

Teenage girls' perspectives on the value of education and school dropout in northern Ghana

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Abstract

Although international policies related to formal education and their local translations have led to an increased number of enrolment and attendance rates, dropout among teenage girls appears to be persistent in northern Ghana. To tackle the school dropout problem, we need to move beyond access and pay attention to the processes of how and why girls drop out from formal schooling.

This study aims to explore both the value of education according to the girls and the dynamics between the factors that contribute to the school dropout process. It aims to understand how school dropout impacts the lives of teenage girls and why it is important to deal with the issue. In doing so, it intends to create policy recommendations that effectively improve the lives of teenage girls.

This research was carried out in a deprived locality in northern Ghana, where traditional and cultural mind sets as well as the socio-economic situation, seem to characterise people's way of life. The participants of this study consisted of 13 girls between the age of 12 and 18 years old, who went through the process of dropping out of school.

This study drew on the social studies of childhood, which suggests that we perceive child participants as valid informants *with* who research needs to be done. Empirical material was collected by means of 'participant-friendly' methods that were interactive and adjustable to the individual participants and settings. The methods that were used comprise semi-participant observation, storytelling, semi-structured interactive interviews, life mapping and in-depth discussion. Apart from the child participants, three adult informants were included in the study: directors of schools and the local Girl Child Education Coordinator.

Besides key theoretical perspectives from the social studies of childhood, the capability approach was used as a theoretical framework. The key point of the theory is that we can measure a person's well-being based on their freedom to choose the life one values. When an individual acquires capabilities, opportunities will open up, his or her freedom will expand and well-being enhanced. Education through formal schooling is an important space for the girls where capabilities can be acquired and which enhances their well-being.

The findings of this study reveal that dropout occurs as a complex process in which familial, cultural, economic and institutional factors push and pull teenage girls from school. Poverty and household survival strategies, such as migration and work of the girls, constrain the girls' schooling opportunities. Institutional environments further compound the problem. These are in other words, the conversion factors that negatively influence the transformation of educational resources into capabilities.

The value of education according to the girl participants, is high. Formal schooling prepares them to 'become somebody' in the future. The capacities that the girls attain through school, help them to earn an income, to be able to aspire and dream and to stand up for themselves. These capabilities are particularly important for teenage girls to survive and live a decent life in the deprived area in which societal structures constrain their life chances.

It is suggested that in order to improve schooling achievements of teenage girls, policy and intervention programs in Ghana need to address the processes that are happening both at the individual and structural level, and the interconnected factors that shape the processes of dropout.

Table of contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Abstract.....	iii
Table of contents.....	v
List of figures and tables.....	ix
Abbreviations.....	xi

1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background to the study	1
1.2 Motivation	3
1.3 Topic.....	3
1.4 Research aim and objectives.....	4
1.4.1 Aim.....	4
1.4.2 Objectives.....	4
1.5 Research questions	5
1.6 Outline of the thesis	5
2 Background.....	7
2.1 Country profile	7
2.2 The Upper West Region	9
2.2.1 Geographical features.....	9
2.2.2 Socio demographic features	9
2.2.3 Political system	12
2.3 Education	14
2.3.1 Colonial education in the Gold Coast	14
2.3.2 Educational structure.....	15
2.3.3 Enrolment, attendance and completion rates.....	16
2.3.4 Interventions	18
2.4 Host organisation.....	18
3 Theoretical framework	21
3.1 The social studies of childhood: a paradigm shift	21
3.2 Structural perspective	23
3.2.1 Generational perspective and interdependent relationships	24

3.3	Childhood as socially constructed	25
3.4	Structure and agency	26
3.5	Gender perspectives.....	29
3.6	Education as a means for human development: the capability approach	30
3.6.1	The capability approach	32
3.6.2	The capability approach and education	35
3.6.3	Operationalising the capability approach and this study.....	37
3.7	Being/becoming tension	38
3.8	Conclusion	40
4	Methodology and methods.....	41
4.1	Methodological perspectives	41
4.1.1	Conceptualising children in research	41
4.1.2	Qualitative research.....	42
4.1.3	Choice of methods.....	42
4.2	Accessing and entering the field.....	44
4.3	Being involved in a Non-Governmental Organisation	44
4.4	Sampling.....	46
4.4.1	Girls living in the NGO.....	47
4.4.2	Girls working in the market	47
4.4.3	Girls attending Junior High School	48
4.4.4	Adult participants	48
4.5	Methodological reflections	49
4.5.1	Role as an outsider researcher	49
4.5.2	Building rapport	49
4.5.3	Use of an interpreter	50
4.6	Methods	51
4.6.1	Unstructured and semi-participant observation.....	51
4.6.2	Research dairy	52
4.6.3	Naming activity	52
4.6.4	Storytelling	53
4.6.5	Remembering with life mapping.....	53
4.6.6	Semi-structured interactive interview	54

4.6.7	In-depth group discussion	56
4.6.8	Informal dialogues.....	56
4.6.9	Data analysis	57
4.7	Ethical considerations.....	58
4.7.1	Informed consent and voluntary participation	58
4.7.2	Privacy.....	60
4.7.3	Confidentiality.....	61
4.7.4	Sensitivity.....	62
4.7.5	Power imbalance	62
4.7.6	Reciprocity	64
5	Analysis I – the dropout process	65
5.1	Household poverty.....	65
5.1.1	Household poverty, direct costs and opportunity costs.....	66
5.1.2	Livelihood adversity.....	69
5.2	Migration	71
5.2.1	Migration, the family collective and school dropout	73
5.2.2	Migration to deal with livelihood adversity	78
5.3	Institutional circumstances	80
5.3.1	Teachers’ behaviour and school environment.....	80
5.3.2	Academic performance and school facilities.....	83
5.4	Agency versus structure examined.....	84
6	Analysis II – the value of education.....	91
6.1	Education as a means ‘to become somebody’	91
6.1.1	Intrinsic value of education	93
6.2	Being capable to earn an income	94
6.3	Ability to aspire and to dream	95
6.4	Education and the ability to stand up for oneself	97
6.5	Conversion factors	99
7	Conclusion.....	103
7.1	Summary of findings and concluding remarks.....	103
7.1.1	The dropout process	103
7.1.2	Agency	105

7.1.3	The value of education	106
7.1.4	Conversion factors.....	107
7.2	Policy recommendations.....	108
8	References	111
9	Appendices	119

List of figures and tables

Figure 1. Map of Ghana (Dejene, 2008). 8

Figure 2. Map of the UWR (GSS, 2010b)..... 8

Figure 3. Household composition UWR (GSS, 2010b)..... 10

Figure 4. Life mapping activity..... 54

Table 1. Overview development indicators. 13

Table 2. Overview education figures. 17

Table 3. Overview girl participants. 46

Abbreviations

GPI	Gender Parity Index
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
JHS	Junior High School
MICS	Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAR	Net Attendance Rate
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UWR	Upper West Region

1 Introduction

This chapter begins with the background of the research containing its significance in light of the current debates. This is followed by the motivation for choosing this topic. Then it presents a description of the topic of the thesis. After this, the aim of the study, research objectives and questions are presented. The chapter will end with an outline of the different chapters comprising the thesis.

