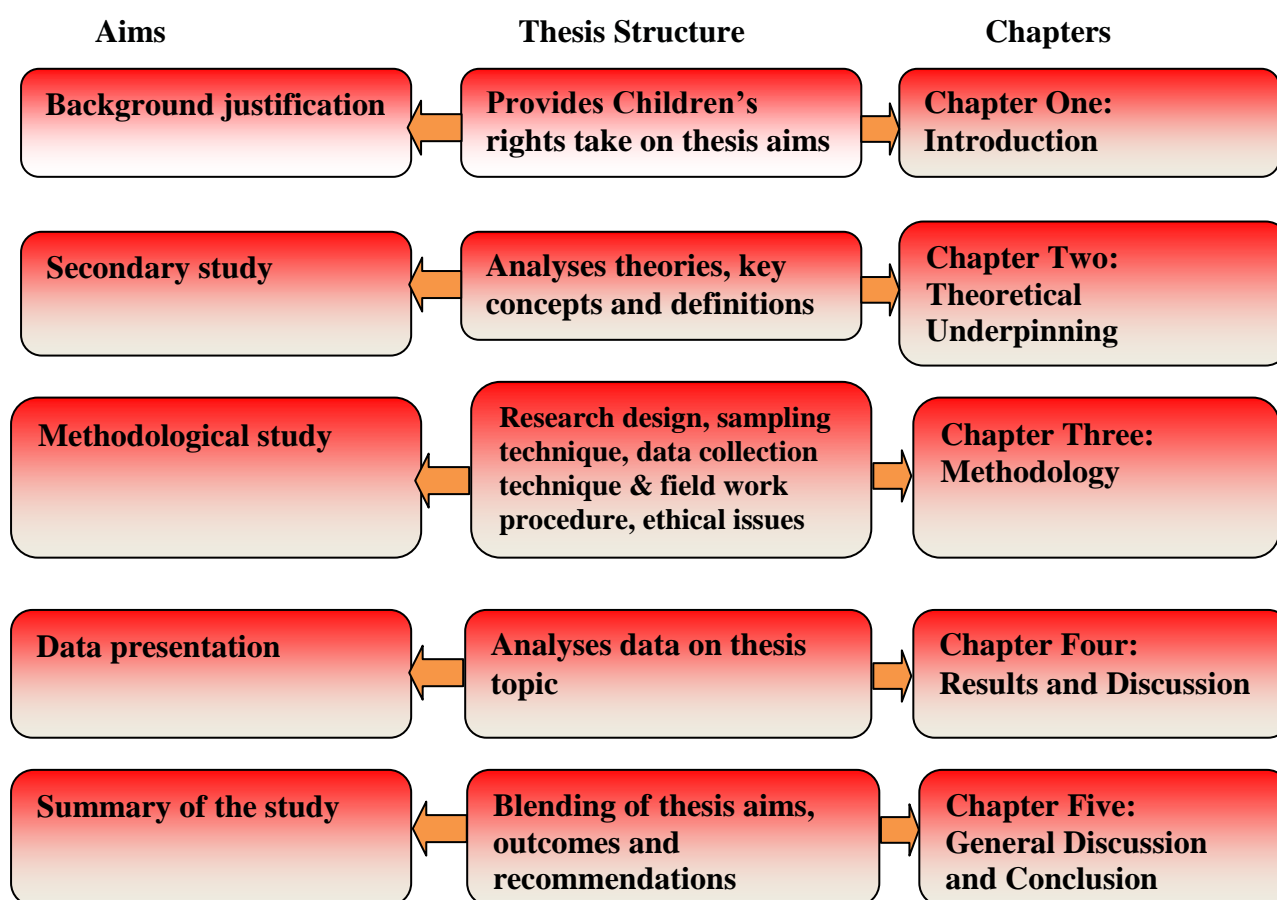
The study will contribute to knowledge building on children's rights in Ghana and the recognition of children as social actors (Qvortrup, 2002; James & James, 2004). The study in its effort will investigate the importance and contribution of Apoo Festival to the reaffirmation of children's rights implementation in Ghana, in terms of freedom of speech for children in the Techiman community. The study centers on Apoo festival because it is the only festival in Ghana that gives the people thirteen days of liberty to lampoon and express their pent up feelings that the soul has harbored to the leaders in the community for the year passed by.

This research may enable policy makers to appreciate and incorporate educational programs on children's rights in their activities to create awareness among citizens.

1.6. Thesis structure and organization

The thesis is divided into five Chapters. All the Chapters are aimed at supporting a qualitative analysis of children's participation in community decision making processes in Ghana. The current Chapter serves as the introduction to the thesis and it encompasses background to the study, problem statement, research questions, research aims and relevance of the thesis along with the children's rights issues underpinning to the thesis (Figure 1.1)

Figure 1.1 The Structure and Organisation of the Thesis



Source: Author's construct

CHAPTER TWO

THEORIES, CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Theoretical Underpinning

The English word “theory” originates from the Greek word, “theoria”, which means “to see” that is to say, to bring to light phenomena previously hidden from our awareness and attention (Watson, 1999). For the purposes of this research, a theory is defined as a way of seeing through “a set of relatively concrete and specific concepts and the prepositions that describe or link those concepts” (Fawcett, cited in Fawcett et al, 2001, p. 117). Moreover, theory and inquiry are inextricably intertwined (ibid). However, the theory serving as a moving spirit and explanatory framework for this current research is the theory of “The Big Three of Morality” (Autonomy, Community and Divinity). The theory of morality together with the human rights discourse are discussed in this chapter in order to identify the moral demands of the culture by adults and the claims of liberty rights by children.

2.1.1 Theory of “The Big Three of Morality”

The theory of morality has been analyzed in different dimensions in cultural psychology work. Morality is centered on culture (Miller, 2001), since culture is the totality of lives of the individuals in the community. Cultural Anthropologist and Psychologist Shweder (1999), noted that culture is the embodiment of community ideas about what is true, good or wrong which embrace diverse ways of life, and play significant role in the self understanding of members of the community.

In the study of cultural psychology of moral development Miller (2001), pointed out that psychological approaches to moral development normally view morality on the ground

that individuals perceived the concept to be above social consensus, rather than accepting societal rules, norms, or other societal standards. To her, the issues that people consider to be moral are concerns that people consider being right or wrong, and that goes beyond what is socially accepted.

However, social constructivist approach to moral development seem to challenge the moral debate on the basis of rights and wrong judgement of morality and made it clear that morality is understood to be more than that moral debate (Haste et al., Killen & Hart as cited in Katayama & Cohen, 2007). To explain this further, Haidt (2007) claimed that the concept morality worth more than harm and fairness and posited that the collective and religious elements need to be explored to capture loyalty, authority and spiritual purity of people. Although there are many assumptions defining this concept, it is established that the content of morality in the work of cultural psychology shows cultural disparity (Miller, 2001) and that the concept morality defers across cultures.

Despite a wide array of ways that morality could be operationalized, Shweder, Much, Mahapatra and Park (2003) postulated three main areas of ethics on which morality should be studied. These ethics are autonomy, community, and divinity

2.1.2 Autonomy

The ethics of autonomy according to Shweder et al. (2003) is based on moral ideas such as harm, rights and justice, which is aimed at protecting individuals in pursuit of liberation of their personal wants and wellbeing. The ethics of autonomy which is centered on the harm-rights-and-justice code which place emphasis significantly on the individual's and for that matter children's demands for self-interest and noninterference. Though, this is the wish of children to have autonomy in decision-making that affect their lives, adults see this differently. The research conducted on adult perspective on children's autonomy by Bohrnstedt, Freeman and Smith (19821) showed that age is an important variable in the

decision making since it connotes experience. Their findings further indicated a substantial variation in adult's views about the age of the child in decision making and that most adults were more likely to support the claims for autonomy for older children than younger ones. Bohrnstedt et al. (1981) finally noticed that age correlates negatively with the demand of children's rights to autonomy.

This ethic of autonomy propounded by Shweder et al. (2003) was actually identified to represent the individual interests, desires, and preferences of the children. But the harm-rights-and-justice code is mostly the resembles of North America practices. Conversely, in the context of Africa with respect to Ghana, the idea of individual is inextricably linked to the idea of a "Soul" and communalism. Gyekye (1996) discussed how African society with its dominance practice of communalism perceived individuality such that African community does not absorb autonomous rights but accommodate it and make it coexist with communalism. The implication of this coexistence is that communalism is not at variance with the concept of individual rights; it's indeed the exercise of individual rights-which include the right of the individual to exercise his or her unique qualities, talents, and dispositions that enhance cultural development and insure material and political success of the community (P.151). As described by Shweder, the entity of a "soul" is identified in the realm of divinity, whereas communalism defined the obligation and interdependence way of living by the members of the community, aiming at bringing the people under one umbrella. All these three discourses; autonomy, community, and divinity are intertwined

2.1.3 Community/Communalism

This ethics of community explains the moral concepts such as duty, hierarchy and interdependency, such concepts help individuals in the community to achieve dignity by virtue of their role and position in a society. According to the views of Shweder et al (2003),

the ethics of community is a discourse associated with the obligation through participation in the lives of a particular community. The pivot of discourse around this ethics is the roles and statuses and obligations in relation to other members of the community. The themes accompanied with this cluster of communalism as has already been mentioned are duty, hierarchy, interdependence and "soul" (selves).

Shweder et al (2003) explained this ethics in details from Indian "Oriya Hindu's perspectives and this is applicable in the context of Africa as well, such that individual desires in the community are more often than not associated with somebody else's responsibility. With this, the person in the hierarchical position is obligated to protect and satisfy the wants of the subordinate person to an acceptable degree. And on the other hand, the subordinate person is also obligated to satisfy the interests of the superordinate person in a specified ways. The People in the community look up unto others to satisfy their wants and needs, even if they are capable of doing so on their own because of the existence of "weesm" (communal living) that regulate the lives of the people. This explained the moral obligation of the interdependent "other" in such relationship is sensitive responsiveness to the perceived or expressed needs of one's interdependent self. In this relationship, children should be obedient to their parents; parents should be sensitive and responsive to the feelings and inclination of their children. Similarly, wives should be obedient to their husbands, and husband should be sensitive and responsive to the needs, desires, and inclinations of their wives. This explained the theme "selves" or "soul" under the themes of duty, hierarchy, and interdependence in the ethics of community.

2.1.4 Divinity/God

Ethics of divinity in the explanations from Shweder et al (2003) manifests itself on moral concepts such as natural order, sacred order, sanctity, sin and pollution, which is established to ensure the integrity of the spiritual side of humanity. It is a belief in such a supernatural being in an unforeseeable world, and that godliness interpenetrates the human social order and communicative exchanges between the physical and the spiritual realm can occur.

The discourse containing this ethics of divinity is deeply rooted with the idea of the sacred one way or the other regulating or influencing the lives and perceptions of individuals in the community about what is “wrong” or “right”.

It is believed that individuals or humanity receive protection from God and as such must recognize God's existence in their activities. The rights of individuals are also believed to derive from and are protected under the ambit of God in which every creature that exists is entitled to what is due or belong to him or her accordingly.

Observably, the religiosity and the beliefs of divinity have been deeply rooted in the minds of most African children. Lari (1997) in his book “Ethics and spiritual Growth” quoted the views from Islamic religion concerning how children should be accustomed to their beliefs in the early stage childhood development. According to such advice, Lari reminded parents that “Impact religious education to your children as soon as you can and before your opponents take a lead over you and plant wrong and false ideas in their minds” (P.48). Christianity and its beliefs also inculcate some sorts of biblical knowledge into children's minds about the fear of the supreme God and obedience to their parents. In Bible, amongst the first commandment in Exodus 20:12 stated that; “Children, honor your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land your God is giving you today”. The similar instruction was also given in Proverbs 7-8 that; “The fear of the God is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. Children, listen to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching”. Implicationally, breaking these instructions is like breaking

the divine order. But the dilemmas on the issue of divinity, according to (Holloway, 2004) is that it is right to obey the concept that claims to be the will of God, as seem as higher value than just acceptance of the alleged claims of divinity, which mediated through religious traditions, since individuals are no longer able to accept other values.

Aside these above modern religious propositions, beliefs of traditional African religion posited that a child comes to know the existence of Supreme Being from the first day he/she steps out of her mother's womb. A maxim of Akan people of Ghana, according to Gyekye (1996) states:

No one shows the Supreme Being to a child.

This does not mean that a child comes to know God by natural instinct, by intuition, as the maxim has often been interpreted. It means, rather, that the child, lying on his back, *sees* the sky, which is believed to be the abode of the Supreme Being. From this experience, God's existence is inferred. (P.7)

To this end, the theory of the big three of morality would be conceptualized in the analysis of data in the present study to help identify how the divinity or religiosity and communal order/responsibilities influence the perceptions of children's autonomous rights as social agents to contribute to the community decision-making processes in Ghana. However, to add to the above theory, concepts and relevant literature on children's rights and participation are reviewed below.

2.2. Review of Related Concepts

2.2.1 The Children's rights discourse and dilemmas

Attitudes in contemporary society towards children's rights to participation have brought on board myriad of discussions worldwide. According to Kjørholt (2004), the discourse about children's rights and their participation, both in policy and in research, as active social actors has been showing tremendous increase during the last two decades, as a result of the effort by NGOs, both local and international as well as actors within the field of child policy. But, in

spite of this increased, there has not been any single approach for the studies of children's rights globally. In view of this, the history underpinning children's rights to participation and the legal instruments for carrying out this task seems to be disjointed (Beer et al. 2006).

The adoption of UNCRC in the 1980s has raised a lot of discussions by many actors within the field of children's rights regarding children's participation as stipulated in article 12. Though, article 12 has been championed as blueprint in the UNCRC by these actors on the field, but analysis of children's participation in their everyday lives have received little attention. Beer et al (2006) have consistently argued that some actors of children's participation use the UNCRC without thinking beyond article 12. However, "attention is usually paid to rights violation, implementation of programmes and project to achieve UNCRC which take away the fact that children do indeed participate in their everyday lives, and are sometimes listened to and have their decisions respected" (Beer et al., cited in Sawadong 2010, p. 27). Adding to the above, some principles in the UNCRC have also received a wide range of discussions and these are reviewed below.

2.2.2 Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was unanimously adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989 and entered into force on 2 September 1990. The Convention, which contains 54 articles, is a comprehensive instrument which sets out rights that define universal principles and norms for children. It provides children with fundamental human rights and freedoms as well as takes into account their need for special assistance and protection due to their vulnerability. It was the first international human rights treaty to include civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in a single comprehensive document. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is presently the most widely ratified international human rights instrument.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified four general principles which should be taken into consideration in the implementation of all articles of the Convention:

- Non-discrimination (Article 2): the rights of each child should be respected without discrimination of any kind
- Best interests of the child (Article 3): the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration in all actions concerning children
- The right to life, survival and development (Article 6): all children have a right to life and their survival and development should be ensured to the “maximum extent possible”
- Participation of children in decisions that affect them: ‘the views of the child being given weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child (Article 12).