1.1 Background to the study

International policies have been established as an attempt to address the problem of out-of-school children and gender disparity in schools. These include the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All targets. *The World Declaration on Education for All* was adopted at the World Conference on Education for All in March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand. The *Declaration* emphasises the international community's commitment to ensuring the right to education for all people. The conference was a major milestone in international efforts to achieve universal primary education and eliminate adult illiteracy. It was also an inspiration to improve the quality of education and achieve gender equality in education (UNESCO, 1990). Article 1 of the Declaration focussing on basic learning needs, states the core of Education for All movement: 'Every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs' (p. 7). Article 3 of the Declaration is of significance of this study, because it addresses universal access and the promotion of gender equity. It not only states that 'basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults', but also stipulates that 'the most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated' (UNESCO, 1990, p.9).

In September 2000, the Millennium Summit was held at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York. World leaders gathered at the Summit to commit their nations to a global partnership and join forces in reducing extreme poverty and establishing a peaceful and just world (UN, 2000). Eight time-bound goals were set out during the Summit, known as the Millennium Development Goals, and should be achieved in 2015. Millennium Development Goals two and three are particularly significant to this study: 'achieve universal primary education' and 'promote gender

equality and empower women'. These goals overlap with the Education for All targets. The Government of Ghana has used both the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All targets as an impetus for shaping their educational policies. The Ghana School Feeding Programme, the re-entry policy for teenage mothers and the school uniform provision policy for low income households (GoG, 2010), have led to an increase of enrolment and attendance rates in Ghana. However, dropout among teenage girls in northern Ghana appears to be persistent. There are still many teenage girls who are out of school today while they are supposed to be and want to be in school.

Although these international policies and their local translations are good attempts for achieving education for everyone, some argue that these policies tend to focus mainly on universal access to education and to reducing gender disparities in access (Hart, 2012). This thesis goes beyond access to school, and takes a closer look at the specific circumstances of girls, and how and why they drop out from formal schooling. This way, it is possible to detect the constraining conditions that restrain the girls from benefiting optimally from their education and completing their schooling. In addition, this study examines the ability of girls to convert their educational resources into useful skills in such a way that it benefits their well-being (Hart, 2012).

In order to understand why some girls do not complete school, we need to move beyond the figures and examine the individual cases. This study is therefore concerned with more than the inputs, such as teachers and books, and the outputs, such as enrolment rates and completion rates. It rather looks closely at the dynamics between all the factors that contribute to the dropout phenomenon and listens to the voices of girls who went through the dropout process. This way, a holistic understanding of the issue of school dropout can be achieved.

The value of education for girls' well-being is interconnected to the school dropout phenomenon. Education contributes socially, economically and personally to the well-being of girls and consequently, the deprivation of education leads to a decreased well-being. Knowing the value of education explains why it is important for girls to stay in school and as a result why school dropout needs to be prevented. So when we understand how and why girls dropout in combination with the value of education for their well-being, policies can be developed that address the dropout issue effectively and holistically.

While there is much focus in research on educational access and the barriers for females, dropout is often obscured. Statistical data is firstly important for highlighting the dropout problem and locating it at a macro level. However, the processes of dropout and the reasons why and how are hereby not known, which might be more substantial (Hunt, 2008). Hence, this study pays particular attention to the *dropout process*, in combination with the girls' *perspectives on the value of education*. Listening to the voices of dropout girls provides a valuable holistic understanding of the issue. This is a new way of approaching the dropout phenomenon and can bring new insights to policy makers.

1.2 Motivation

One of the motivations for undertaking this research is my previous experience in working as a teacher and volunteer in Uganda and Namibia in Africa. I have worked with marginalised groups of children, such as children living on the streets and in slum areas. The work that I did was always related to the development of children through education and I witnessed cases of school dropout regularly. Looking at the life circumstances of these children and girls in particular, I became inspired to undertake research in order to have a deeper understanding of the main reasons why girls leave schools, and how they perceive their experiences of dropping out. Moreover, I became interested in the way how school dropout affects the lives and futures of girls.

1.3 Topic

The main focus of this study is on the dropout experience of teenage girls in basic education in northern Ghana and the value of education according to them. Girls' education is known to bring forth various social and economic benefits for the family, community and nation. This happens through for instance improved child rearing and increased economic productivity of women. But more importantly, girls' education contributes to both improved well-being of the girls in the here and now and to empowering them. This study inquires the girls' perspectives on the value of education and how it improves their well-being.

School dropout among teenage girls continues to be a frequently recurring issue in northern Ghana and impedes their well-being. School dropout does not happen as a single event, it is rather a result of a complex process. Familial, cultural, institutional, socio-economic and political structures of society interact with the agency of girls to make the dropout happen. By listening to the life stories

of teenage girls and situating it in the particular context in which their lives unfold, this study attempts to understand how the dropout process comes about in northern Ghana.

The age range of the girls participating in the research is 12-18 years old. The research includes 13 child participants and besides that several adult participants such as members of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and directors and teachers of schools.

In order to get a full understanding of the dropout issue and the value of education, I looked at it from different angles by selecting three different samples. I carried out participant-centred methods with 1) girls who dropped out of basic education and joined a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO), through which they rolled back in formal school. The other sample consisted of 2) girls who dropped out of school and who did not role back into school, but who work on the market instead. The last sample 3) comprises girls who are in Junior High School (JHS) and who did not drop out of school though they have had or still have struggles to stay in school.

1.4 Research aim and objectives

1.4.1 Aim

The overall aim of this study is to understand how the school dropout process occurs among teenage girls in northern Ghana. In addition, this study aims to explore the value of education according to the girls. By examining both aspects, we can understand how school dropout impacts the lives of girls and why it is important to deal with the issue. Ultimately, the insights generated open up new possibilities into creating effective policies that benefit the girls optimally.

1.4.2 Objectives

The following objectives were formulated in order to achieve the aim of the study.

- To critically assess the familial, socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors that contribute to the dropout process for girls
 - To explore how the factors contributed or ultimately led to the dropout
 - To explore the emotional, practical and personal consequences of teenage girls dropping out of basic education.
 - To explore the agency of girls within the process of school dropout

- To explore how teenage girls in Wa, northern Ghana, value education
 - To explore the educational or professional aspirations of teenage girls
 - To examine the importance of girls' education and how it helps to achieve what they value in life
 - To investigate the constraining factors of the formation of capabilities through educational resources

1.5 Research questions

In order to fulfil the objectives of this research, the following research questions were formulated.

- What are the familial, socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors that contribute to the basic education dropout process of teenage girls in northern Ghana?
 - What contributory factors and which specific occurring events lead to the dropout of teenage girls?
 - What are the emotional, practical and personal consequences of dropping out of school?
 - How do the girls negotiate their agency within the constraining structures they live in?
- How do the girls value basic education?
 - What are the educational or professional aspirations of the girls?
 - How does basic education help the girls to achieve what they value in life?
 - Which contextual factors constrain the transformation of educational resources into capabilities?

1.6 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is composed of seven chapters. This introductory chapter presents the topic, the study's rationale, aim, objectives and research questions.

Chapter two highlights the background of the locational context where the fieldwork for this study was carried out. Information about the context and research setting is particularly important as it shapes the lives of the participants in certain ways, which this study specifically attempts to explore.

Chapter three continues with the theoretical framework that directed the research approach and was used for interpreting the data and writing the thesis report. The theory that was used, is situated in

the social studies of childhood and the capability approach, which is part of the human development framework.

Chapter four comprises the methodology and methods that were used during and after the fieldwork. These were shaped by the theory and fit a participant-friendly approach. This chapter contains in addition the modifications that were made in the field, the challenges that were encountered and the ethical considerations.

Chapter five includes the first analysis part, which was done according to the empirical data that was generated during the fieldwork. This analysis reveals how the dropout process among teenage girls in northern Ghana plays out. It highlights the familial, socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors that contribute to school dropout. In addition, this chapter explores how the participating girls negotiate their agency within the constraining circumstances in which they live.

Chapter six includes the second analysis part and relates to the value of education according to the participating girls. This chapter presents the capabilities which the girls expressed as valuable in their lives. It also takes a closer look at how the personal, environmental and social contexts of the girls influence the formation of those capabilities.

Chapter seven comprises a summary of the findings accompanied by concluding remarks. As the implications of the conclusion, it finally provides policy recommendations.

2 Background

This chapter provides contextual information on macro and micro level related to the location and topic of the study. Information on socio-economic characteristics of an area is important for understanding the issue of school dropout, which occurs within that specific context.

The chapter first describes the profile of Ghana and specifically the regional context where the research was conducted. Development indicators such as fertility, infant mortality and migration rates are presented. Afterwards, background information on the education system and structure of Ghana are described. Finally, this chapter presents the contextual details concerning the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) from where the fieldwork was carried out.

2.1 Country profile

The Republic of Ghana, formerly known as the Gold Coast, is a country on the West Coast of Africa and is about 238,533 square kilometres big. Figure 1 shows that its neighbouring countries are Côte d'Ivoire to the West, Burkina Faso to the North and Togo to the East. The capital city located on the coast in the South, is Accra with 2.573 million inhabitants. Ghana is divided in ten administrative regions: Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Volta and Western region.

Ghana achieved independence from the United Kingdom on the 6th March 1957, being the first independent sub-Saharan country in the African continent. On the 1st of July 1960 it became a republic with Kwame Nkrumah as its first President. English is the official language, though some other major Ghanaian languages are Akan, Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, Nzema and Hausa (GoG). The current estimated population is 25,758,108 of which nearly 40 percent under 15 years old. Approximately 71 percent is Christian, 18 percent is Muslim and 5 percent practices traditional religions (Factbook).



Figure 1. Map of Ghana (Dejene, 2008).

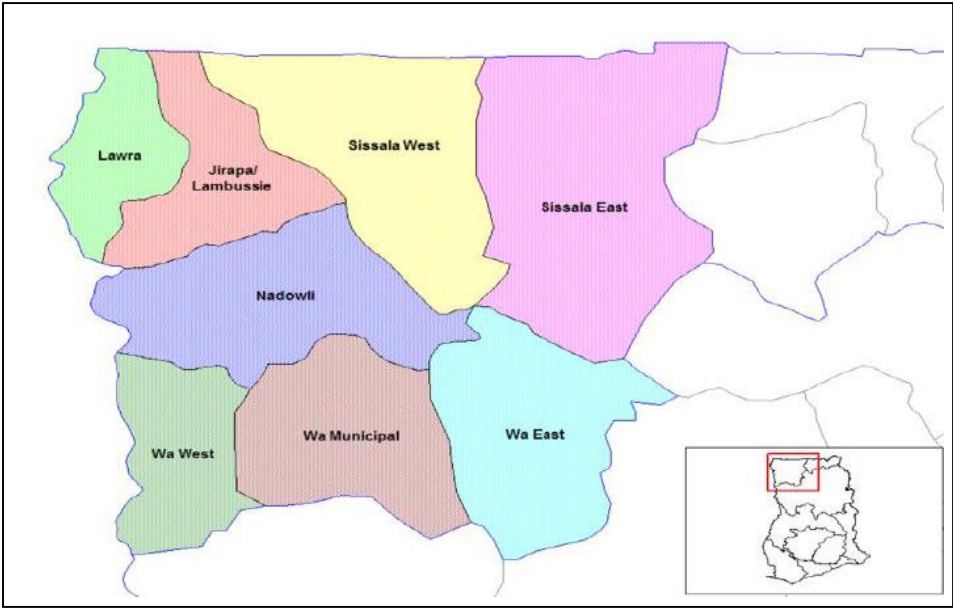


Figure 2. Map of the UWR (GSS, 2010b).

2.2 The Upper West Region

The Upper West Region (UWR) is among the least developed regions in the country (GSS, 2010a) and that is visible in the fertility, mortality, dependency, migration and household figures. These development indicators are used as a way of measuring the quality of life. Akyeampong (2006) stresses the underdeveloped character of northern Ghana as follows, which also well-describes the UWR.

‘Northern Ghana has socio-demographic characteristics typical of many poor deprived communities in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, it is an area with low socio-economic activity, high levels of poverty and scattered community settlements, all of which contribute to undermining access to conventional school systems’ (Akyeampong, 2006, p.215).

Following I will present relevant development indicators abstracted from both national and regional reports of the Ghana Population and Housing Census 2010, which indicate the negative economic implications this region is dealing with.

2.2.1 Geographical features

The UWR borders with Burkina Faso to the north, the Upper East Region to the east, the Northern Region to the south and with Côte d’Ivoire to the west. The UWR consists of nine administrative districts and has Wa as its capital, located in the district Wa Municipal. The UWR has only one rainy season from April to September, followed by a dry season with harmattan winds from early November to March and after that an intense hot weather that lasts until April. Maximum temperatures are 40°C and minimum temperatures are 20°C.

2.2.2 Socio demographic features

The population size was with 702,110 persons in 2010, 48.6% males and 51.4% females, the lowest of the 10 regions in Ghana. The population is relatively young with 41.7% aged less than 15 years. Wa Municipal district has the largest population size compared to the other districts in the UWR (GSS, 2010b).

The major ethnic groups in the UWR are the Dagaba who live in the western part, the Sisaala who live in the eastern part and the Wala who live in Wa and surrounding villages. While the Dagaba

and Sisaala are mostly Christians, most Wala are Muslim. The biggest languages of the UWR are Dagaare, Sissali, Wale and Lobi. All ethnic groups except for one are patrilineal, whereby individuals belong to the father's lineage.

Household composition

Household sizes in the UWR are high with an average of 6.2 persons living together compared to 4.4 on national level. The heads of households are predominantly male; male-headed households constitute about three times as many as female-headed households in the UWR (GSS, 2010b). The phenomena polygamy, male-headed households and patrilineal systems in the UWR are persistent. And through these phenomena, men's power, status and privileges are maintained. In other words, women and girl children are marginalised groups in the households of the UWR's male-dominated society (Bowen, 2013).

Figure 3 represents a household composition in the UWR. It shows that 15% constitutes household heads and 55.5% spouses and children. 28.5% consists of parents, son/daughters-in-law, grandchildren, brothers/sisters, step children, adopted/foster children, other relatives and non-relatives. This reveals that a significant proportion of the household is extended family members who live with the nuclear family. The extended family system plays an important role in sharing resources in the UWR (GSS, 2010b).

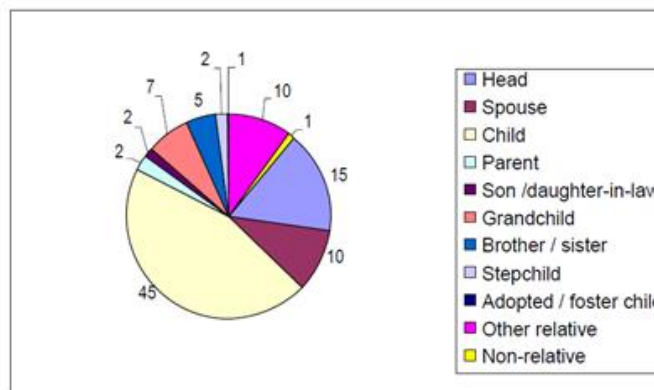


Figure 3. Household composition UWR (GSS, 2010b).