These principles are intertwined in nature, but this research is heavily focused on the article 12. The 41 Articles that specify children's rights are often categorized into three main groups: the three Ps and these are as follows:

- Provision to ensure children's survival and development (welfare rights)
- Protection from abuse and exploitation (welfare rights)
- Participation in decision making (liberty rights)

The present work is mainly focused on the third point about participation in decision making. However, rights should not be thought of individually but as a whole, as pointed to by (Jones & Welch 2010, p.46)

These general principles as stipulated above are the mainstay in the implementation of children's rights by all stakeholders, researchers and actors in the field of child policy. Every member state/country within UN in their enactment and interpretation of law must pay

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economically dependent on others but also contribute to the family and community 	<p>responsibility and also make mistakes and has a lot to learn</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economically independent but is also dependent on other socially and emotionally 	<p>growing capacities of the child and supports and involves them in making decisions.</p> <p>Children are encouraged to contribute and take responsibility within the family and community</p>	
--	--	---	--

Source: Jones and Welch (2010)

Making inference from the above, the table seems to present two different sets of relations. One aspect indicates unequal relationship between adults and children while the other aspect indicates a mutual relationship between the two parties. Unequal power relationship emphasis on welfare rights where adults believe that they are capable enough to protect, provide and make decision for the children as shown in the table. A mutual respectful relationship on the other hand emphasis on welfare and liberty rights where the strengths and weaknesses of the two parties are recognized and adults attempt to improve the capacities of children and involve them in decision making. Though, it is clear that in the pursuit of UNCRC, adults are more interested in the welfare rights and not the liberty rights, but the best interest of the child of which Article 3 emphasises include the two; both welfare and liberty rights. The conceptual table by Jones and Welch (2010) is based on empirical finding of the Western culture. In an attempt to interpret the best interest of the child, one must take in account the socio-cultural values surrounding childhood in that setting (Liden & rusten, 2007). Such socio-cultural account brought about moral dimension of children’s rights which need to be analysed in the present study, though the above concepts do not capture it. This is imperative in the analysis of data since morality is central to culture (Miller, 2001), it would help deepening the understanding of the child-adult relationship as explained in the conceptual table above. In view of this, the discussion about morality should be added to better the understanding of the conceptual table provided above.

Therefore, Jones and Welch (2010) concept of rights, children and adults have given the clear picture of why adults think they are capable enough to make rational decision as compare to children. But the focus of the research is specifically on decision making and liberty rights of children. The views of the children in this research would be analysed against the views of adults as explained in the conceptual table above by Jones and Welch (2010). This is so because; the expression of children's participation in decision-making has become important within policy and practice pertaining to children (Tisdall & Liebel, 2008). This is why article 12 of UNCRC came into being and childhood studies established to emphasise "that children can and should be seen as social agents and not passive subjects, well able and already contributing to... communities" (Tisdall & Liebel, 2008, p.1). Though Jones and Welch (2010) concept will be used in the study, it is worthy to state that the possible shortcomings of a Western approach in an African context is that it does not deeply explore the socio-cultural norms with regard to children's liberty rights and how morality is tied to religion. These areas will be explored in the current study in comparison to the conceptual table provided by Jones and Welch (2010) in order to identify why adults think children should not be part of decision making in the African context.

2.2.3 The ACRWC

The ACRWC was adopted by the Heads of State of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), now called African Union (AU) in 1990 and came into force in 1999. ACRWC is deeply rooted in other human rights treaties, such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR) and the convention on the rights of the child (CRC).

The ACRWC is grounded in the CRC four key principles of non discrimination, the best interests of the child, children's participation and the survival and development of the child.

The ACRWC adds to the UNCRC in that the duties and responsibilities of children are given due weight so far as African cultures are concerned, "its balance between duties and

responsibilities on the one hand and rights on the other makes the instrument more pertinent for an African context". (Save the Children Sweden, 2009, p.12). The tensions on duties of the child was noted by Freeman as discussed by Jones & Welch (2010) such that

...differences of whether children should have 'duties' were also noted by [Freeman] as contentious issues which was not resolved in relation to the final form that the UNCRC took. 'Duties' as a concept found its way into the Charter on the Rights and welfare of the African Child, but was excluded from the UN convention (p.65)

The responsibilities of both parents and children were stipulated in ACRWC as follows;

Article 20: Parental Responsibilities

1. Parents or other persons responsible for the child shall have the primary responsibility of the upbringing and development the child and shall have the duty:

(a) to ensure that the best interests of the child are their basic concern at all times-

(b) to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, conditions of living necessary to the child's development; and

(c) to ensure that domestic discipline is administered with humanity and in a manner consistent with the inherent dignity of the child.

2. States Parties to the present Charter shall in accordance with their means and national conditions the all appropriate measures;

(a) to assist parents and other persons responsible for the child and in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes particularly with regard to nutrition, health, education, clothing and housing;

(b) to assist parents and others responsible for the child in the performance of child-rearing and ensure the development of institutions responsible for providing care of children; and

(c) to ensure that the children of working parents are provided with care services and facilities

Article 31: Responsibility of the Child

Every child shall have responsibilities towards his family and society, the State and other legally recognized communities and the international community. The child, subject to his age and ability, and such limitations as may be contained in the present Charter, shall have the duty;

(a) to work for the cohesion of the family, to respect his parents, superiors and elders at all times and to assist them in case of need;

(b) to serve his national community by placing his physical and intellectual abilities at its service;

(c) to preserve and strengthen social and national solidarity;

(d) to preserve and strengthen African cultural values in his relations with other members of the society, in the spirit of tolerance, dialogue and consultation and to contribute to the moral well-being of society;

(e) to preserve and strengthen the independence and the integrity of his country;

(f) to contribute to the best of his abilities, at all times and at all levels, to the promotion and achievement of African Unity.

These extracts from Africa Charter pinpoint the duties and responsibilities of children and that of their parents in the African context. But critically looking at these assigned responsibilities to these two parties, there seem to be a possible inconsistency in some aspect of these responsibilities spelt out for children and their parents under ACRWC. For instance, Article 31 of ACRWC, section (a), state that children should respect their parents, superiors and elders at all times and this section may conflict with Article 12 (respect for the views of the child) and Article 13 (the right to freedom of expression) under UNCRC. The implications are that if children are to kowtow to the decisions and authority of their parents,

superior and elders at all times, then Article 12 and 13 of UNCRC as well as section 20c of ACRWC are undermined.

However, the concept of duty and responsibility of children outlined in ACRWC would be analysed in the data of the present study to take a closer look at how some Ghanaian children are assigned similar duties and responsibilities as discussed above. Duties and responsibilities will be addressed with a focus on moral dimensions, religious beliefs, and community ethics. From this point, the influence of children's responsibilities would be assessed against children's rights.

2.2.4 Respect

Ghana like other African societies places great emphasis on the value of respect in all spheres of the lives of the children. Ghanaian children are taught to be respectful, submissive, humble and obedient to their parents, superior and elders in the community. This value was given a legal backing in the ACRWC, specifically in the Article 31 which gives honor to parents and elders in African communities. With this, parents bear the burden to carry out this responsibility to ensure that their children are well mannered to meet the societal expectation. Gyekye (1996) has noted this about how African parents ensure character development of their children in society.

African parents, like parents in all other societies, want their children to develop good character traits, to grow and become worthy, respectful, and respectable adults, and responsible citizens. Character development, accordingly, is an important aspect of the upbringing of children. In this connection, efforts are constantly made to instruct children the values in the society and to help them acquire the values that a person should possess in order to live a most satisfactory life (p.85)

Traditionally in Ghana, society blames parents whose children go wayward for their inability to control and training them for approved character. Parents tend to be authoritative and superior in the Ghanaian society and children are supposed to be submissive to their control. Children are by tradition not to challenge adults on whatever they are asked to do and they must not consider themselves superior to adult but rather submit totally to parental control (Twum-Danso, 2009). This value of respect and submission of children to adults/parents, by implication, pose a serious threat to the Article 12 of UNCRC which stresses on respect for the view of the child. Hence, this principle is being undermined.

Children, proven resistance to parents' instructions for character training sometimes receive some kind of parental punishment or torture in order to correct them, but this action by parents also violate Article 37 of the UNCRC which state that, no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (a)...

2.2.5 A situational analysis of Children's rights in Ghana

The government of Ghana ratified UNCRC in 1990 and signed the ACRWC in 1997. The country has embarked on many reforms to provide security and protection of the children's rights from 1990s and in 1992, a ten year national action program called "The Child Can Not Wait" was earmarked to fulfilled the requirement of the UNCRC. Based on that, the children's bill was drafted in 1995. In June 1998, the bill was passed by the parliament of Ghana as "The Children's Act (Act 560).

The main contents that are enshrined in the Act are stipulated below

1. Definition of child 2. Welfare principle 3. Non-discrimination 4. Right to name and nationality 5. Right to grow up with parents 6. Parental duty and responsibility 7. Right to parental property 8. Right to education and well-being 9. Right to social activity

10. Treatment of the disabled child 11 Right of opinion 12. Protection from exploitative labour
13. Protection from torture and degrading treatment 14. Right to refuse betrothal and marriage
15. Penalty for contravention

However, for the purpose of this research, emphasis is placed on only section 11 of the Children's Act (Act 560) which states that;

No person shall deprive a child capable of forming views the right to express an opinion, to be listened to and to participate in decisions which affect his wellbeing, the opinion of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

This section 11 of Children's Act of Ghana adds and conforms to the article of 12 of UNCRC which aimed at achieving children's rights to participation in decision-making. Both local and international legal frameworks attempt to achieve liberty rights of children.

To achieve this objective, the Act also defines and identifies various mechanisms and institutions as well individuals for ensuring successful implementation of the provisions in the Act.

Among these institutions/individuals required by the Act are as follows;

(a) All districts shall have a District Assembly (DA) which shall protect the welfare and promote the rights of children within its area of authority and shall ensure that within the district, governmental agencies liaise with each other in matters concerning children.

(b) All districts shall have the Social Welfare and Community Development Department of a DA referred to in this Act as "the Department" shall investigate cases of contravention of children's rights.

(c) All districts shall have family tribunal which shall have jurisdiction in matters concerning parentage, custody, access and maintenance of children and any other provisions of the Act.

(d) All parents and other persons who are legally liable to maintain a child is under a duty to supply the necessities of life, health, education and reasonable shelter.

(e) There shall be established child rights committees and residential homes to advocate for children's rights and to cater for needs of children outside of their homes.

The aims of all these provisions are to provide justice to children as a way of mediation and reconciliation based on the traditional system of arbitration and resolution of conflicts.

2.2.6 Typology and spheres of Participation

In many societies, social spaces for children to participate in decision that affect their lives is limited and are regulated by adults. One of the major reasons why children's participation has become an issue of significance, according to James & James (2008) is due to the growing discourse on children's rights and the significance of the UNCRC (1989) in coining what have popularly come to be termed children's 'participation rights'. With this, the interpretation of the term was clearly stated in Article 12 that;

- 1. State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
- 2. For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.*

This Article (12) is principally understood as clear encouragement to governments and non governmental bodies, UN, as well as ordinary citizens, to radically appreciate the capacities of children and involve them in decision-making (Newman et al. 2003). But critically looking at these provisions, 'some of these are a direct of a pervasive impact of developmental psychology on adult thinking about the age at which children become competent to make decisions' (James & James 2008, p.92). According to this view, adults seem to allow some children to participate in decision-making whilst denying others on basis of insufficient age or

immaturity to make contribution. And this act of deploying such developmental based criteria by adults is what Jones & Welch (2010) describe as “a divided response” which been already discussed. This developmental based criteria adopted by adults to divide the children based on their competence to make a substantive contribution that affect the outcome of decision-making process, prompted a renowned researcher on children’s participation; Roger Hart, to postulate what is called “Hart’s ladder of participation” (1992). This ladder represents different forms of participation and the diverse possible degrees of children’s involvement in decision-making. The Hart’s ladder identify eight steps and each step representing increasing degrees of children’s participation and different forms of cooperation with adults and this is illustrated below.

Table 2.1 Level of Participation

Rung of the Ladder	Level of Participation
8 Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Children/young people have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join with them in making decisions
7 Youth-initiated and directed	Children/young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge
6 Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth	Adults have the initial idea but children/young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Their views are considered and they are involved in taking the decisions.
5 Consulted and informed	The project is designed and run by adults but children/young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.
4 Assigned but informed	Adults decide on the project and children/young people volunteer for set roles within it. Adults inform them adequately and respect their views.
3 Tokenism	Children/young people are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.
2 Decoration	Children/young people take part in an event, e.g. by singing, dancing or wearing T-shirts with logos on, but they do not really understand the issue or goal.
1 Manipulation	Adults lead children/young people in accordance with a scheme known only to the adults. The children/young people do not understand what is happening. They are not free to explore or act on their own thinking. Adults use some of their ideas but do not provide children with recognition on what influence they have.

Source: Hart, R. (1992) *Children’s Participation: Adopted from Commonwealth Secretariat (2005)*

However, after Hart postulated this ladder of participation, some criticisms and comments were made by some researchers on the field, especially Reddy & Ratna (2002) about the unqualified use and possibly misleading nature of the ladder of participation. It is believed that the conceptualisation of levels of participation in terms of a ladder indicate a hierarchy of value (Jo Boyden, cited in Newman et al 2003).

Such discussions called for an explication of the context in which children's participation occurs. Some researchers highlight that children's participation occurs at the family level while others focus on the local community, school, public domain, societal or national and international level. With regard to this, Newman et al (2003) have given five main types of contexts in which children's participation occurs in a deliberate and organised ways as follows;

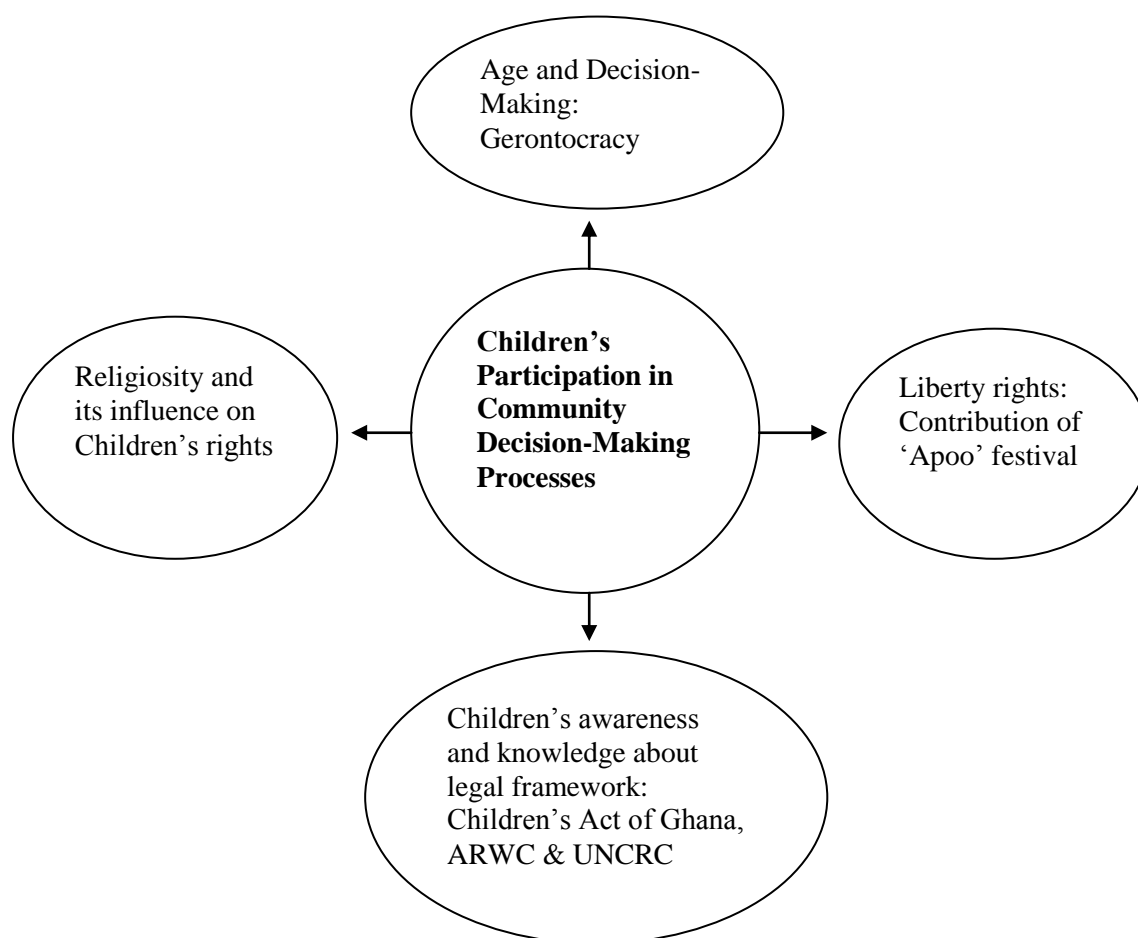
- (i) Events held at local, national, regional and international level in which children are encouraged to voice their concerns.
- (ii) Participatory research undertaken in direct relation to agency programming.
- (iii) Child-led initiatives, such as clubs and children's 'parliaments', usually at the local level.
- (iv) Community development projects in which children are involved together with adults.
- (v) Social and work-related movements / organisations such as associations of child workers or street children.

2.3. Analytical Framework

Making inference from the foregoing discussions of theories and concepts on children's rights to participation in community decision-making, it can be said in general that the concept of children's participation in decision-making is very broad (Tisdall & Liebel, 2008) and no single theory or concept can explain it. In order to narrow the focus to capture the thematic areas relevant for data interpretation and discussions, I intend to use this analytical framework to incorporate these theories and concepts discussed above. The prominent issues stemming out from the foregoing discussions, serving as an analytical approach to this study are; Age and decision making, liberty rights of children, religiosity and its influence on children's rights, and children's perspectives and knowledge in legal framework.

Age is believed to be associated with life experience as claimed by adults identified in the Jones and Welch (2010) conceptual table above. Adding to that, Schubert et al. (1987) found out that old age is associated with status in the community and that adults have greater participation in group decision making processes than younger members in the community. Age-based status is presumed to be associated with wisdom and life experience (ibid). Such perceptions would be analysed in this research to find out whether they hold also in the present context. The position of divinity or religiosity as discussed in the Shweder et al. (2003) theory of morality would be further examining in the analysis of data to identify its stands on children's rights to participation in community decision making processes. Liberty rights with reference to article 12 of UNCRC which gives children rights to participate their views will be analysed in the data with regard to the community Apoo festival. Finally, children's awareness and knowledge in legal framework of children's rights; Children's Act of Ghana, ACRWC and UNCRC as discussed above will be examined to find out children's awareness on that and how is being practice in Ghana. In summary of the foregoing, Fig 2.1 below summarizes the analytical framework of this current study.

Figure 2.1: Analytical Framework



Source: Author's own construct

From the diagram, children's participation in community decision-making processes is determined by the age and the religiously founded practice of showing respect to the elderly persons by being obedient to them at all times. The knowledge of children about the legal framework and the festival that ensure their liberty rights, to some extent contributes to the global outcry for children's participation in decision-making. The interaction between these four contexts may influence the extent to which children can participate in community decision-making processes.

2.4. Operationalization of key concepts

A Child: A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years (UNCRC, Article 1)

Participation: The process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is a means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured (Hart 1992, p. 5).

Community Decision-making: A community decision is a choice among several modes of action which is made by an authoritative person or group within the community institutions and of which the goals are the change or maintenance of community-wide institutions or facilities (Rossi, 1957)

Community decision-making forum: A platform created by both modern political leaders (Assembly members) in conjunction with traditional leaders (local rulers) to discuss issues of important to community development.

Apoo festival: A kind of festival that gives the citizenry the right to come out openly and criticize those in authority, with impunity which demonstrates democratization of the rule of law and good governance.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The specific areas that are covered under this methodology section are; study context, research design, target population and sample size, sampling technique, data analysis, data collection technique and ethical reflections.

3.1. Study Context

The study was conducted in the Techiman municipal capital. The Municipality is situated in the northern part of Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana and lies between longitudes 1⁰49` east and 2⁰30` West and latitude 8⁰00` North and 7⁰35` South. The Municipality shares common boundaries with four other districts; three in Brong Ahafo Region and one in Ashanti Region. The Wenchi District lie to the northwest, Kintampo South District lie to the northeast, Nkoranza District to the South- East and Offinso District (in the Ashanti Region) lie to the south. (**Figure 4.1** depicts the Map of the Techiman Municipality in national context).

The Municipality covers an area of 669.7km² representing 1.69% of the surface area of Brong Ahafo Region. It is the smallest district in the region and is well located in terms of major road accessibility. The Municipal capital, Techiman is a major market centre and a nodal town or entrepol, where roads from the three northern regions converge. Trunk roads from Sunyani, Kumasi, Wa and Tamale all meet at Techiman thus making it a buoyant commercial centre.

According to the 2000 Population and Housing Census, the population of the Municipality stood at 174,600. The population density was over 260 persons/Km², far higher than the regional figure of 45.9 and national figure of 79.3.

The population of the Municipality has witnessed rapid increase from a modest 34,642 in 1960 to 174,600 in 2000 with intercensal growth rates far higher than the regional and national averages. The Techiman Municipal is generally characterized by a rapidly growing, young population of 56% of the total population. This shows the high influx of young people from other parts of Ghana into the municipality and that makes the area well suited for a study on children's participation.

I selected Techiman municipal as my data collection site since the natives are Bono and that they make up the main population. In addition, many other ethnic groups also live in the area.

The major festivals are the Apoo and yam festivals. The yam festival is celebrated between August and September, annually to mark the two farming seasons. It serves as thanksgiving to the Almighty God and the ancestral spirits for a bumper harvest.

The Apoo festival is celebrated between April and May. The major significance is that it gives the citizenry the right to come out openly and criticize those in authority, with impunity. The aim is to secure democratization of the rule of law and good governance. It also serves as introspection for those in authority to re-assess themselves and make amends for any wrong doings, in order to promote effective development.

The Apoo festival seems to hold a specific potential concerning children's rights in the municipality and that has prompted me to research into the reality of it.

Map 1.1



3.2. Research Design

Qualitative research methods are suitable when the aim is to describe life-world 'from the inside out' from the point of view of people in their particular context. In this study I employ a qualitative research paradigm to explore the experiences and perceptions children in the Techiman municipality with regard to Apoo festival and community decision making forum.

Qualitative research usually have the following features: a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them, a tendency to work primarily with "unstructured" data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories, investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one case, in detail, analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 248).

Qualitative research can be done through several methods of data collection, depending on the type of research question (s) that the researcher attempts to address. These qualitative data collection methods amongst others include interviews, focus groups, observation, reflexive journals, the use of field notes, diaries, tape social interaction and surveys (Heaton, 2004). However, the present study adopted interviews and focus groups as methods of its data collection.

The qualitative research interviews according to (Kvale, 1996), enable the researchers to understand something from the respondents' point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experiences. It allows respondents to convey to researchers a situation from their own perspective and in their own words (ibid). Schwandt (2001) describes the qualitative interviews as behavioural events; which involve verbal behaviour, verbal exchange or pattern of verbal interaction. Kvale(1996) asserts that the qualitative interview is described as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest that aims to produce knowledge through human interaction.

Focus group interviews on the other hand, is an intriguing hybrid term and applies in the research context when the interest is to interview a group, which is seen as holding a consensus view, rather than creating this consensus through interaction in a focus group discussion (Flick, 2007, p.2). The definition that is assumed to be rightfully broad to cover all of the aforementioned usages according to Kitzinger & Barbour (cited in Barbour 2007), is that any group discussion may be called a focus group as long as the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to the group interaction. Bloor et al. (2001) also posits that focus group interviews are the method of choice if the purpose of the research is to study group norms, group meanings and group processes. However, Morgan (1988) has also noticed that "Focus groups are useful when it comes to investigating what participants think, but they excel at uncovering why participants think as they do" (p.25). According to the social constructivist approach in focus group interviews, researchers have to adapt to the role of moderators and not teachers (Bauersfeld, 1995).

3.3. Target Population and Sample Size

The research targeted children at the Junior High School (JHS) in Techiman municipal as informants. Their ages range from 12 to 17 years. The rationale for selecting JHS students is that they are more organized to reach out to and have an idea on 1998 children's Act, (Act 560) in Ghana and that of the UNCRC which are taught in social studies. I used Interview guide to carry out in-depth personal interview with 3 JHS students and also one focus group interview with 7 JHS students who are below the age of 18 years. The local children recruited were 8 in numbers while children from other parts of Ghana were 2. This showed a representative of the natives (Bono) and other ethnic groups as participants in the study.

In addition, I interviewed 1 chief of the Techiman traditional area (Second in command to paramount chief). The total sample size for this current study was 10 (participants).

3.4. Sample Technique

The main sample technique that I used under this study was the purposive. Purposive sampling as the name suggests, the researcher, adhering to the objectives of the study, selects respondents who can answer his research questions (Twumasi, 1986). Purposive sampling also enable the researcher to chose a case since it demonstrates some features in which researchers are interested (Silverman, 2001). This technique was purposely used to select the traditional chief 1 of the Techiman Municipality to give his accounts on the issue under study. I also used it to select students (children age 12-17) at JHS who are the main informants of this study and can answer the research questions. These diverse groups were the targeted informants of this research.

3.5. Procedure

3.5.1 Focus group with children

To ascertain the present realities and diverse views of children's participation in decision-making at community level, I conducted a focus group interview with the children, age ranging from 12-17 at the Techiman Ameyaw JHS. The thrust of this discussion was to enable the children to express their views on how they see themselves as partners in community decision-making processes (both positive and negative), their views on children's rights and their participation in the Apoo 2 festival.

I was given one big class room to carry out the discussion with the children by the school authorities. Coincidentally, the discussion happened during the peak of the examination week where students were busily preparing their exams. Looking at the situation, I brought all the

1 Chiefs are the local ruling body and the custodians of the land in Ghana and they preserve the custom and traditional values.

2 Is the festival of the people of Techiman which is cerebrated annually as a way of given the people liberty to express their views in public domain on what has gone wrong in the community for past year gone in order to restore justice for the new year

children together, both girls and boys, but I divided them based on their age. Age group of 12-14 were put at one side of the while the age group of 15-17 were put at the other side of the same room. I did that in order to detest their level of competence to make contribution and the differences in their responses to the process. I employed the service of the research assistant to help me take notes during the focus group interviews while recording the data on the tape recorder as well. I did that because of noise at the background and thought this service from the research assistant would help me in case I could not retrieve the data very well from the tape recorder, though I did not intend using such data from this additional person.

Challenges: Observably, during the focus group interviews with the school children, most of the children at the initial stage regarded me as one of their teachers. I identified this through their responses from their popularly words applied to their teachers like “yes Sir” or “Sir”. These responses initially made the interaction a bit cumbersome as the students took the interviews process like teacher-students relationship. As a researcher, as Bauersfeld (1995) warned that in the focus group interviews context, researchers have to adapt to the role of moderators and not teachers, I quickly notified this and negotiated my self-possession or composure and re-addressed myself well again that I am a students like one of them in order to free the process from formal as students considered it, to informal form to solve this problem, though I had already introduced myself. In fact, this statement surprisingly removed the fear from the students and they participated in the discussion to my amazement. The discussion lasted for two hours.

3.5.2 Personal Interviews with Children

In order to grab the entire nitty-gritty and the intricacies of certain contextual issues of children's rights that may not be easy subject to group analysis, I conducted three separate face-to-face interviews with 3 children in JHS of the Techiman municipality using interview guide.

To proceed with the personal interview with the students, the Headmistress of the school assisted me to select three students under the age of 18. So after the group discussion in the classroom allocated to me, the same room was booked for the interview. The first girl I interviewed was a native of the Techiman municipality who happened to have experienced in the community Apoo festival and was able to articulate her view on the children's rights very well. The second student I interviewed was a boy from the northern region of Ghana, but has been living in the Techiman with his parents for almost twelve years now. He was able to give his experienced on children's participation in decision-making from a Muslim perspective. The last participant was also a boy from central region of Ghana who happened to hold a strong faith in Christianity. He was also able to express his views on children's rights very well, but when a question on his participation in the community Apoo festival was put before him, he totally disclosed to me of his non participation based on his religious faith and that enabled me to explore more on the influence of religiosity on children's rights.

3.5.3 Personal interviews with Chief

With regard to the interview with the paramount chief of Techiman, my appointment to meet the paramount chief for the interview was confirmed. Unfortunately, the chief had the emergency travel on the appointment day but he directed me to have the interview with his second in command who happened to be his senior brother. I held the personal interview with the second chief on that same day. I explained my mission to him and I tasked him to give the

socio-cultural perspectives of the traditional leaders on children's participation in community decision-making processes, particularly in the community forum and the Apoo festival as well as the implementation of UNCRC in Ghana. He gave his perspectives on children's rights in Ghana and also narrated the history of Apoo festival and its significance to the children's rights in Ghana. He demonstrated some of the instruments that are used in the celebration of Apoo festival, by showing to me his own mask he used to cover his face during the festival.

Challenges: The chief being a busy man because of his role in the palace, there were people around who were waiting for us to finish so that they can also meet with him and he has to sometimes tell them to wait for a while. He received phone calls several times during the interview process. With these interruptions, I had to pause the tape recorder for a while and resumed when he has finished receiving the phone calls or dealing with other people around. These interrupted the interview process, but at the end of it all, I had a very participatory and successful interview with the chief. The interview lasted for approximately 40 minutes.