Economy

The UWR has an agricultural based economy. Farming and cattle rearing are the major economic activities in the region and are mostly done on family basis. Cultivation of crops such as maize, quinoa corn, millet, yam, rice, soya beans, groundnuts, shea butter and cotton is done both for household consumption and to produce cash crops. Manufacturing such as spinning, weaving and smock designing are activities that people are involved in as well (GoG). More males (77%) than females (68%) are employed in agriculture while the percentage of females employed in manufacturing (14%) was higher than males (3.2%) in 2010 (GSS, 2010b).

Dependency ratio

The dependency ratio of the UWR was 91.0 in 2010, this is far higher than the national ratio of 44.3. The dependency ratio compares the non-working dependent population, aged under 15 years old and above 65 years old, to the population of capable working people aged between 15 and 65 years old. This supposedly means there is a large non-working population that is economically dependent on a relatively small working population (GSS, 2010b). The high dependency ratio is linked to the fact that the UWR consists of a large young population. One should bear in mind though that many children aged under 15 years old are economically active and not completely economically dependent, even though they fall under the dependent population.

More than half of the population of 15 years and older (59.5%) of the UWR was not literate in 2010, this percentage is more than twice as high as the national average of 25.9%. The level of illiteracy was higher for females (66.5%) than for males (51.5%). Wa Municipal is the district with the highest level of literacy, with 71.9% for males and 52.4% for females (GSS, 2010b).

Fertility and mortality

Fertility rates in the UWR are with 5.48 in 2010 the second highest of all regions in Ghana, the national average fertility rate is 4.57. The fertility rate is the assumed average number of children that are born to a woman over her lifetime (GSS, 2010a). A high fertility rate means a rapid population growth and a large economically dependent population. An implication is that it is difficult for large families to provide for the basic needs of all the children.

Infant mortality and under-five- mortality are good indicators of the health status of a region and are known to be higher in less developed areas with poor health status (GSS, 2010b). Infant

mortality in 2010 in the UWR was 81 deaths per 1,000 live births compared to 59 on national level. The under-five mortality was 128 deaths compared to 90 nationally. Children in the UWR were exposed to the highest risk of dying of all regions in Ghana (GSS, 2010a).

Migration

In-migration rates are rates of people moving into an area and out-migration rate is the reverse. The UWR had the highest out-migration rate (28%) in 2010 and belongs to the regions with the lowest in-migration rate (6.3%). This leads to a negative net migration rate of -302.50 persons per 1000 who migrate, and an -70.7% Migration Effectiveness Ratio (MER). Thus in the UWR, nearly 71 persons migrate out of the region for every 100 persons that migrate in total. The UWR has the most ineffective MER of the country opposed to the region Greater Accra with the most effective MER of 66.4% (GSS, 2010a). Thus, the UWR will lose population over time and, for instance, Greater Accra will become a net in-migration area (GSS, 2010a).

In conclusion, the socio-demographic characteristics of northern Ghana and the UWR in particular, are disadvantageous compared to the rest of the country and especially to the south of Ghana. The socio-economic challenges this area faces affect the quality of education and make it difficult for many children to access and participate in school (Akyeampong, 2004).

2.2.3 Political system

The main administrative structure in the UWR is the Regional Coordination Council. The Regional Coordination Council is headed by the Regional Minister. Representatives from each District Assembly, regional heads of local ministries and representatives of the Regional House of Chiefs, are other members of the Regional Coordination Council. Each district is administered by a District Assembly, which is headed by a Chief Executive nominated by the President and approved by the Assembly members. The rest are selected by the central government in consultation with local leaders (GSS, 2010b).

An important institution of traditional governance in Ghana is chieftaincy, which plays a significant role in socio-economic development practices like security, justice, health and finance, in communities (Odotei & Awedoba, 2006). Chieftaincy has gone through many transformations as Ghana has been going through numerous phases. It faced challenges and needed to adapt to new demands (Odotei & Awedoba, 2006). Today, chieftaincy has a place in the governance of Ghana

as well as in traditional rule. Some chiefs are active in the Regional or National House of Chiefs. They represent their area of authority and advise the central government on cultural and customary laws. Besides that, they are ‘the bearers of the essential culture of Ghana’ (Brempong, 2006, p.40). Chiefs organise various popular festivals in their area where traditional rulers, government officials, ambassadors and development organisations come together. During these festivals, the traditional rulers bring under attention the facilities that are needed for the development of a certain local community. The festivals are the means for mobilising resources for development and a reminder of the vital elements of Ghana’s culture (Brempong, 2006).

Colonial and post-colonial governments emphasised the role of the woman as solely domestic and their traditional authority in the public domain was minimised. However, in pre-colonial times, women’s power and authority were well recognised. Western norms of male superiority undermined the traditional system and the position of chief is now most occupied by men (Odotei, 2006). Nevertheless, women are engaged in chieftaincy and debates and negotiations for achieving gender equity in traditional leadership are on-going. The title ‘queen mother’ is introduced for a woman who is engaged in traditional governance structures nowadays (Odotei, 2006).

Table 1. Overview development indicators.

Indicator	Upper West Region	Ghana	Greater Accra region
Dependency ratio	91.0	44.3	
Not literate	59.5% (f:66.5%, m:51,5%)	25.9%	
Fertility rate	5.48	4.57	
Infant mortality (per 1000 live births)	81	59	
Under-five mortality (per 1000 live births)	128	90	
Migration Effectiveness Ratio (MER)	-70.7%		66.4%

2.3 Education

This part describes the history of the expansion of basic education in Ghana during colonial period and the educational reforms that took place. This is important to know in order to understand why the current structure is the way it is today. As well as why there is an imbalance between northern and southern Ghana and boys and girls. After that, this part elaborates on current figures related to education and school dropout as well as interventions concerning schooling that the government has put in place.

2.3.1 Colonial education in the Gold Coast

The current basic education structure and curriculum is rooted in the colonial past of Ghana, the Gold Coast, in the nineteenth century. The provision and expansion of education during colonial period was both done by the colonial regime in order to sustain their functioning and by the Christian missionaries in order to carry out their missionary activity (Akyeampong, Djangmah, Oduro, Seidu, & Hunt, 2007). Ideas about women's duties in the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth century in England were reflected in education in the Gold Coast: girls needed to be trained to become good wives and mothers. Aims of girls' schooling were thus rather obtaining domestic skills than intellectual development (Graham, 2013). In other words, colonial schools offered classical education whereby discriminatory structures were maintained, excluding women from the educational ladder and the work place (Goff, 2013). The purpose of education organised by the Colonial rule was to train the population to communicate with colonizers at the work place and to build infrastructures to facilitate the exploitation of resources. Thus, there was no need to educate girls since they worked in the home (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). The missionary bodies started their work in the nineteenth century in Cape Coast and were concerned with training teachers, artisans and preachers through religious based education. In the 1840s, the mission schools were producing good results and the number of Cape Coast schools was increasing. Coastal regions which had a history of trade with Europe, housed significantly more schools than the inland regions (Graham, 2013). Education was in that time for children of Africans in the upper class society: mulatto¹ children, children of chiefs and of wealthy merchants, traders and

¹ Mulatto children are children born from one white European parent and one black African parent.

professionals. Although few girls schools were established by the missionaries, parents often kept the girls at home to help in running the affairs at home (Graham, 2013).