3.5.4 Choice of Language

Akan language is the widely spoken in Ghana, though Ghana is regarded as multi-lingual state. English language is the official language in Ghana. I intended to use Akan language during the interviews process, since all the participants in the study area speak this local language. So with my interviews with the school children, both the focus group and the personal interviews, I introduced the process in the local language, but to my surprise, all the students responded in English language. Generally in Ghanaian Junior High Schools, it is a punishable offence for student to speak vernacular in the school environment, especially in student-teacher conversations. Perhaps, this may be the reasons for their responses in English. To avoid this situation, I asked the students to make decision on which language to be used

for the interviews. All the students selected the English language to be used as a medium of communication. With this, I chose English language for my interaction with the students.

With regard to the personal interviews with the traditional chief of Techiman, I first of all, asked the chief the kind of language we should use for the interviews. The chief said he preferred English language to the local one since I am a student and he is also a graduate, English would be perfect match for the interviews. Hence, English language was chosen for this interaction as well.

3.6. Materials

I used an interview guide constructed flexibly with semi-structured types of questions to be asked during the focus group interviews and the personal interviews. I used an audio recorder to record the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. Field notebook was also used by me to take notes during the interviews to serve as complementary to the recorded interviews.

3.7. Reliability and Validity

The qualitative research paradigm places great emphasis on the trustworthiness of its research findings. It is worthy to state that there exist distinct philosophical and methodological positions underpinning the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999). This brought on board the concept of establishing the reliability and the validity in qualitative research findings.

Reliability, according to Hammersley (1992, p.67) 'refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions'. Joppe (as cited in Golafshani, 2003) also defines reliability as:

...The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. (p. 598).

What is simply meant about this excerpt on reliability is the idea of repeatability of results or observations of research findings (Golafshani, 2003). In addition to this, Kirk & Miller (as cited in Bashir et al, 2008) summarized reliability in three forms, which relates to the degree of consistency of results, the stability overtime and the similarity within a given time period. The stability was established when using the same interview guide to ask informants similar questions at different times across both focus group and personal interviews which produced consistent results.

The concept validity in the context of qualitative research paradigm refers to the accuracy with which a description of particular research findings (or a set of such descriptions) represents the theoretical category that it is intended to represent and captures the relevant features these findings (Hammersley, 1992 p.67). Joppe (as cited in Golafshani, 2003) explained that 'validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are', (p. 599). With this, in order to achieve the true reflection of data, this current study employed different methods of data collection techniques namely; focus group interviews and personal interviews. These enabled me to compare different kinds of data from different methods to find out whether they corroborate one another (Silverman, 2001). The responses from the informants were quoted verbatim in the data analysis and interpretation of the study. All the themes analyzed under this current research were also truly emerged naturally from the data collected on the children's participation in the community decision-making processes in Ghana.

3.8. Data Analysis

3.8.1 Data Transcription

The transcription is the process of turning recorded interviews or speech into written form. However, in order to ensure the efficacy in transferring the audio recorded data into written form, the researcher made use of DSS Player Pro Transcription Module machine, popularly used in qualitative research data transcription. This machine was employed because it enabled the researcher to rewind forward and backward as well as helped to control the entire process of data transcription to grab the nitty-gritty of the respondents' repetitions, emotional feelings attached to their responses and the like. By and large, I transcribed all the audio recordings of the focus group interviews and individual interviews word-for-word in official national English language text as chosen by the respondents.

3.8.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Content Analysis

For the analysis of this current research, I used both IPA and content analysis approach to carry out this task. IPA was used to analyze the individual interviews whereas content analysis was used for the analysis of the focus group interviews in that order.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in qualitative research as the name suggests, seeks to interpret the meanings that people make about their lives in natural setting (Payne & Payne, 2004) and IPA is one of the analytical tools in qualitative research that dwells on individuals' lives experiences. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the interview data. IPA was employed in this study because of its philosophical assumptions of capturing individuals' experience (Willig, cited in Grigoriou, 2004). IPA is a method of analysis emanating from philosophical approach which focuses on ...the world as it is subjectively experienced by individuals within their particular social, cultural and historical contexts. Phenomenology's interest in individuals'

experiences of the world appeals to psychological research, as it enables the researcher to investigate the diversity and variability of human experience. (Willig, cited in Grigoriou, 2004, P. 7).

According to Smith (2008), IPA brings to fore detailed assessment of the participants' lived experiences; attempt to explore personal experience and individual's personal perception or account of an object or event. To that end, Larkin et al (2006) added that in choosing IPA for a research project, researchers in the field commit themselves to exploring, describing, interpreting, and situating the means or contexts by which our participants make sense of their experiences.

Conversely, content analysis is also one of the analytical tools used in qualitative research which focuses on the subjective interpretation of the integrated research data such as focus group text data. Content analysis has been defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of the text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Patton (2008) also defined content analysis as any qualitative method where sense – making efforts are made to reduce a volume of qualitative data and try to identify its core consistencies and meanings. What these definitions mean is that in qualitative content analysis, researchers make meaning or sense from an integrated view of participants speech or text data or otherwise in this context of research known as focus group interviews on a specific social reality.

However, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) identified three main types of qualitative content analysis, inter alia; summative, directed, and conventional content analysis. In summative content analysis, researchers "...start with identifying and quantifying certain words or content in the text with the purpose of understanding the context use of the words or content" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1283). Directed content analysis is used when "existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit

further description” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). The goal of this type of analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory (ibid). Conventional content analysis is also generally used in a situation where existing theory or literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). With this type of analysis “categories emerge out of the analysis rather than through preconceived categories being imposed on the data” (Humble, 2009, p. 37).

By and large, this current research focused on conventional type of content analysis since this approach provided room for the researcher to allow categories to emerge out of the analysis rather than using preconceived categories. To this end, research literature on this current study is a bit limited.

3.8.3 Data Analytic Strategy

As starting for analysing individual interviews text data, I read and reread intensively each transcript a number of times in order to become familiar with the participants' accounts on the case under study. I divided my sheet of paper into two; left hand margin and right hand margin respectively. I used the left hand margin to make notes about key phrases, preliminary interpretations and any connections or contradictions resulted from each reading within each participant's accounts. To the right hand margin, I used it to document emergent themes (Grigorious 2004). In order to identify the chronological sequence between emergent themes, I used another sheet of paper to list all the emergent themes and then looked for connections or commonalities between them. As a result, most of the emergent themes were clustered together forming superordinate themes. So as to ensure proper categorisation of emergent themes, I used the iterative process of reading and analysis (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2001) to check in the transcript again to ensure that the superordinate themes emerged were consistent with the actual words of the participants or participant's accounts (IPA). Adding to the process and

to ensure order of coherent, I produced another table of themes for each transcript. With this, each transcript already produced were compared to this table of themes for each transcript to identify connections or contradictions. These comparisons produced the final themes which consistent with the source material or in other words, the participants' accounts and finally, I organised the themes which were produced deductively with coherent participants' accounts. Themes that were not fit well into the structure of coherent participants' accounts were dropped.

On the other hand, to analyse to the focus group interviews, I read and reread thoroughly the unstructured data or text for a number of times in order to understand the features language for the communication during the interaction with the participants to grab the contextual meaning of the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I read through the data again following iterative process to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures, creating categories that trigger the formation of conceptual themes that suits the data (Bisit, 2003). I focused on the meaning inside the content of the data basing it on the context of the research and used subjective interpretation of them. I allowed the categories or themes to emerge itself conventionally through systematic classification and closed codes or categories which summarised the data (Wilkinson, 2008). I then compared across data of categories, made changes and dropped the categories that were not in consistent with the context of the research. I finally organised the themes to have order of hierarchy.

3.9. Ethical Consideration

Ethical concerns are paramount when planning, conducting and evaluating research (Cozby, 2001, p. 32). According to Davis (1998), the ethics of children's research can be categorized into three broad groups; informed consent, confidentiality and protection (Davis, 1998).

Research Permission; To pay homage to ethical stand of this research, I first of all sought approval and clearance from the Ethical Committee in Norway, who then referred my research project to Norwegian Social Science Data Services, known as NSD (see appendix...) who are in charge of social research for approval. On the field in Ghana, I sought research permission from the gatekeepers: Ghana Education Service for approval to conduct the research with the school children and Techiman Traditional Council for approval to conduct the research with the traditional chiefs.

Informed consent; ideally, all research should provide research participants with full informed consent. Informed consent means that research participants are informed about the purpose of the study, the risks involved with the procedures, and their rights to refuse or terminate participation in the study. In other words, participants are provided with all information that might influence their decision to participate prior to making that decision (Cozby, 2001, p. 35). I observed this principle by provided informed consent forms to the children and that of their parents/guardians as well as the chiefs concerning the entire process and duration of the fieldwork and made them to sign the form based on their consent or have the liberty to opt out if they so wish. To begin with this concept on focus group interview and personal interview with students, I sent a letter of consent to the Headmistress of the JHS and discussed my intention of the research to her. Assurance was given to me to return the next day where 10 children under the age of 18 years were selected by me and the staff. Two copies of the informed consent letters were given to the children; one was for them to sign to participate in the process while the other one was to be given to their parents/guardians

showing their approval for their participation. All the letters were signed and agreed date was fixed. With regard to the personal interview with the paramount chief of Techiman, I sent a letter of consent to the Techiman traditional council ³to book an appointment to meet the paramount chief. Three days later, my appointment was confirmed and a day was fixed to meet the paramount chief for the interview.

Confidentiality; I observed this principle by placing premium on the anonymity of my informants. Children were asked to select different letters (e.g. SA, SB, SC and so on) to represent their identities for the purpose of this research project. Sensitive information was not published with this report and the recorded interviews are kept securely from public and deleted by the closing of the project.

Protection; as a researcher, the interest of my respondents should be my number one priority. Morrow and Richard (1996), suggests that "the perception that children are vulnerable and that interaction between researcher and child involves power relations, creates an obligation on adults to ensure children do not suffer harm when participating in research (Morrow & Richards, cited in Davis 1998, p. 328). In Berestford's words, " researchers must be aware that children may feel a number of pressures, from for example fear of failure, threats to self-esteem, reactions to invasions of privacy, conflict, guilt, or, embarrassment when acting as respondents" (as cited in Davis, 1998). I upheld to these ethical issues by reducing my position or level to be at the *pari passu* of the children through my dressing code, informal way of asking questions and created convivial environment for children to feel safe for my interaction with them and many others. School children were allowed in the project to freely participated their voices as way of ensuring children's rights to opinion in the study.

³ Traditional council is the organisation or a body in charge of traditional affairs. The paramount chief is the head of the organisation.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This current data, researching into children's participation in community decision-making processes in Ghana analyzed 4 accounts of participants in the personal interviews through interpretative phenomenological analysis and views of 7 participants in the focus group interviews through content analysis approach. In the light of these analyses, the two parts of the data are presented and discussed together. The following themes representing participants' accounts emerged; Children's awareness and knowledge in legal framework, liberty rights: contributions of Apoo festival, gerontocracy in community decision-making, duties/roles and responsibilities of Ghanaian child, and religiosity and its influence on children's rights. These themes including sub-themes are presented and discussed in this chapter;

4.1. Children's Awareness and Knowledge about Legal Framework

This theme captures children's knowledge on their fundamental rights and diverse ways they exercise them. Children during focus group interviews and personal interviews were asked to give their accounts on whether they are aware of children's Art (Art 560) in Ghana or not. One of the students in focus group interview confirmed to that. *"Yes, I learnt children's Art in Ghana by our teacher in class and I am aware of children's right to education, movement, expression..."* (SB)

This informs us that the concept of children's rights has been incorporated into the school curriculum in Junior High Schools in Ghana. This to some extent prove that children in junior high schools in Ghana are aware that they have fundamental children's rights

through some of the courses they study in school. One other participant interviewed attested to the fact that they learn about the 1998 children's Art in Ghana in their social studies course. A 14-year-old SHS boy in the personal interviews posits that "*...I know of children's right in Ghana, because we have studied it in school through the social studies subject, so I know something about it*"

From this excerpt, it is clear that effort has been made by government of Ghana to communicate 1989 UNCRC in the educational system of Ghana, especially in social studies course where students are introduced to civic rights or human rights paradigms. This also indicates that most children in Ghana are not ignorant of the fact that they are granted certain rights as citizens of Ghana. On account of what children know about their rights, two SHS children reported as follows;

I have learnt of children's rights and I know right to education, right of movement, freedom of speech, or right to expression (a 14-year-old SHS girl)

I know of right to education, freedom of movement, freedom of speech, freedom of thought (a 14-year-old SHS boy)

Positioning these children's views above on the context of 1998 children's Art in Ghana, it can be deduced that children know of the article 3, 8, and 11, which talk about non-discrimination of children, children's rights to education and wellbeing and children's rights to opinion as stipulated in 1998 Children's Art (Art569) of Ghana respectively. These expressions from children also explain that children know to some extent the context (e.g. education, movement, and expression) where they can exercise their fundamental rights.

However, even if children are aware of the existence of the 1998 children's Art in Ghana, majority of the children in the study knew little or nothing about the ACRWC and UNCRC international legal documents. I expected that once children know the national legal documents, then they should have known the international legal documents as well. But the results show the opposite situation. For instance, when children were asked in the focus group

interviews about whether they had heard of or are aware of the ACRWC and the UNCRC, all the children in SHS stated that “*we have not heard of ACRWC or UNCRC before*”. So when this same question was asked in the personal interviews, one SHS student put it as follows;

I also heard of Africa Charter by one madam from the Education office who normally comes to our school to teach us about our rights and some NGOs too who come to teach us about our rights, but I have never heard of UNCRC before (a 14-year-old SHS girls)

This statement above indicates that though ACRWC is not well known to children, some children have at least heard about it before. To the children in the present study, the UNCRC is not known. Thus when they learn about children's rights and human rights issues in school and there seems to be gap concerning the ARCWC and UNCRC. This may mean that the social studies subject is not comprehensive enough to provide children information and sources of their fundamental children's rights.

4.2. Liberty Rights: Contribution of Apoo Festival

Many researchers in the field of children's rights, including Jones & Welch (2010) maintain that the rethinking of children's rights in contemporary society should now be focused on liberty rights which premise on Article 12 (UNCRC); respect for the views of children in decision making. However from these interviews, “Apoo” festival in Techiman, was described by the informants based on their practical experiences and beliefs as a unique festival in Ghana that provide an empirical support for freedom of expression in community decision making. Deducing from these facts, Apoo festival and its contribution to children's rights became sub-themes and pillars on which liberty is achieved.

4.2.1 Apoo Festival

The term 'Apoo' according to Ameyaw (2001) is said to derive from the Bono⁴ word "po" which mean 'reject' that is to throw away all the ills and resentment in the community. Apoo festival is described as 'rejection' of all evils in the community by the informants as well in the present study using some relational features. *Is the kind of festival through singing and dancing to identify and criticise the wrong doers in the community, especially the community leaders* (a 15 year-old JHS girl). This child described the festival as means to sort out the leaders of the community who pursued wrong interests and evil act and criticize them through singing and dancing. By this activity, evil acts in the community are rejected. So the focus of the festival is on immoral actions and people who abuse their power and it functions to restore the community into justice. Another child in focus group interviews also describes 'Apoo' festival as a way of ensuring morality in the community. *Is a kind of festival that offer children opportunities to rebuke the community leaders about their wrong doing and give us a platform to advice every member in the community about their immoral act* (SC). From this point of view, Apoo festival is understood as a means adopted by the community to reject the immorality. This can be seen in relation theories of morality where culture is centered to distinguish between what is wrong and right in the community (Shweder et al. 2003). Moreover, in the responses to the question of what the children know about Apoo festival, one of the participants in the personal interviews give her account as stipulated below;

Apoo festival is a kind of festival celebrated by Techiman people and every country has a period in which they celebrated their festival, but in Techiman, Apoo festival is celebrated in the months of April and May. the festival is being climaxed in an area called "Amanfrom⁵" where the chiefs and elders perform their ritual before the

4 Bono is one of the tribe by the Akan people of Ghana

5 Amanfrom is an area where the shrine of the people of Techiman is located and that is where rituals are performed every year in the community.

general cerebation begin. But during the initiation of the festival at Amanfrom, announcement is made by the chief and elders for the people to sleep by midnight (12:00) and the next day the general celebration of the festival begin where men dress like women and vice versa, and people dance and sing special song that criticises wrong behaviours in the community (a 14-year-old SHS girl)

To add to this excerpt, the chief in an interview also describe the nature of the Apoo festival in the account below;

Apoo in Akan word "Po" which means to reject unwanted behaviour in human lives and all evil things in our community so that progress will prevail. So our forefathers from the time immemorial instituted this Apoo festival during the reign of one tyrannical chief and that is the only period where people can freely express any pent up feelings that have been worrying them in this Techiman community, this region and even the whole country at large. For example, it could happen that a leader in the community or people who occupy high position like chiefs and elders who rule over this community, some may be involved in some unaccepted behaviour like misappropriation and misapplication of public funds, corruption, defiling children and others. All these behaviours will be disclosed during the Apoo festival... In short Apoo festival is all about rejection of all the evil acts that retrogress our society and it is performed through singing and dancing with drums and other instruments or costume like wearing mash to help prevent people's identity from fearful leaders in order to express their feelings directly through the principal street of this town and the song itself manifest some of the evil things that happens in the community so as to reject it and restore the community into justice...(a personal interviews with the chief of Techiman).

These responses seem to cover the meaning, the nature and the processes involved in the Apoo festival celebration in the Techiman community. But thrust of the festival as deduced from the data above is that the festival helps to control the people in power. The comments by the children point to the misuse of power by older people in the community. Children also mentioned that during the festival, rituals are performed at the shrine and that is done based

on the traditional beliefs to pour libation to appeal to the gods of the land to “wash away” all the social, political and personal ills in community for the past year so as to restore justice. This relates to the theory of divinity by Shweder et al (2003) on the moral concepts such as natural order, sacred order, sanctity, sin and pollution, which is established to ensure the integrity of the spiritual side of humanity. It is a belief in such a supernatural being in an unforeseeable world, in that such godliness interpenetrates the human social order as well as the natural world and interacts with such physical and spiritual realms in the form of communicative exchanges. Looking at the meaning that the chief used to describe the Apoo festival is also similar to the explanation from Ameyaw (2001) and that Apoo is about “rejection” of calamities, abominations, curses, worries and other social menaces. The responses also indicated that during the festival, males dress like females and vice versa and other people also wear mask. As suggested those costumes are used to hide people's identity, especially those who fear a bit to talk to the paramount chief or elders of the community. Whether the people wear a mask or change their clothes or not, according the interview they have thirteen days of liberty to express their views directly or through song on the principal street of the community where everybody including the chiefs and their elders are gathered together to listen to people, especially children's expressions in the immoral actions had happened in the past year. By and large, the thrust of the Apoo festival as deduced from the informants is that the festival is meant to ensure morality by giving power to the citizenry to express their feelings that the soul has harboured for the year gone by. The Apoo festival suggests the democratization of the rule of law in Ghana where children's opinions are respected.

4.2.2 Contribution of Apoo Festival to Children's Rights

Analysing the importance of Apoo festival from the responses of the informants, it was emerged that Apoo festival contributes significantly to the liberty rights of children, that is to the article 12 of UNCRC and that of the Children's Art (Art 560) of Ghana. The informants asserted that it is the only festival that gives them the liberty rights to interact directly with their authoritative leaders in the community. In the focus group interviews, children revealed the importance of the festival. The participant SG shared her thought that *"This Apoo festival gives we the children the liberty to interact with our autocratic chiefs and elders without any fear"*. This statement suggests how chiefs and elders in Ghana are positioned in society to be fearful and authoritative. No member in Ghanaian society has the right to challenge the chiefs and elders in the decision making and children are not allowed culturally to interact with the chiefs and elders in the meeting for decision making. But during the Apoo festival, all cultural norms affecting children are broken. The chief asserted his account on this as follows;

Apoo festival to me as a chief, I personally called it "cultural democracy" it offers a platform for free expression for all the community members, especially children to participate their views in a democratic manner without being sued by the traditional law or custom, because during the festival all the cultural norms affecting children are broken down and children actually voice out their feelings before the whole community and before the chiefs and elders, and we listen to them carefully because they are our future leaders...children say whatever they think is wrong in the community without thinking about it consequences, but we the elders learn lessen from it (a personal interview with the chief).

The interpretation of the excerpt point out clearly to the contribution of Apoo festival to children's rights of freedom of expression. The new definition of Apoo festival; "Cultural democracy" as propounded by the chief substantiate the fact that Apoo festival holds special

potential to children's rights. Comparing the statement of the chief to what the children say about Apoo festival, one participant in the focus group interviews confirmed the following;

For me, I think that the Apoo festival promotes the children's rights in Ghana, because it gives us hope and confidence to share our feelings to our elders and I believe they listen to us during the festival (SA).

Another participant SD also established that the Apoo festival helps to break the barrier between the children and the elders of the community. "...Apoo festival gives we the children the opportunity to talk directly to our community leaders about what worries us and our problems". This mean that the hierarchical position that the elders in the community hold as the theory of community by Shweder et al (2003) suggested is no longer supported and children share their views directly before the chiefs and elders as well as the whole community at large. Here, there is no representation of children (Casas 1997) in the expression of views in the Apoo festival as clearly suggested from the informants.

I think that Apoo festival is good, because it gives we the children the right to say something that some people in the community have done secretly and also give us liberty to talk to our leaders about our problems through singing and dancing without them saying that we are children and we have small mind... (a personal interview with the 12 year-old SHS girl).

The position of this child indicates how Apoo festival conforms to the article 12 of UNCRC and that of article 11 of children Art of Ghana which give children freedom of opinion. In line with this same assertion from this young girl also shows how children are still considered by adults in the community of having small mind to contribute to decision making. This is what Jones & Welch (2010) argued that adults use developmental based criteria to deny some of the children from decision making. It further suggests that adults in the community still

consider children as “human becoming”, but through Apoo festival children exercise their liberty right and expressions of agency in child-adult relations (Bjerke, 2009) to the fullest without adults positioned children differently. But, that is not to say that child after all do not have less experience in some areas compared to adults. Children are human beings and not human to becoming and do have problems as noted by the above informant. The Apoo festival emerged in the findings to provide children with the opportunities to air their grievances and liberate them from oppression which might have led them to even commit suicide. A personal interview with a 14-year-old SHS confirmed how their participation in decision making through Apoo festival save them from child slavery. “...*Our participation in decision making through Apoo festival can save us from child slavery, which sometimes leads to child suicide because of lack of opportunity for us to bring out our feelings...*” To this end, Apoo festival to a very large extend according to the findings, has supported children's rights to freedom of expressions in community decision making processes in Ghana as emerged in the interviews in many diverse ways to save the lives of children psychologically.

4.3. Gerontocracy in Community Decision-making

The analyses of children's responses to the question regarding their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about their participation in the community decision making processes revealed that only elders take part during community decision making processes. Children are being suppressed, sabotaged and misrepresented during this process. This led to the categorization of the theme gerontocracy in community decision making. A personal interviews with the chief confirm that “.... *because of our culture, so when chiefs and elders as well as other leaders meet to take decision, children are not permitted to be with us in the meeting...*” Such perception and belief from the chief is what Casas (1997. P.285) commented that “Often, ‘participation’ is understood as an adult's activity, ‘like adults do it’; adults become

frightened that children may participate in the social life, 'like them' ” And from this perception, elders in the community use culture as a yardstick to deny children from participating in the decision making. A focus group interviews with the children disclosed that they are being denied of their rights by the elders to participate in the decision in the community that affect their lives.

we have the right, but our people will not allow you to participate in the decision that affect our lives, because they think that we are children and we have small mind and small knowledge to contribute, may be what we are going to say would have been the best one that will benefit the community (SC).

The adults still believe that children are human to become and therefore used the developmental based criteria to deny them their rights to participate in the community decision making processes as has been identified by this participant above. Here what is also mean is that age becomes prerequisite for decision making. This in its essence relates to the ethic of community by Shweder et al (2003) on the moral obligation where the elders in the hierarchical position seem to protect and satisfy the wants of the subordinate children. In doing this, children in the community feel oppressed and suppressed since they cannot voice out their sentiment in the decision making.

We have the right to contribute to the decision making in our community, but our elderly people usually suppress us, but our same elders also said in our local adage that “wisdom does not stay in one man's head” meaning two heads are better than one. So once you are in the community, whatever happen will by all means affect you and that we must have the right to contribute to the decision making in our community (SG).

This statement is a clear indication of how children feel about the way elders suppresses them in the decision making in the community. But the children believe that together in decision making with the elders; their community will be a better tomorrow since whatever happens in the community today will definitely have effects on their future lives. It became clear with the personal interviews with the children that community use their parents to represent them in the decision making that affect their lives and that shows the misrepresentation of their views. The account of the one participant is asserted as follows;

What happen to our participation in decision making is that, when there is something concerning children in this community, then the leaders in the community meet first and after that invite all the children's parents(they represent we the children), and when our parents return home, they will tell you what happens at the meeting and if you have something to say, then you have to send it through your parents, but if we the children are in the meeting ourselves, then at that moment something may cross your mind which you need to say it rather than sending message through your parents without knowing actually what happen there (a 14-year-old SHS boy).

A participant in the focus group interviews also added the followings;

ved that some of the decisions that need public concerns normally taking place in front of the chief's palace in an open space and normally people who participate it are chiefs and elders, our parents, Assembly men, District Chief Executive, member of parliament in the district and other opinion leaders in the community (SE).

The interpretation of these excerpts suggests the procedure adopted by the community to make decision on behalf of children. Such procedure from the views of the children shows a misrepresentation of their views and interests. This situation is what social psychologists,

according to Moscovici (as cited in Casas 1997) refer to as social representation of collectively shared mental images of different realities. And this does not also explain the right-based concept by Thomas and Thomas (as cited in Casas 1997, p.284) that "Situations defined as real (in the minds of children) ...Action for children...by traditional representation of *children being a different social category of people*". Relating the position of children interviewed to the Hart (1992) ladder of participation, children are placed at the step one (manipulation) and step three (tokenism) where children are not free to explore or act on their own thinking and are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views respectively. In the essence of this situation as lamented by children interviewed, parents representing them are still adults and therefore decision making processes in the community become adults' game and the realities of their voices and interests are farfetched and unachievable.

4.4. Duties/ Roles and Responsibilities of Ghanaian Child

In African cultures, children traditionally have many duties and responsibilities. Even in the draft of ARCWC, these concepts of duties and responsibilities found their place. To collaborate with this, Save the Children Sweden (2009) also realised that the concept of duties and responsibilities emerged out of the social and cultural values of Africa, including family, community and societal values and takes into accounts the virtues of cultural heritage, historical background and values of the African civilization.

However, in the interviews in the present study, children were asked to describe their expected duties, roles and responsibilities in the community. A student SF in the focus group interviews described that "*As a child you are expected in this community to be respectful and obedient to the elderly people in the community...*" This assertion describes how children are positioned in the Ghanaian community to submit to the elders and obey them in decision

making processes. In other words, it also has to do with hierarchical structures. In Ghanaian context, children are not supposed to challenge the elders in the decision making or even talk when elders are talking. A 15-year-old SHS boy in the personal interviews confirmed that “...you have to respect the elders and you don't have to talk when elders are talking” This illustrates how Ghanaian children are supposed to act in the society to satisfy the needs of adult. This statement also confirm to the assessment made by Twum-Danso (2009) in Ghana that Children are by tradition not to challenge adults on whatever they are asked to do and they must not consider themselves superior to adult but rather submit totally to parental control. The submission of children to adult control become pervasive in this context and actually challenge article 11 of UNCRC which mandate that no person shall deprive a child capable of forming views the right to express an opinion, to be listened to and to participate in decisions which affect his wellbeing. This also suggests that the ethics of autonomy referred to by Shweder (2003) is being undermined by adults relative to children. Children in Ghana are mostly assigned to perform specific roles in the house rather than taking part in decisions that affect them, be it at home or in the community. Another respondent put this situation as follows;

As a Ghanaian child, you have to assist your parents in household activities like, cleaning, washing and other household chores, as well as in farming, because you don't contribute money to the house and your duty is to assist... (SC)

Looking at the content of this statement above, one can say that children do participate in the home activities to support their parents. With regard to participation, distinction must be drawn here; participating in the home activities is different from participation in decision making. The child suggests that because children do not contribute in monetary terms to family or community upkeep, they are pushed to play supportive roles. In this context, giving children ‘rights’ may well be seen as undermining families or even communities by relieving

children of their duties. Giving children rights are also widely believed to limit the ability of adults to make decision (Freeman, 2000). The roles and duties of children in Ghana are regulated by the culture of the people in the community. Culture is the totality of lives and constrains what is good or wrong.

It is clear that duties in some sense position children as equal to adults. From the interviews the children posit that their assigned roles and responsibilities are part of the culture which been passed over to them and they must preserve that heritage. In the focus group interviews when a question on how children feel about their perceived roles and responsibilities, one participant responded that;

I feel good about my duties in the community because is part of our culture that our forefathers have followed and that we also have to continue it and even the government of this country came and met it. So we have to follow our culture (SC).