In 1945, the colonial government set into action a 10-year education expansion plan which intended to achieve universal primary education within 25 years. The Accelerated Development Plan was launched in 1951 and aimed to accomplish Universal Primary Education for all by producing a basic education structure and abolishing tuition fees. After independence, efforts to make basic education free continued. All these policies contributed to a rapid expansion of access to basic education (Akyeampong et al., 2007). However, European notions about the role of women persisted and male enrolment was higher than female enrolment (Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004).

Akyeampong (2006) explains how the enrolment figures did not increase as much in the north as in the south of Ghana. This was due to the fact that there could not be supplied a sufficient amount of trained teachers for all the children that enrolled. Trained teachers availability and the certainty that facilities would be fully utilised were the main quality assurance indicators (Akyeampong et al., 2007). Hence, concerns about the quality of education emerged in the politics and policies of primary education development, which halted the rapid growth. This was mostly noticeable in northern Ghana where the population density is low. Thus, northern Ghana was disadvantaged since the early stages of education development regarding primary expansion (Akyeampong, 2006).

In 1987, major educational reforms took place which restructured the school system. In the old educational system, the pre-tertiary education 'lasted for 17 years and was considered inefficient, highly selective and marginalising the poor' (Addae-Mensdah, 2000 in Akyeampong, 2006, p 230). The length of pre-tertiary education was reduced from 17 to 12 years: from 6 years of primary, 4 of middle and 7 of secondary schooling to 6 years of primary, 3 for junior secondary and 3 for senior secondary.

2.3.2 Educational structure

The *2007 National Education Reform* programme produced the *2008 Education Act* (MoE, 2010) and organised the system of education in a slightly different way than the previous structure. The Education Act states that the education system consists of three levels: basic education, secondary

cycle and tertiary education. Basic education is divided into three elements: two years of Kinder Garten, six years of Primary School and three years of Junior High School (JHS). At the end of JHS, the pupils sit for the national Basic Education Certificate Examination in order to obtain access to Secondary School. Education at the basic level, until JHS, is free and compulsory. The second cycle level of education consists of four years of senior high school or vocational education (GHANA, 2008).

2.3.3 Enrolment, attendance and completion rates

The number out-of-school children and girls has been reduced remarkably as the Ghana Education Service (GSS) has been putting effort in interventions regarding this issue. I will come back to these interventions later on in this chapter.

The figures in this chapter are extracted from the Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2011, published by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS). The MICS is an international household survey programme developed by UNICEF and provides up-to-date information on the situation of children, women and men (GSS, 2011).

The Report on Basic Statistics and Planning Parameters for Basic Education in Ghana 2012/2013 was used as well. This report is the effort of the Ministry of Education (MoE) of Ghana and contains data on basic education (MoE, 2013b).

Net enrolment (NER)² and net attendance (NAR)³ ratios of girls have increased over the years on both national and regional level. NER of girls in Primary School are even exceeding rates of boys in the UWR: 86.2% girls enrolled in Primary School in 2012/2013 compared to 81.9% boys. The enrolment rate of the UWR overall is with 84% the same as the national level. In JHS, the enrolment rates in the UWR (35%) are still behind on the national level (47.8%). The enrolment rate of girls in JHS (34.8%) is slightly behind on boys (35.2%) in the school year 2012/2013 (MoE, 2013b). The Primary School Net attendance rate was in 2011 higher for girls (68.4%) than for boys (62.1%) in the UWR (GSS, 2011).

² NER is the number of enrolled students in the official age group in a particular class expressed as a percentage of the total population in the age group that officially should be enrolled.

³ NAR is the number of students in the official age group attending an educational institution in a particular class expressed as a percentage of the total number of students in the age group.

In the school year 2012/2013, the enrolment Gender Parity Index (GPI)⁴ was in favour of girls in both Primary School (1.05) and JHS (1.06) in the UWR. Meaning that more girls enrolled in Primary School and JHS than boys (MoE, 2013b).

We can see that more girls than boys are enrolling and attending Primary School in the UWR. Furthermore, almost the same amount of girls as boys are enrolling in JHS. Yet, completion rates of girls in both Primary School and JHS are lower than boys both nationally and in the UWR. Nationally, 83.3% girls complete Primary School compared to 96.4% boys. Completion rate in the UWR is 82.2% compared to 89.9% nationally (GSS, 2011). 61% girls living in the UWR complete JHS compared to 67.3% boys. When we look at the literacy rate among young people, the literacy rate among young women in Ghana is with 61.4% significantly lower than young men with 71.3% (GSS, 2011).

These numbers indicate that many girls do enrol and attend school, but have a difficult time staying in school. Girls are still behind on boys when it comes to completing their schooling. In other words, the dropout phenomenon among girls is the biggest challenge at the moment, especially in JHS.

Table 2. Overview education figures.

	Net enrolment		Net attendance		Enrolment GPI		Completion	
	PS	JHS	PS	JHS	PS	JHS	PS	JHS
National	84%	47.8%					89.9%	
National girls							83.3%	
National boys							96.4%	
UWR	84%	35%			1.05	1.06	82.2%	
UWR girls	86.2%	34.8%	68.4%					61%
UWR boys	81.9%	35.2%	62.1%					67.3%

⁴ GPI is the quotient of the number of females by the number of males enrolled in a certain level of education.

2.3.4 Interventions

A number of activities aimed to promote gender parity at the basic education level and they have been achieved largely (GSS, 2010a). Interventions were put into place by the MoE. These included scholarships for girls, to support with school uniforms, school sandals, schoolbags and stationary. Mentoring camps and awards were organised to build confidence and motivation. Camps for girls and boys were organised to promote positive attitudes towards female education and to gain skills such as communication and decision making (MoE, 2013a).

2.4 Host organisation

A local NGO was the host organisation for my stay, which name is kept anonym in this thesis. Access to research participants was partly obtained through this organisation.

The NGO was founded in 2005 and offers healthcare, education and shelter to children and youths in the UWR. The mission of the NGO is to do everything in their power to help children in need in the community, particularly street girls who are most vulnerable in society. The objective is to educate the admitted girls as good and responsible citizens with their own opinion, in an African traditional way.

The NGO has a support foundation in The Netherlands and an executive organisation in the capital of the UWR, Wa. The foundation in the Netherlands secures funding and recruits volunteers. The executive organisation in Wa owns land on which they have built a compound with several buildings. Over 40 vulnerable girls between the age of 6 and 18 years old live in the compound. A hostel for volunteers as well as offices are also located on the compound. Several employees work on the compound, among which mothers with caring and cooking tasks and security staff.

Whether a child can be admitted to the NGO or not is in the first place to decide by the Department of Social Welfare in Wa, part of the Ministry of Gender. This department investigates the background of the child. If the background and the environment of the child endangers the development or life of the child, the child will be reported to the NGO. If the capacity is available and the requirements for admission are met, the child will be admitted and funding for the child will be sought in the Netherlands. The requirements are: the child must attend school, has to be tested negative for HIV/AIDS, must have regular contact with the family during holidays and must

possess a health insurance ID and a birth certificate or weighing card. Children are allowed by the Ghanaian law to stay on the compound until they are 18 years old or until they complete JHS.



Host organisation in Wa.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter firstly presents the social studies of childhood. It describes relevant concepts and theoretical perspectives, starting with the structural and generational perspective linked to interdependent relationships. This is followed by the debate around the concepts structure and agency, childhood as socially constructed and gender perspectives.