From this view, it suggests that culture has been deeply rooted in the duties and responsibilities of children in Ghana and that also explain the cultural norms of 'a child should be seen and not heard' (Lansdown, 1995). So the child above sees him/herself as part of the culture. So the constraint of culture is clearly already internalized in the children as it becomes part of their duty to act in accordance with the culture. To collaborate with this, the personal interviews with one of the traditional leaders also confirm such cultural norms regarding children's participation in community decision making as follows;

In our Ghanaian culture in general, children must be respectful, obedient and submissive to the elders. Because of our culture, so when chiefs and elders as well as other leaders meet to take decision, children are not permitted to be with us in the meeting, but we have other channels where we can use to listen to the views of the children or their problems so that when chiefs and elders are taking decision they will

think about the children's welfare and their development in this community and not specifically allowing children to participate in our decision making directly (a personal interview with the chief).

From the perspectives of the chief, it is not culturally permitted to involve children in the decision making processes in the community. So the idea of culture seems to constrain the chief from reflecting on whether the tradition is good or bad. It also suggests that the culture has laid down a hierarchy where elders are placed at the apex with powers vested in them to make decision in the community, whereas children are placed at the base of this hierarchy with their mouths muted to contribute directly to the decision making in the community. This also confirms the theory of community by Shweder et al (2003) on the themes of duty and hierarchy as discussed above. In the sense of the views from the interviews of the chief, Community use morality as a measure to isolate children from decision making. Miller (2007), added to the position of Shweder that morality is centered on culture in that "culture' involves community specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful or efficient which explain the lives and the self understanding of members of the community.

4.4.1 Rights and Responsibility

The findings on rights and responsibilities related to the children's participation in community decision-making processes in Ghana shows dialectical (conflicting) results. Much of the responsibilities of a Ghanaian child have already been discussed. Responsibility as a concept implies duty or obligations of children. On other hand, rights are freedoms that children are supposed to enjoy. However, as a saying goes, "right goes with responsibility". According to the results of the interviews, the concept of rights in Ghana can only be claimed and not demanded. One of the children (SC) in the focus group interviews complained that "we have the right, but our elders will not allow you to participate in the decisions that affect our lives, because they think that we are children..." What this statement suggests is that,

children claim that they have the rights, but they cannot demand it. This is so because these rights are not being recognized by the elders in the community. Even in the axis of claiming these rights, children need to fulfill certain obligations of the community, family and of their religion (God). Children can only achieve their individual rights when they have satisfied and respected the responsibilities of these three levels mentioned. The account of one participant in the personal interviews confirm to this as follows;

As a child, the society expects you to respect your parents, respect your religious concepts and practice them, respect your elderly people and the most common one is to respect someone older than you (a 14-year-old SHS boy)

From the excerpt, it is clearly suggests that, the rights of the children are linked up and determined by the fulfillment of the obligations to the community, family and religion. It also seems to relate to the hierarchical structure as explained in this theory and moving up in the hierarchy as children grow, then their status also grow. It is true that right goes with responsibility, but the responsibilities of children are ambiguous as they on the one hand position children as full members of society, but on the other hand place them at the bottom of the hierarchy with obligation to respect the elders in all spheres of their lives. This calls for a rethinking of ethical issues concerning rights and responsibilities of children in the community. For example, one of the children in the personal interviews declared her feeling about their responsibilities to show respect to elders;

Sometimes I feel bad about some of our responsibilities, that we should respect and obey our elderly people. Because of that if an elderly person asks you to go and buy him a cigarette for instance, if you refuse to go then they say you are not respectful, but if you go too, it can lead you to so many things of which I think is very bad to me (a 14-year-old SHS girl)

Looking at the ethical position of such comments from this child, such situation diminishes the rights of children to make their own decision on whether to obey elders or not. Observing, this view of the child, it shows that the older people in the community sometimes exploit their higher position to make life easier for themselves. What this also means is that children in Ghanaian society do not fully enjoy their autonomy as explained in section 20c and 31a of ACWRC. Such views from the Ghanaian society also confirm to the observation made by Gyekye (1996) that African society with its dominant practice of communalism does not absorb individuality but accommodate it and make it coexist with communalism. From this point of view, children in Ghana are not only under the control of their parents alone, but by the entire community.

4.5. Religiosity and its Influence on Children's Rights

The concept of religiosity is referring to a set of beliefs about God, in this case held by the children and regulating their moral conduct in the community. According to Graham & Haidt (2010, p.140), social psychology posits that "beliefs, rituals, and other religious practice are best understood as means of creating a moral community". This is supported by the data where the expression of religious beliefs and practices emerged as a potential influence on children's rights to participation in community Apoo festival. Reference to religiosity and its practices was found among children to be a core constituent to their cosmology on community social participation. In all the instances where children mention religion, it served as a limiting or regulation factor for them to participate their rights. It was never mentioned as a driving force for them to claim their rights. Amongst the 10 children selected for this study, eight were Christians while other two were Muslims. Both the Christian and Muslim children express their own beliefs towards their participation in community Apoo festival. One of the children who hold Christian beliefs made his account in the excerpt below:

To me, I believe I have the right, because I am a Ghanaian, but I don't have interest in most of the activities in this community; For instance to participate in Apoo festival, is something I considered it like worshipping god, because I am a Christian and it opposite to Christian beliefs, whether it gives freedom of speech or not I don't value it, because we celebrate it with all the fetish priests and their traditional things, but Bible says it in Exodus 20:1-5 that we should not worship anything made by man.

(Personal interview with a 15-year-old JHS boy)

Such Christian's belief from this participant is a clear emphasis on how religiosity adversely influences the children's rights in community decision making. From the excerpt, the informant expresses awareness about having rights because of his nationality. But on the other hand, he denied his rights based on his religious beliefs. Such beliefs also concord to the discourse on the ethics of divinity by Shweder et al (2003) as is being deeply rooted with the idea of sacred tradition that one way or the other regulate or influence the lives and perceptions of individuals in the community about what is "wrong" or "right". This is what Freud's (as cited in Graham & Haidt, 2010, p.141) argued that religious ideas have exercised the greatest possible influence on mankind and that has always been a psychological problem. The beliefs of most Christian's children from the interviews seemed to condemn the other religion; especially the traditional religion and that affect their participation in community festival whether it gives freedom of speech or not as can be deduced from the excerpt above.

Similarly, another child who comes from a Muslim background also reflected on how Islamic religion denied him the opportunity to participate in the community Apoo festival. He submitted his account below;

emm, as for me according to my religion, I don't have the opportunity to participate my views during the festival and I am not part of it, because I am a Muslim and my mother said it is 'haram⁶' for me to participate and if I do, when I die I will go to hell. But if I am given an opportunity then I will sing and dance throughout the festival (a 14-year-old SHS boy)

The foregoing assertion point out to the fact that religiosity exhibits a great influence and deny many children from enjoying their basic rights to participation. Making critical deduction and assessment from this statement made by this Muslim boy, what it suggests is that, inwardly that boy has the enthusiasm to participate in the festival, but the Islamic beliefs and philosophy inculcated into him by his family for being a “haram” and go to hell after death is the discarding factor for his non participation in the festival. Family as indicated by the spheres of participation model (The state of the world's children, 2003), is the starting point and influential stage of children's participation. Children believe what their parents told them about what is wrong or right based on their religious beliefs. Such beliefs are in consistent with what Lari (1997, p.48) said about how religious education is being impacted into children at their early childhood development that “Impact religious education to your children as soon as you can and before your opponents take a lead over you and plant wrong and false ideas in their minds”. The expression of religiosity became ubiquitous among children interviewed in this study and that poses great challenges to their participation in community festival and that of the decision making processes.

⁶ Haram is the Islamic term, which means an abomination

CHAPTER FIVE

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Overview

Preceding studies and literature both local (Ghana) and international have intensively addressed children's participation in decision making and its importance in the contexts of family (home); education (schools); local community projects; and research (Ekumah, 2008; Sawadong, 2010; Lansdown, 1995; Kjørholt, 2004; Sinclair, 2004; Kellet, 2010). However, this current study aimed to explore children's perspectives on participation in the community decision-making processes in the contexts of community forum and community 'Apoo' festival in Ghana. It was also aimed in this study to examine informants' understandings and interpretations of the multiple realities of the children's rights implementation in Ghana. The findings in the study indicated that culture of gerontocracy or age and the religiosity are the main limiting factors influencing children's rights to participation in the community decision making processes in Ghana. Community 'Apoo' festival was identified to hold a special potential to children's rights in Ghana. The relationship between responsibilities and rights of the children in the community were also manifested in the findings to show some dilemmas and to satisfy the primordial interests of adults. To this end, the summaries of the findings of this study are presented and discussed in this chapter;

5.2. The Processes of Participation in Community Decision-Making

The findings indicate that the process of participation in community decision-making have a hierarchical structure as identified in the ethics of community by Shweder et al. (2003). In such cases, the traditional institutions tend to play a major role in decision making in the community. The findings show that when the need arises for decision-making in the

Techiman community of Ghana, the traditional chiefs and elders, first meet and discuss the issues before the public. Then they normally in the community forum invite the opinion leaders, Assembly members who represent the local government, representatives from other non governmental institutions and parents of the children if the decision is concerning them. However, the parents who represent the children in community decision-making forum then send the message to the children. But if the children have something to say about what transpired at the meeting, then they send it through their parents. As we have seen, one of the children in the personal interviews emphasized this; ...*"when our parents return home, they will tell you what happens at the meeting and if you have something to say, then you have to send it through your parents"*... (a 14 years-old JHS boy). Children were identified in the findings to be at the base of the community decision-making structure while elders are at apex in that respect. The school children show negative perception about this lack of participation in community decision-making processes.

The further discovery indicates that it is not culturally accepted for children to be in decision-making process with elders in the community. This shows how culture determines what is good or bad (Miller, 2001). The position of the chief in the findings seems to gear towards the moral ground for not allowing children to participate in the decision-making with them. With reference to this, the chief stated that ...*"Because of our culture, so when chiefs and elders as well as other leaders meet to take decision, children are not permitted to be with us in the meeting, but we have other channels we use to listen to children's views"*... This shows how the community decision-making process is understood within the context of culture in Ghana.

5. 3. Dialectical Relationship between Children's Rights & Responsibilities

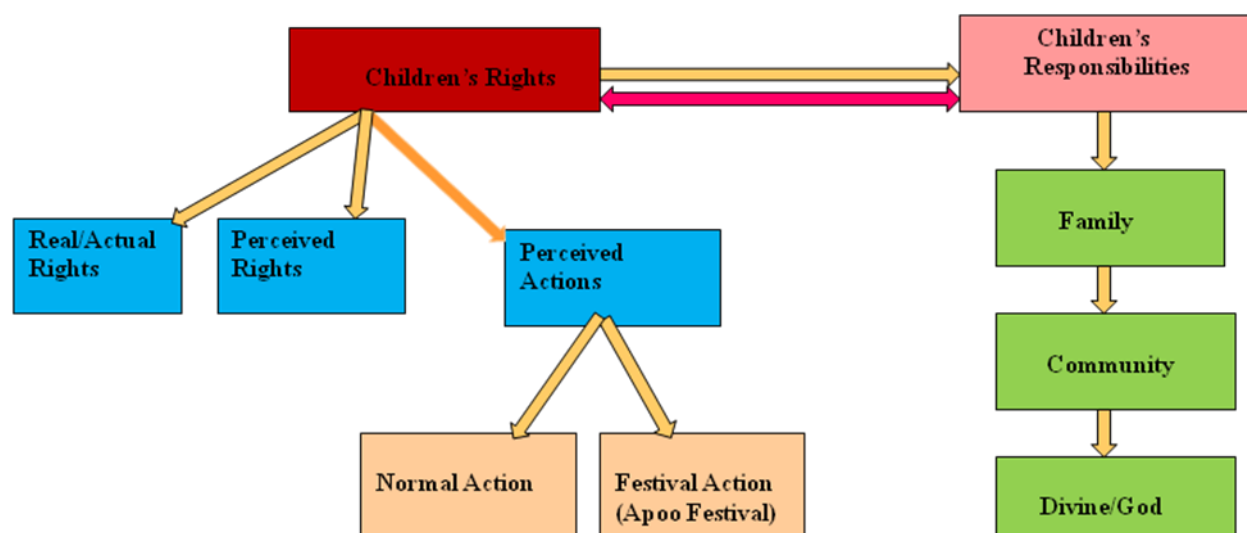


Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model for Dialectics of Children's Rights & Responsibilities

As visualized in conceptual model, children's rights were identified from the findings to go with children's responsibilities. The findings indicate that the children's responsibilities are defined in the contexts of family, community, and divinity. As cultural demands, typical Ghanaian children are expected to fulfill certain obligatory roles or duties from these three contexts identified in the model.

The findings show that children are expected at the family level to respect their parents and obey their instructions at all levels, cleaning household chores, assist parents in farming and marketing, etc. The findings also indicate that children play the role of listeners in terms of decision making and that parents are the sole responsible for taking decision on behalf of the children at the family and community level.

At the community level, children are expected according to the findings to respect elders or elderly persons. Respect became a core constituent in the interaction of children with adults in the community and that limit children's choices for elders' instructions. Being obedient is the prerequisite duty for ideal Ghanaian children and challenging adults in

decision making were identified to be morally and culturally unacceptable in the community. The findings further indicate that Children are not culturally expected to be in the meetings with adults in the community for decision making and that age is an important indicator for community decision making process.

Religiosity or the beliefs in God was identified in the findings to be another arena that has burdened children with some moral responsibilities. Religiosity is an essential component in the Ghanaian culture and cut across every sphere of lives of children in the community. The findings indicate that children believed that their assigned responsibilities in the community are endorsed by the divine order, such that they should respect and be obedience to their elderly people in the community. For instance, most of the children made inferences from the Bible and Quoran to support their stance. All these levels of children's responsibilities on one hand serve one way or the other as opposing factors to the children's rights on the other hand.

However, children's rights on the other hand, were identified in three levels; actual rights, perceived rights, and action rights with sub categories of normal action and festival action as identified from the model. Conventionally, children's rights have been endorsed by both international (UNCRC) and local (Children's Art of Ghana) legal framework to provide children with liberty to express themselves in decision making that affect their lives. This represents the actual rights of children in the model above. The findings indicate that the actual rights of children are being subverted by the Ghanaian culture which places emphasis on adult ruling (gerontocracy) in decision making in the community. This may be the case in many places in the world. After all, children defer with regard to age. It will defer what they can do if they are 3, 7, or 15 years of age. This shows the limitation of such perception on children in decision- making, since older children have abilities to contribute to decision-making. The findings in this area also support the report of the Ghana NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child (GNCRC), *"that while the legislative framework is adequate, the general*

public still thinks to a large extent that children must be seen not heard" (2005). Such perceptions seem to weaken the actual rights of children in Ghana.

In view of that, the actual rights of children are turned out to 'perceived rights' as many of the children in the present study assumed. Perceived rights in the context of these research findings denotes a situation where children are aware of their fundamental rights, but where those rights have been relegated to the background based on the cultural norms. It became ubiquitous in the findings that School Children in the Techiman community complained consistently that they believe they have the rights to contribute to decision making in the community, but the elderly people in the community do not allow them based on the cultural norms that children are not supposed to take part in the meeting with the elders in decision making. This is because they are children and they are not capable enough to make decision in the community. The children themselves however, expressed that they are capable enough to represent their own views.