After that, the chapter presents the capability approach as a framework for human development, in which a focus on what people are actually able to do or to be is central. It first sets out the capability approach, then explains the relation with education and with this study. This theoretical chapter then delves into the discussion around the being/becoming tension and concludes with a comparison between the two theoretical frameworks used in the thesis.

3.1 The social studies of childhood: a paradigm shift

In order to design, analyse and conceptualise this thesis and my data material, I made use of theoretical perspectives derived from the social studies of childhood and the capability approach. The point of departure in this theoretical chapter is the social studies of childhood. The social studies of childhood as a theoretical framework shaped the methodology and methods of this study as well as it influenced the way how the data was analysed. This part starts with the paradigm shift that took place within the social studies of childhood as a background to the framework.

Childhood has always existed as a phenomenon in society; it is not a new invention. However, substantial changes surrounding the way how children and childhood is perceived, have taken place (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The social studies of childhood as a field of study the way it is today and how it is used in this thesis, has emerged during the 1980s. Several new conceptions and approaches to children and childhood came into view during a paradigm shift. A paradigm is a pattern of thoughts within a field of study and contains assumptions, principles and information about what constitutes a phenomenon and instruction about the best way to find out more about that phenomenon (Kuhn 1970 in James et al., 1998). Before new notions about children and childhood became prominent, the dominant framework consisted of developmental and socialisation theories. The focus was on children as irrational, natural and universal creatures who needed to be socialised in order to be able to participate in the adult's world. Universalistic ideas of child development linked to biological aspects dominated, in which little account was taken of

a cultural component. Children were viewed as passive in their progression of becoming an adult and there was no space for the individuality of the child. The curiosities and activities of children were only of interest in relation to the adults they would eventually become (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013; James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1997).

During the 1980s, the focus shifted from children as *becomings*, to children as *beings* (James et al., 1998; James & Prout, 1997). Researchers in a range of disciplines, such as anthropology, psychology, human geography and sociology, began to pay attention to children's own views and experiences as a being in the here and now (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013). The child is now seen as a person with a set of needs and rights. This was consolidated with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) that was ratified by almost all nations of the world, viewing children as holders of separate rights and as claiming these rights from society (Kjørholt, 2004). This human being can be researched in its own right and does not have to be approached from an assumed lack of competence, rationality or significance (James et al., 1998). In other words, the child is a social actor with agency, who shapes its own childhood experiences. Meaning that children can express their wishes and their interactions have an effect on a relationship, a decision and the lives around them (Mayall, 2002). I will elaborate more extensively on the concepts agency and social actor later in this chapter.

The emergence of a new paradigm took place, in which the discovery of children as agents was made (James et al., 1998). The new framework through which children and childhood are understood in their own right became known as the new social studies of childhood. By now, the new paradigm has become the dominant framework (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013) and is therefore called the social studies of childhood in this thesis.

Within the social studies of childhood, there are three overarching perspectives or approaches to study childhood as a social phenomenon. These are 1) an actor-centred sociology, 2) a (de)constructive sociology and 3) a structural sociology (Alanen, 2005). The focus in the different approaches is respectively on the experiences of individual children, on childhood as culturally constructed and on childhood as a permanent element in society. The first two perspectives are actor-oriented and childhoods are here diverse and plural. Whereas the structural perspective sees childhood as a singular phenomenon (Alanen, 2005). The last two approaches are significant to this study and therefore discussed in more detail as follows.

3.2 Structural perspective

The structural perspective in the social studies of childhood is concerned with the macro-level contexts, social structures and mechanisms in which childhood is manifested and which shape manifestations (Alanen, 2005). Within the structural approach is embedded the generational perspective, which is also highlighted here as it is significant to this study.

Structure refers to both social institutions and relational components of society (James & James, 2012) and this subchapter focusses first on childhood as a social institution. Childhood is within the structural perspective perceived as a form or space in society that is influenced and changed by societal changes or ‘macro-parameters’ of childhood, such as political, social, cultural and technological parameters (Qvortrup, 2009b). The approach does not look forward to adults nor does it study the individual child. It rather focusses on the social form in society that is occupied by children. Qvortrup (2009b) argues that children enter this social space from birth and leave it again at a certain age to pass it on to other children. But they do not leave it the same way as they found it: childhood always changes. Changes in the social form of childhood take place due to societal changes rather than individual activities or plans. Qvortrup (2009a, 2009b) argues furthermore that although children make a difference, their activities do not contribute significantly to societal changes. Within the structural perspective, noteworthy societal changes are seen as a result of adults’ interventions. However, on other levels, such as the familial level, children have potentially more input. But the structural perspective is not so concerned with that.

Childhood is ‘the result of strength relations between prevailing parameters, which must all be counted as structural forces’ (Qvortrup, 2009a, p. 25). These parameters interact with each other and its values change. As a result, childhood changes as well, as it is the outcome of these parameters. Nevertheless, childhood exhibits continuity because its forming parameters are in principle the same ones: every society will always have an economic parameter, as well as an political, technological, social and cultural one (Qvortrup, 2009b). In other words, childhood is both changing and a permanent structural form in which all children spend a period of personal experiences (Qvortrup, 2009a).

The structural perspective on childhood is important in order to gain insights that are not produced by the more actor-centred perspectives. The parameters of society influence children’s lives, without actually involving children. The way how this happens is of great significance and can be

examined through the structural perspective (Qvortrup, 2009a). Although the structural perspective is not the main perspective of this study, it is partly relevant and important to bear in mind. While my focus is on individual life stories, the girls' lives in this study are influenced and shaped by structural forces. Such as familial, cultural and socio-economic structures. Their individual lives cannot not be understood without situating it within the societal structures in which their lives unfold.

3.2.1 Generational perspective and interdependent relationships

Childhood is not only a structural form which is influenced by other structures, it is also a social group through which social relations and transactions take place. It is in other words a relational or generational component of society (James & James, 2012). Generation can be defined as 'a group of people who belong to an age-based category' (James & James, 2012, p. 62). Alanen (2001) goes further to explain that generation is a socially constructed system of relationships 'in which children and adults are the holders of specific social positions defined in relation to each other and constituting, in turn, specific (generational) structures' (p. 12). Thus, the social phenomenon of childhood is shaped by and shapes the structural and relational complex of generation.

Alanen (2005) argues that 'childhood is an essentially generationally defined social condition' (p. 287). Thus, the childhood phenomenon is in nature relational. Children are born into families and spend a substantial amount of time of their lives with parents, children and maybe grandparents and other extended family members. They grow up within these generationally structured 'units' (Alanen, 2005). Generationing of children's social relationships is a process in which some individuals become 'children' and others become 'adults'. As a consequence, belonging to a particular generational group matters in terms of activities, opportunities, experiences, identities and relationships between the generational categories (Alanen, 2001).

Relationships between generations, such as children and adults, are interdependent. Parents may for instance depend on their children for care in old age while children may depend on their parents for provision of basic needs. Actions of one group influence the actions of the other group and vice versa. However, the relationship is not necessarily symmetrical in both directions (Alanen, 2001). Interdependent relations are also present between children and extended family members. Abebe (2013) argues that relationships within families in rural Ethiopia are reciprocal and children grow up keeping complex responsibilities towards the family. Children are 'interdependent beings whose

daily livelihoods are intricately entwined with and are inseparable from that of the family collective' (Abebe, 2013, p. 72).