Again, the findings brought to fore the concept of participatory practice as can be seen in the model. Perceived action of children's rights is characterized by the perception of children in the practical areas where they are being culturally allowed to participate their views in the community. In that line, two concepts were identified, thus everyday actions, and festival actions. Everyday actions according to the findings are those vivid roles endorsed by the elders of the community, such that children should show respect, not only to the elders but everyone older than themselves. In the everyday, Children are allowed to participate in communal labour and household activities as such practices are understood by elders as participatory rights and responsibilities of children. Example is what one of the children emphasised in the study; *As a Ghanaian child, you have to assist your parents in household activities like, cleaning, washing and other household chores, as well as in farming...(SC)*. This indicates how children are positioned in Ghanaian society in relating to their participatory rights and responsibilities.

Conversely, the understanding of the children with regard to everyday actions, challenged the proposition of the elders such children expect from the elders in the in community to include them in the decision making process of the community. Though the participation of children in this aspect of decision making in the community was found to be unrealistic in everyday lives of the community, community festival was instituted yearly to break the hierarchy of powers between elders and children.

Finally, community Apoo festival was positioned in the findings as a unique arena where children have a rare opportunity to express their opinion in public without being limited by hierarchical power structure. The festival can thus be said to support the liberty rights of children and the implementation of UNCRC and the 1998 Children's Act (Act 560) of Ghana. 'Apoo' festival of the people of Techiman gives children thirteen days of liberty to express their views and complain about wrong doing of people in power for the past year which need to be corrected in the community. The findings indicate that the children appreciate this opportunity, even though they may not always be able to use it. The findings further indicate that Apoo festival premised on the moral ground, such the term "Apoo" is Akan word which means "rejection" of evils that the community has experienced for the past year in order to restore it into justice. In this regard, the 'Apoo' festival become the action festival that empowered children with the bigger voices in community to speak out all their views concerning the immoralities in an attempt to reject such behaviours in the community. This action Apoo festival was also revealed in the findings that it breaks all the cultural norms affecting children's rights in Ghana.

Making inference from the findings of the current study, it can be said in summary that the children's rights to community decision making process in the Techiman community have been greatly influenced by the religious beliefs of children, cultural norms of Ghana that favoured elders in decision making (gerontocracy) and the concept of respect for the elders in the community. But on the whole, community 'Apoo' festival was identified as holding a

special potential in Ghana that provides empirical support to children's participation in the community decision making processes in Ghana.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

The procedure earmarked for the study, was appropriate but choked some limitations in the process of data collection and analysis.

First, the study was designed to conduct two separate focus group interviews with the school children based on their age differences and sex. Coincidentally, this interviews process occurred at the examination period where children were busily preparing for their examination. This situation compelled me to have composite focus group interviews irrespective of children's age and sex differences.

The sample sizes of the participants of the study were mainly the indigenous children from the study area, only few of the participants were from the other regions of Ghana. I could have added to the data to include more children and capture a broader range of experiences.

Again, the personal interview with the traditional chief of Techiman was carried out at the chief's palace. Unexpected visitors to the palace and phone in calls interrupted the consistency and smoothness of the interview process, since the chief at times had to respond to the incoming phone calls and the visitors while the interview was in progress.

I could have also taken part in the festival to observe the event, though I have participated and observed the event before since I was born and bred in the community. But the period of the festival event together with my research scheduled limited me in this regard.

5.5. Strengths of the study

This current exploratory and conventional analytical study, though confronted with some limitations, still fills a number of gaps and provides insights into children's participation in the community decision making processes in Techiman, Ghana.

Empirically, the study has been the first to investigate children's own perspectives on their participation in the festival. The previous studies only focused on children participation in decision making in the contexts of family, school, community projects and so on. From this point of departure, the present study uncovered the new context of children's participation where further research need to be explored.

In addition, the study was useful in the sense that it adds to the knowledge building on the global concerns of the discourse on children's rights and serve as a policy document for the actors in this field.

The predominant recruitment of children as the participants of the study adds to the reality of the current trend of doing research with children rather than using adults or public perceptions as representative views of children. This makes the present study the true reflection of the vox populi of children.

5.6. Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

5.6.1 Community Psychological Praxis

Praxis, as understood by Prilleltensky (2001, p.758) is defined as the "unity of theory and action" which places emphasis on reflection, social research and social action. Descending from this background, predominant Ghanaian culture which gives powers to adults in the community decision making at the detriment of children can be reversed through concerted efforts by the community psychologists. In deconstruction and reconstruction of such Ghanaian culture, community psychologist should reflect on traditional power relation

between adults/elders and children, so as to deal with cultural norms that favored adults in the community decision making processes in Ghana. In doing this, social action which focuses on holism in decision making with children, empowerment, social justice and respect for the views of children (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010) should be the values and core concerns of the community psychologists in this pursue.

The study reveals that religiosity and age are some of the limiting factors that deprive children access to community decision making processes in Ghana. Age is cultural endorsed whilst religiosity endorsed respect for the elders, whether good or bad is being interpreted to affect children's rights to air to views before elders in community decision. Therefore, community psychologists can work closely with the traditional leaders, religious leaders and other stakeholders in the community in order to achieve social change that provides room for children in the community decision making. Though, community 'Apoo' festival as identified in the findings has been instituted to ensure social justice, but this is done on yearly basis. However, efforts must be done by community psychologists together with the social workers, NGOs and the like, to widen the scope of festival of this kind across Ghana and be performance on regular basis support children access to self expressions in the community decision making processes.

Again, community psychologists can collaborate with the Department of Social Welfare (DSW), District Assemblies (DA), Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) which were set up by legal framework of Ghana to provide children access to legal rights, but were under-resourced (GNCRC, 2005) to empower children irrespective of their religious beliefs to demand their rights to community decision making. Here, community psychologists can focus on the right-based approach in their advocacy process for children in this respect.

Community psychologist can again in conjunction with the stakeholders and NGOs in the community design communication campaign through mass media with cultural specific

messages, since decision making in Ghanaian culture is adults game, this form of dissemination will help decrease such perceptions. In this regard, children may find a position in the Ghanaian culture in terms of community decision making since culture is dynamic.

5.6.2 Research on Children's Participation in Community Decision-Making Processes

This current study establishes empirical evidence to support children's to participation in community decision making processes with specific reference to community 'Apoo' festival and community forum. The accounts of children and the traditional chief who participated in this research generally showed positive and radical concerns to the cultural practices that limit children access to liberty rights: 'Apoo' festival is positioned in the data as a unique festival that has a potential to support children's participation in the community decision making processes.

However, in order to deconstruct and reconstruct cultures that infringe the rights of children, researchers in the field of children's rights and policy, should find out how the festival influence the awareness of children about their rights and how it may be used as an arena for teaching children about participation and participatory rights.

Moreover, the future research must attempt to cover a wider spectrum of sample sizes with children, traditional leaders, religious leaders and the like from difference districts, regions or municipalities of Ghana. These groups of people from diverse cultural backgrounds of Ghana can help provide deeper insights into the context of children participation in the community decision making processes. This may serve as a synergy for the generalization of this present study.

Finally, future research can explore this same phenomenon by using different methodology. With this, mixed methods with emphasis on transformative paradigm can also

be applied in this present research since transformative paradigm framework in its assumptions tries to examine and address power issues, social justice, and cultural complexity (Mertens, 2007).

5.7. Conclusion

Children's participation in the community decision making processes is both conventional and phenomenological study, whose reality premised on liberty rights through community 'Apoo festival, and how its relevant could be used to substantiate the implementation of article 12 of the UNCRC in Ghana. The study identified how culture has singled out adults as a sole decision makers in community and how this has also called for the liberation of children from adult control and power (Kjørholt, 2004). Age (gerontocracy) was revealed as the prerequisite social indicator of community decision making, since age-based status is assumed to connote wisdom and life experience (Schubert et al. 1987) in the deliberation of issues in the community. Religiosity; the beliefs of supreme being which provides a sacred order for children to be submissive to the elderly persons was identified to transcend its jurisdiction and misinterpreted to limit children's rights to participation in the community decision making processes.

On the whole, the community 'Apoo festival of the people of Techiman, was appeared in the findings as a unique festival in Ghana that provides children with thirteen days of liberty to lampoon their grievances and express their views on immoralities publicly before the whole community. From this point, community is being healed both spiritually and psychological (Ameyaw, 2001) and decisions are taking afterward to restore the community into justice. Apoo festival was described in the study as 'culture of democracy' since it breaks the hierarchical power structure and cultural norms affecting children. This is however, the empirical findings that this present study offers to children's rights to self expression in Ghana.

REFERENCES

African Charter on the Rights and welfare of the child, OAU Doc.CAB/LEG/24.9/49 (1990),
entered into force Nov.29, 1999.

Alkinson, P. & Hammersley, M. (1994). Ethnographic and participant observation. In:
Denzin, N. k. and Lincon, Y. (eds). Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks,
CA, Sage.

Barbour, R. (eds.) (2007). Doing Focus Groups. The Sage Qualitative Research Kit. Sage:
London.

Bjerk, H. (2011). 'It's the way they do it': Expressions of Agency in Child-Adult Relations at
Home and School. Norwegian Centre for Child Research; Children & Society, 25: 93-
103.

Bashir, M., Afzal. M.T. & Azeem, M. (2008). Reliability and Validity of Qualitative and
Operational Research Paradigm. Pakistan Journal of Statistics and Research, 4(1): 33-45.

Basit, T.N. (2003). Manual or Electronic? The role of coding in qualitative data analysis.
Educational Research, UK: Routledge.

Bauersfeld, H. (1995). Constructivism (learning theory). Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
Retrieved April 20, 2010, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism
_%28learning_theory%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_%28learning_theory%29)

Bloor, M., Frankland, J., Thomas, M., & Robson, K. (2001). Focus Groups in Social
Research. Sage: London.

Bohrstedt, G.W., Freeman, H.E., & Smith, T. (1981). Adult Perspectives on Children's
Autonomy. Journal of American Association for Public Opinion Research, 45(4): 443-
462.

Casas, F. (1997). Children's right and Children's quality of life: Conceptual and Practical

Issues. *Social Indicators Research* 42: 283-298.

Children Act (1998). Act 560. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Republic of Ghana.
PP. 1-37.

Cozby, P. (2001). *Methods in Behavioural Research* (7 eds). Mcgraw Hil Company, Inc,
1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, USA.

Cutcliffe, J.R. & McKenna, H.P. (1999). Establishing the credibility of qualitative research
findings: the plot thickens. *Journal of Advance Nursing*, 30(2): 330-374.

Davis, M. (1998). Understanding the meaning of children: A reflexive process. In: *Children
Society* Vol. 12. University of Edinburgh.

Dewalt, K.M. & Dewalt, B.R. (2001). *Participants observation: A guide for fieldworkers*.
New York: Rowman & Littlefield Pub Inc.

Ekumah, A.A. (2008). *Children's rights: Perspectives of some Ghanaian children and parents*.
Unpublished master's thesis presented to the Norwegian Centre for Child Research,
Trondheim.

Fawcett, J., Watson, J., Newman, B., Hinton, P., Fitzpatrick, J.J. (2001). On Nursing Theories
and Evidence. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(2): 115-119.

Flick, U., Kardoff, E.V., & Stainke, I. (eds) (2010). *Companion to Qualitative Research*.
London: Sage Publication.

Flick, U. (2007). Introducing Focus Groups. In: R. Barbour (eds.) (2007). *Doing Focus*

Groups. The Sage Qualitative Research Kit. Sage: London.

Freeman, M. (2000). The future of Children's Rights. *Children and Society* 18: 277-293.

GNCRC (2005). Report on Implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child by the Republic of Ghana.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4): 597-607.

Graham, J. & Haidt, J. (2010). Beyond Beliefs: Religions Bind Individuals into Moral Communities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(1): 140-150.

Grigoriou, T. (2004). Friendship between Gay Men and Heterosexual Women: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Families & Social capital ESRC Research Group Working Paper No.5. London South University Bank.

Gyekye, K. (1996). African Cultural Value: An Introduction. Sankofa Publishing Company, Accra-Ghana.

Holloway, R. (2004). Goodles morality: Keeping Religion out of Ethics. Edinburg, London, Melbourne: Canongate

James, A. & James, A. L. (2004). Constructing childhood: Theory, policy and social practice. New York: palgrave Macmillan.

James, A., Jenk, C., & Prout, A. (1998). Theorizing childhood, New York: Teacher College.

- Haidt, J. (2007). *The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology*. American Association for the Advancement of Science. Retrieved from: [www. sciencemag.org](http://www.sciencemag.org).
- Heaton, J. (2004). *Reworking Qualitative Data*. London: Sage Publication
- Hamersley, M. (1992). *What's with Ethnography?* London: Routledge
- Humble, A.M. (2009). *Technique Triangulation for Validation in Directed Content Analysis*. *International journal of qualitative Methods*, 8(3): 34-51.
- Humaniora, M.H.,(2007). *Concept and Implementation of participation and Involvement: Reflection from Cafee IPM-SECP*. Indonesian Center for Agro-socioeconomic and Policy Studies (ICASEPS), 11 (2); 58-70. Bogor 16161, Indonesia.
- Kane, C.O. (2003). *Children and Young people as citizens*. In: Amtzis, J (eds). *Partners for social change, exploring concepts*. Save the Children, Nepal.
- Katayama, S., & Cohen, D. (2007). *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*. The Guilford, New York: London
- Kellet, M. (2010). *Rethinking of Children and Research: Attitudes in contemporary Society*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Kjørholt, A. T. (2004). *Childhood as a social and symbolic space: discourse on children as Social participants in society*. Ph. D thesis, Trondheim, NTNU.
- Kuyini, A. B. & Mahama, F.K. (2009). *Implementing Child Rights and Protection Law: Case Study*. Crescent Educational and Voluntary Service, Tamale-Ghana.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interview: An Introduction to Qualitative Interviewing*. Sage Publication: Thousand Oaks California.

Laird, S. (2002). The 1998 Children's Act: Problems of Enforcement in Ghana. *British Journal of Social Work*, 33: 893-905.

Lansdown, G. (1995). Taking part: Children participation in decision-making. In: Sinclair, R. (2004). *Participation in practice: Making it meaningful, effective and sustainable*. Children and society, 18 pp.106-118.

Larkin, M., Watts, S. & Elizabeth, C. (2006). Giving Voice and Making Sense in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 102-120.

Mertens, D.M. (2007). Transformative Paradigm: Mixed Methods and Social Justice. *Journal of mixed Methods Research*, 1(3): 212-225.