The extent to which children can exercise agency, that is, to have the power to influence and control events in their lives, derives from the social organisation of generational relations (Alanen, 2001). In general, children have an inferior position in relation to more powerful adults. But children can develop strategies to resist adult control and negotiate the interdependent generational power relations. Intra-generational relations influence agency of children as well whereby the hierarchy of siblings plays a big role (Punch, 2007). And as this study will show, the gendered division among siblings have an effect on the amount of power children are able to exercise in their lives and lives around them. Thus, inter-generational relations and intra-generational relations are structures that have an influence on the agency of individual children. These relations are rather dynamic and change when transformations in households take place and in which power relations are constantly negotiated (Punch, 2007).

3.3 Childhood as socially constructed

The main approach of this study is within the perspective of childhood as socially constructed, which allows me to combine the structural and the actor-centred perspective. The six key features of the paradigm of the social studies of childhood were stated by James and Prout (1997). The first feature is crucial to this study explaining the socially constructed viewpoint and reads as follows.

‘Childhood is understood as a social construction. As such it provides an interpretive frame for contextualising the early years of human life. Childhood, as distinct from biological immaturity, is neither a natural nor universal feature of human groups but appears as a specific structural and cultural component of many societies’ (James & Prout, 1997, p. 8).

This means that childhood is common to all children but also varies across and between cultures and generations. Childhood is characterised by basic physical and developmental patterns and is a certain stage of the life course everywhere in the world. However, the ways in which this phase of the life course is interpreted and understood varies between contexts and is influenced by societal structures (James & James, 2004). Children are not always and everywhere the same thing; they are socially and culturally constructed (Jenks, 2005). Consequently, the needs children have,

activities they are able to undertake, ideas about what children are like and the risks they face differ between contexts (James & James, 2004). This perspective argues that notions of childhood need to be deconstructed and analysed within the specific conditions they are situated in, so that a deep understanding of the particular childhood can be reconstructed. My view is in line with what Kjørholt (2004) argues, that a social constructed approach opens up a possibility for broader analyses of the cultural and socio-economic context related to the local context of the study and the individual dispositions of children. It also gives space to the historical conditions that brought about the particular contexts.

This study is carried out in a society with particular values, traditions, cultural, social and economic structures that shape the girls' livelihood opportunities and constraints. Within these societal structures, every individual girl lives her life in different familial and financial circumstances. This study explores the economic, cultural and social structural challenges that facilitate school dropout. At the same time, the girls have an opinion, exercise agency and to some extent have power to influence their lives, the lives around them and society. So the structural perspective is important to take into account as well as the actor-centred perspective. I view childhood as culturally constructed and therefore listen to the voice of the individual girl while simultaneously examining the contextual circumstances in order to comprehend how the phenomenon school dropout is constructed.

3.4 Structure and agency

With the paradigm shift, the focus of research changed from viewing children as 'adults-in-the-making' to children as human beings who possess agency and need to be researched in their own right (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013). Some argue that the concepts agency and social actor are often not clearly explained in the sense of what it really means for different groups of children (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Children as social actors means merely that they are persons who do something. Mayall (2002) goes further to explain that an agent is someone who in addition of doing something, makes changes happen and contributes to wider processes of social and cultural reproduction in doing so. Thus, seeing children as social actors acknowledges the fact that children are active in the construction of their own lives. Seeing children as agents however, recognises the part they play in the lives of people around them and the societies they live (Mayall, 2002). In other words, agency may be conceptualised as the capacity of individuals to exercise change in their lives, lives

around them and to some extent in society (James & James, 2012). Acknowledging that children are social actors who possess agency, implies that children are competent and independent human beings who shape their own childhoods. This new perception of children has created ‘tensions between recognising children’s agency versus acknowledging their position of vulnerability in a context of extreme structural constraints, such as acute poverty’ (Tisdall & Punch, 2012, p. 256). I will delve into the debate about agency and structural forces of society, connected to the concepts competence, dependency and autonomy.

A structural perspective highlights the dependency of childhood as a segment in society. On the other hand, a constructionist perspective is more concerned with individual dispositions and with the ability of a child to act independently within the societal structures. A child who possesses agency is understood to be able to act against customs independently as competent and self-possessed social actors, in order to bring change (Lee, 2001). Dichotomies of children as autonomous and competent *or* vulnerable and dependent could be a result from the opposing viewpoints. But simply stating that children possess agency can be problematic according to Lee (2001). Because it denies, for instance, the biological and psychological immaturity of children that influences agency, as well as the social and cultural circumstances in which children’s actions unfold. Lee (2001) argues that one should not assume that agency is a simple possession. Instead of asking whether children possess agency or not, we must ask ‘how agency is built or may be built for them by examining the extensions and supplements that are available to them’ (Lee, 2001, p. 131). To do so, we need to study children’s lives and actions situated in the particular set of circumstances they live in and as located in a network of interdependent relations with family and others (James & James, 2012). Kjørholt (2004) argues similarly that a simplified way of looking at the different viewpoints of structure and agency overlooks contextual aspects like the complex social practices in which children as well as adults, develop competencies (Kjørholt, 2004). Children, as much as adults, are capable and autonomous in some situations, while being vulnerable and dependent human beings in other situations (Abebe & Kjørholt, 2009).

So, the concepts structure and agency are not necessarily a dichotomy within the social studies of childhood and are in fact interrelated (Qvortrup, 2009b). Structure and agency can play together at the same time or even complement each other when looking at both, in order to understand the lives of children (James et al., 1998). The individual child acts as an agent of his or her own life

and its activity is a source of social change. However, this happens within the collectivity of children as a social institution or structural form in society. One needs to recognise both the uniqueness of the individual's childhood as well as its commonality as a life course phase. A theoretical space needs to be created for the activity of children within childhood as a social institution and the constraints and possibilities that the institutional level creates (James & James, 2004; James & Prout, 1997).

Klocker, Robson, and Bell (2007) suggest that agency is 'an individual's own capacities, competencies, and activities through which they (children) navigate the contexts and positions of their life worlds, fulfilling many economic, social, and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual/collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives' (Klocker et al., 2007, p. 135). This meaning of agency captures the capabilities of individual children as well as the contextual conditions they have to deal with at the same time. In the context of the developing world, the concept agency needs to be viewed in relation to their 'family contexts, livelihood opportunities or constraints and interpersonal relationships' (Abebe, 2013, p. 75). These structural factors play an important role in shaping the personal agency of children as well as the choices they make. Abebe (2013) argues that children can be simultaneously dependent and independent with regard to different aspects of their social worlds. Children's agency might be more limited at some social arenas than others, depending on authority, rights, abilities, knowledge, responsibilities and so on (Abebe, 2013; Klocker et al., 2007; Punch, 2007). Thus, social, economic and political structures that shape livelihood opportunities and constraints, such as family contexts, institutions, traditions and values of society, are interrelated with the agency of children (Abebe, 2013). In other words, children may be limited in exerting agency independently in some situations due to context specific influences that relate to with whom they are, where they are and what they are doing (Bell & Payne, 2009).