Miller, J.G. (2001). Cultural Psychology of Moral Development. In: Katayama, S., & Cohen, D. (2007). *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*. The Guilford, New York: London

Morgan, D. L. (1988). *Focus group as qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Nelson, G. & Prilleltensky, I. (eds.) (2010). *Community Psychology: In of Liberation and Well-Being* (2nd Ed.). Palgrave: Macmillan.

Patton, M.O. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication.

Prilleltensky, I. (2001). Value-Based Praxis in Community Psychology: Moving Toward Social Justice and Social Action. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(5): 747-778.

Prout, A. & James, A. (1990). *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*. London: The Falmer press.

Qvortrup, J. (2002). Sociology of child: Conceptual liberation of children. In: Mouritsen, F, & Qvortrup, J. (eds). *Childhood children's culture*. Odense: University of Southern Denmark, pp. 43-78

Van Beers, H. (2002). Assessment on understanding and practices o children's participation. In: Save the children Sweden Bangladesh.

Save the Children (2003). *So you want to consult with children? A toolkit of good practice*. International Sava the Children alliance. London: UK.

Sawadong, I.M. (2010). *Children's participation in family decision-making in Ghana: Evidence from the Lawra District*. Unpublished master's thesis presented to the Norwegian Centre for Child Research, Trondheim

Schubert, J.N., Wiegele, T.C. & Hines, S.M. (1987). Age and Political Behavior in Collective Decision-Making. *International Political Science Review*, 8(2): 131-146.

Schwandt, A.T. (2001). *Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* (2nd Ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Shweder, R. A., N. Much, L. Park & Mahapatra, M.M. (2003). The 'Big Three' of Morality (Autonomy, Community, Divinity) and the 'Big Three' Explanations of Suffering. Originally from "Morality and Health." Allan Brandt and Paul Rozin (eds). New York: Routledge, 1997. Reprinted in "Why Do Men Barbecue?: Recipes for Cultural Psychology." Shweder, R. A. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Shweder, R.A. (1999). Cultural Psychology. In R.A. Wilson & F.C. Keil (Eds.), *The MIT encyclopedia of Cognitive Sciences* (PP. 211-213). *The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology*.

Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpretating Qualitative data: Methods for Analysing Talk, text and Interaction*. London: Sage Publication.

Sinclair, R. (2004). *Participation in practice: Making it meaningful, effective and sustainable*. In: Johansson, E. (2005). *Child participation in practice-A study of the used in Assessments and Social Workers Attitude Toward Child Participation in Michigan*. A Paper submitted to the Lunds University

Skivenes, M. (2010). Judging the child's best interests: rational Reasoning or Subjective Presumptions? *Nordic Sociological Assessment*, 53(4): 339-353.

Smith, J. A. (2008). *Qualitative Psychology Practical Guide to Research Methods*: UK, Sage Publication.

Techiman Municipal Assembly (2003-2005). Medium Term Development Plan.

Tisdall, E.K.M. & Liebel, M. (2008). Children's Participation in Decision-Making: Exploring Theory, Policy and Practice across Europe; For the European Science foundation Seminar, Berlin.

Thompson, B. (1992). Africa's Charter on Rights: A Normative Break with Cultural, Traditionalism, 41 International and comparative Law Review, no.2 p. 440. In: Africa child policy forum (2006) UNICEF Children and Youth polls in Eastern and Southern Africa. Summary of findings, (2) p.40, 15 November, 2006.

Twumasi, P.A. (1986). Social Research in Rural Communities: The problems of Fieldwork in Ghana. Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, legon. Ghana Universities Press, Accra.

UN (1990). Convention on the Rights of the Child 1998. Geneva: U.N/ General Assembly. Retrieved from: www.ohchr.org/default.aspx (Accessed on 14/02/2011).

Watson, J. (1999). Postmodern nursing and beyond. New York: Churchill Livingstone.

Welch, S. & Jones, P. (2010). Rethinking of Children's Rights: Attitudes in contemporary Society. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Wilkinson, S. (2006). Focus Groups. In: J. A. Smith (2nd ed.), Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods. London: Sage.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW GUIDE (SEMI-STRUCTURED)

NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (NTNU)

INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDREN

This research is purposely for academic use only and any information given will be highly treated as confidential. You are being promised of anonymity and no sensitive information provided will be published without your consent. You are free to be part of this study and can also withdraw from the study at any time if you change your mind of participating. The interview will be recorded by tape recorder and the recording will be deleted after the interview data have been transcribed. If you agree to participate in this study under these conditions, I would be appreciated if you could respond to the questions being going to ask...Remember that all views are rightfully accepted.

Interview

Bio-Data

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Class/form:

Knowledge and Awareness of UNCRC/ACRWC/Children's Art, (Art 560) in Ghana

4. How will you describe that you have any right as a child?
5. Could you take my through about what you know on children's right?
6. Have you heard of the United Nation Convention on the rights of the Child? If yes, what and where did you hear?
7. Have you ever heard of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child? If yes, what did you hear and where?

8. Could you describe what do you know when we talk about children's Art, (Art 560) in Ghana?

Perceived Duties and Responsibilities in the Community

9. Could you take me through the expected duties of children in this community?
10. How would you describe your feeling about those roles/duties the community expects you to play? And are those roles enough for you? If No/Yes, explain...

Children's Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions about their Participation in Community Festival (Apour/Apoo)

11. Could you take me through what you know about Apour festival in this community?
12. Could you describe the situation where you have been participated in this festival?
13. How could you describe the attitudes and perceptions of elderly people when seeing you participation in this festival?
14. Could you take me through how you wish to have participated in this festival when given the opportunity? And under what condition do you believe to have been treated as partners in this festival? Explain...
15. How would you describe the importance of this festival to you when participating?

Children's Beliefs, Attitudes and Perceptions about their Participation in Community Decision-Making Forum

16. Could you take me through how the decisions are making in this community? And who are involved in this decision-making process?
17. Could you describe how you participate in the community decision-making forum? And whom do you think influences most of the decisions that are taken in the community?
18. Do you think children in this community have the rights to actively participate in decisions that concern them? Explain how...

19. Under what conditions do children in this community believe that they are being treated as partners in the community decision-making forum? How do their views being represented in this forum? Describe...
20. Could you describe the importance of your participation to the community decision-making processes?

NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (NTNU)

INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOLOGY

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TRADITIONAL LEADERS

This research is purposely for academic use only and any information given will be highly treated as confidential. You are being promised of anonymity and no sensitive information provided will be published without your consent. You are free to be part of this study and can also withdraw from the study at any time if you change your mind of participating. The interview will be recorded by tape recorder and the recording will be deleted after the interview data have been transcribed. If you agree to participate in this study under these conditions, I would be appreciated if you could respond to the questions being going to ask...Remember that all views are rightfully accepted.

Key Informant

Bio-Data

1. Age..... Gender..... Position.....

History of Apour Festival

2. Could you briefly take me through the history of this Apour festival? And how is this festival is being performed?

Socio-Cultural Norms Regarding Children's participation in the Festival

3. Could you describe how cultural values affect children's participation in this festival? And in which aspect do you involve children in this festival?
4. How would you describe your feeling when people criticize you with impunity during the festival? And would you accept expression of criticism from children when participated? Explain if Yes or No.

Community Decision-Making Forum

5. Could you take me through how the decisions are making in this community? And who are mostly involved?

6. Could you describe how you involve the children in the community decision-making forum? And how do you think the socio-cultural norms can affect their active participation?
7. Could you describe your beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about children's participation in community decision making?

APPENDIX B:

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION

I am by name **Evans Osei Bediako**, a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Human Development student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). I am currently spending part of my graduate programme in Ghana collecting data on the chosen area of study for my master's degree thesis. The topic of my research is, "**Children's Participation in the Community Decision-Making Process in Ghana**". The study will involve interviewing Traditional leaders, Assembly Members and focus group discussions with students (with consent from their superiors and parents/guardians). The total number of participants will not be more than 26. The interviews and focus group discussions would be audio recorded so that your responses can accurately be recorded. This would enable the researcher to review the topics and responses later for analysis so not to miss any details. Participation is possible if only you are willing to have the interview or discussions recorded.

BENEFITS

This study is significant in that there have been the perceptions of the larger society about children's rights implementation in Ghana; thinking that a "child should be seen and not heard". Knowing these perceptions will create a new mindset of our society towards children's rights to decision-making and help to understand that "children are human being and not human to become", their views must be respected in the areas that affect their life. More so, very little is known (through research) about children's participation in festival of expression and community decision-making forum, so this study would help in that regard.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participation is anonymous in sense that you would not be identified by your name or school of affiliation. All personal information provided in this study will be held in absolute confidence; the tapes would remain in the custody and control of the researcher always and would not be given out for any purpose to anyone who is not working directly with the researcher. The researcher will not share information which could identify you with anyone or in publication. The recorded interview will be deleted when the project comes to an end by 30.08.2012.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you have the right not to answer any question(s) you feel uncomfortable with and you can withdraw from participation at any time if you do not want to continue.

CONTACT

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me at oseibedi@stud.ntnu.no, or by telephone, 0243358558. You can also contact my supervisor, Prof. Berit Johannesen at berit.Johannesen@svt.ntnu.no.

(Signature of Researcher: Evans Osei Bediako)

(Date)

Consent of Children

I certify that the purpose of the study has been thoroughly explained to me in English/mother tongue to my satisfaction and I have received a copy of the consent form. I understand that any information obtained from me for this research will be kept confidential. To further ensure privacy, I have the option of using a pseudonym. I understand that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. I agree to participate in this study.

(Informant: Signature/Initials/thumb Print)

(Date)

Informed Consent Form

INFORMATION

I am by name **Evans Osei Bediako**, a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Human Development student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). I am currently spending part of my graduate programme in Ghana collecting data on the chosen area of study for my master's degree thesis. The topic of my research is, "**Children's Participation in the Community Decision-Making Process in Ghana**". The study will involve interviewing Traditional leaders, Assembly Members and focus group discussions with students (with consent from their superiors and parents/guardians). The total number of participants will not be more than 26. The interviews and focus group discussions would be audio recorded so that your responses can accurately be recorded. This would enable the researcher to review the topics and responses later for analysis so not to miss any details. Participation is possible if only you are willing to have the interview or discussions recorded.

BENEFITS

This study is significant in that there have been the perceptions of the larger society about children's rights implementation in Ghana; thinking that a "child should be seen and not heard". Knowing these perceptions will create a new mindset of our society towards children's rights to decision-making and help to understand that "children are human being and not human to become", their views must be respected in the areas that affect their life. More so, very little is known (through research) about children's participation in festival of expression and community decision-making forum, so this study would help in that regard.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participation is anonymous in sense that you would not be identified by your name. All personal information provided in this study will be held in absolute confidence; the tapes would remain in the custody and control of the researcher always and would not be given out for any purpose to anyone who is not working directly with the researcher. The researcher will not share information which could identify you with anyone or in publication. The recorded interview will be deleted when the project comes to an end by 30.08.2012.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you have the right not to answer any question(s) you feel uncomfortable with and you can withdraw from participation at any time if you do not want to continue.

CONTACT

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me at oseibedi@stud.ntnu.no, or by telephone, 0243358558. You can also contact my supervisor, Prof. Berit Johannesen at berit.Johannesen@svt.ntnu.no.

(Signature of Researcher: Evans Osei Bediako)

(Date)

Consent of Community Leaders

I certify that the purpose of the study has been thoroughly explained to me in English/mother tongue to my satisfaction and I have received a copy of the consent form. I understand that any information obtained from me for this research will be kept confidential. To further ensure privacy, I have the option of using a pseudonym. I understand that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. I agree to participate in this study.

(Informant: Signature/Initials/thumb Print)

(Date)

APPENDIX C:

Letter of Informed Consent to Parent / Guardian of Student

Dear Parent / Guardian,

INFORMATION

I am by name **Evans Osei Bediako**, a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in Human Development student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). I am currently spending part of my graduate programme in Ghana collecting data on the chosen area of study for my master's degree thesis. The topic of my research is, "**Children's Participation in the Community Decision-Making Process in Ghana**". The study will involve interviewing Traditional leaders, Assembly Members and focus group discussions with students (with consent from their superiors and parents/guardians). The interviews and focus group discussions would be audio recorded so that your responses can accurately be recorded. This would enable the researcher to review the topics and responses later for analysis so not to miss any details. Participation is possible if only you are willing to have the interview or discussions recorded.

BENEFITS

This study is significant in that there have been the perceptions of the larger society about children's rights implementation in Ghana; thinking that a "child should be seen and not heard". Knowing these perceptions will create a new mindset of our society towards children's rights to decision-making and help to understand that "children are human being and not human to become", their views must be respected in the areas that affect their life. More so, very little is known (through research) about children's participation in festival of expression and community decision-making forum, so this study would help in that regard.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participation is anonymous in the sense that your child would not be identified by the name or school of affiliation. All information provided in this study will be held in absolute confidence; the tapes would remain in the custody and control of the researcher always and would not be given out for any purpose to anyone who is not working directly with the researcher. The researcher will not share information which could identify your child with anyone or in publication.

PARTICIPATION

Your child participation is entirely voluntary. If he/she decides to participate, he/she has the right not to answer any question(s) he/she feels uncomfortable with and can withdraw from participation at any time if he/she does not want to continue.

CONTACT

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me at oseibedi@stud.ntnu.no, or by telephone, 0243358558. You can also contact my supervisor, Prof. Berit Johannesen at berit.Johannesen@svt.ntnu.no.

(Signature of Researcher: Evans Osei Bediako)

(Date)

Consent of Parent/Guardian of Student

I certify that the purpose of the study has been thoroughly explained to me in English/mother tongue to my satisfaction and I have received a copy of the consent form. I understand that any information obtained from my ward for this research will be kept confidential. To further ensure privacy, my ward has the option of using a pseudonym. I understand that participation is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which my ward is otherwise entitled and my ward may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which my ward is otherwise entitled.

I agree to allow my ward, _____, to participate in this study.


(Parent's/Guardian's Signature/Initials/thumb Print)

(Date)

APPENDIX D:

Letter of Ethical Clearance from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), Norway

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

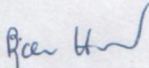
Berit Overå Johannesen
Psykologisk institutt
NTNU
Dragvoll
7491 TRONDHEIM


Vår dato: 26.05.2011 Vår ref: 26875 MSS/LR Deres dato: Deres ref:

AFFIRMATION

The Data Protection Official for Research at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) finds that the processing of personal data in relation to the project *Children's Participation in Community Decision-Making Processes: Empirical Support for Children's Rights in Ghana* is in accordance with the Norwegian Personal Data Act.

Sincerely,


Bjørn Henrichsen


Marie Strand Schildmann

Kontaktperson: Marie Strand Schildmann tlf: 55 58 31 52
Kopi: Osei Bediako Evans, Herman Kraggs veg 33-22, 7050 TRONDHEIM

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:
OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrre.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD, HSL, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. martin-arne.andersen@uit.no