The girls in this study are 'social actors whose relative abilities to exercise agency are rooted within 'structures' that can be either enabling or constraining' (Abebe & Kjörholt, 2009, p. 177 & 178). The dropout experience of the girls is highly influenced by economic, political, cultural and familial structural forces of society as well as interdependent relationships within the family context. These social institutions and relational aspects may design the circumstances in such a way that few agency could be exercised by the girls, or in a way that their agency is subordinate to the familial

circumstances. Collective concerns also shape the girls' educational aspirations and their choices, which, in turn, influence their future life chances. Where the welfare of the family collective is dominant over one's individual concerns, individual aspirations and choices need to be negotiated in connection with the collectivity. Some of the girls may not be able to aspire big in terms of education and professions, because the family's concerns come first. In the context of this study, the challenging influences that societal structures have on the family collective require social and economic contributions of the girls. This affects their choices and as a consequence, their future life chances. A girl may for instance choose to work and contribute financially to the household instead of going to secondary school. This choice will help the family collective, but may limit her future outcomes as she will not be able to pursue a professional occupation. The interaction of constraining structures and little agency may lead to school dropout, which highly influences educational aspirations and choices of the girls.

3.5 Gender perspectives

Gender relates to the way in which maleness and femaleness are understood and experienced in society (James & James, 2012). It is something that 'individuals come to acquire in and through the interactions that take place within their sociocultural environments' (Gallacher & Kehily, 2013, p. 221). The way in which children acquire gender identities can, therefore, be studied. Although this was not a research objective in this study, I highlight this topic briefly here in order to fully comprehend the relationship between gender and education later on.

Thorne (1990) highlights the importance of the social context in research on children and gender identity. Studies of sex differences need to attend to variations in society and culture in order to understand how gender shapes the social identity of children (Thorne, 1990). Gender is not the sole factor that shapes social identity; other social divisions such as age, race, ethnicity, social class, religion and individual characteristics are other factors that interact with gender and shape a child's experience of gender identity (Thorne, 1990). In addition, it is often the intersection of these different social variables that play out differently in children's (or girls') educational outcomes.

Dhar (2014) explains how gender does not function in isolation. It interacts in complex ways with many other dimensions of social identity such as, in addition to the former mentioned, geographical location, the rural-urban divide and nationality (Dhar, 2014). These factors are social structures that shape a child's social identity and the way he or she experiences maleness or femaleness

(James & James, 2012). Gendered identities may change for instance as children grow older, which implies that it is not a fixed state and influenced by other factors.

In this study, the structures of age, social class, geographical location, and so forth, interact with the gender aspect to shape gender identities of the girls. These gender identities highly influence the girls' schooling maintenance. For instance, the social class to which the interviewed girls belong is low, with challenging financial circumstances. The intersection of household poverty with gender results in constraints of girls' school maintenance. These constraints relate to the direct costs of education and moreover, the opportunity costs of girls going to school. This study shows that the broader socio-economic, political and cultural structures of society interact with the gender aspect to shape gender identities and to influence girls' education. Education of these girls is situated within the larger context of society in which context-specific gender roles may impact girls' educational opportunities negatively (Dhar, 2014) and lead to dropout. Although the girls are constrained by gendered norms, they also participate in and negotiate the implementation of these norms (Risman & Myers, 1997). Thus, adults and society provide role models and the girls participate in the process as social actors and may be able to exercise agency to a smaller or larger extent, depending on the specific context and the actors involved. Some of the girls are able to counteract to the gendered norms and practices and shape their gender identity in such a way that it does not have negative effects on their education.

As we can understand, gender is socially constructed and there is an evident relationship between gender and education (Dhar, 2014). Gender must be seen in relation to other context-specific social structures of society in order to understand how it negatively influences the girls' education. This study explores how gender positions girls in their household, family, community and society and how this influences their dropout experience.

3.6 Education as a means for human development: the capability approach

While the interaction of gender and context-specific circumstances may impact girls' education opportunities negatively, the positive influences of education on girls are possibly great and essential. Women's education is often explained as a means to a larger end. It is seen to contribute to the welfare of the family through improved child health, reduced maternal mortality and better child rearing practices. Women's education also contributes in this view to the economic and social development of family, community and nation as well as to the reduction in global inequality due

to for instance a greater investment of income in the family and increased productivity of the labour force (Dhar, 2014). In other words, the education of women is in this approach for others and not for themselves and fits in the human capital perspective. The human capital perspective sees schooling as a means for developing qualities in persons that enhance economic productivity and economic growth (Unterhalter, 2005). But women's education does not just contribute to human capital; it also adds to human capability.

A rights-based approach focusses on securing an individual's rights and is therefore a strategic tool in securing capabilities (Hart, 2014). Rights-based research with children acknowledges the fact that children are social actors and encourages the empowerment of children. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) provides a framework for rights-based research. The UNCRC is made up by 54 legally binding articles that relate to protection, provision and participation. It is the most rapidly and widely ratified international human rights treaty, signed by 194 nations (UNICEF, 2015), which demonstrates its importance. The UNCRC emphasises that all children have equal rights, whoever they are wherever they live (Montgomery, 2013). The four general principles of the UNCRC are based on Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12. Article 2 states that all rights must be available to all children without discrimination. Article 3 includes that the primary consideration in all actions concerning children must be the best interests of the child. Article 6 ensures that every child has the right to life, survival and development. Finally, article 12 states that the child's views must be considered and taken into account in all matters affecting him or her. This article promotes the participation and empowerment of children (UNICEF, 2015).

The UNCRC and a rights-based approach promote the participation and empowerment of children and helps advancing their capabilities. However, in this study I go beyond children's rights, focusing on enabling capabilities that specific individuals indicate as valuable for their lives and their goals in life. While rights are valued doings, beings and havings of the dominant cultural group within a society, capabilities are ways of being and doing that an individual reasons to value (Hart, 2014). And these capabilities may or may not have 'their foundations in hegemonic, moral and legal frameworks' like rights (Hart, 2014, p. 19). Looking at girls' education and development through their capabilities has its foundations in the capability approach.

3.6.1 *The capability approach*

Amartya Sen developed the capability approach as a holistic framework to evaluate, conceptualise and assess an individual's well-being (Sen, 1999). He argued that per capita income is not an adequate measure of a person's well-being and that more focus was needed on people's basic needs and less on commodities (Saito, 2003). The main characteristic of the approach is the focus on what people are actually able to do and to be: the capabilities of people, such as being able to imagine, think and reason. The capabilities of people can also be expressed as their real freedoms to lead the kind of life they reason to value. Sen (1999, 2009) argues that the expansion of freedom is both the means and the end of development and is of fundamental value to human well-being:

‘Expanding the freedoms that we have reason to value not only makes our lives richer and more unfettered, but also allows us to be fuller social persons, exercising our own volitions and interacting with –and influencing– the world in which we live’ (Sen, 1999, p. 14&15).

Freedom in the capability approach does not relate to the presence or absence of interference from others, but is conceptualised as ‘the scope and scale to which a person is feasible to decide what she or he might actually realise to be and to do’ (Otto & Ziegler, 2006, p. 8). Thus, it is the range of options a person has to choose and decide what kind of life to lead (Drèze & Sen 1995 in Otto & Ziegler, 2006).

The capability approach has its roots in human development in which the state of a population is assessed from a people-centred perspective. In this framework, the value of goods like income and wealth is limited while the value of people is great. Therefore, the framework expresses that the ‘purpose of development is to enhance people's capabilities, in the present and in the future, in all areas of their life – economic, social, political and cultural’ (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009, p. 27). So in order to achieve a healthy economy, governments need to expand what their people are able to do and be, such as to enjoy a long and healthy life, a good education, a meaningful job, physical safety, democratic debate, and so on (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). Sen (1999) argues that when one wants to evaluate a person's well-being, one needs to look at the substantive freedoms, the capabilities, the person has to choose the life she has reason to value. In the capability approach, individual advantage is judged by a person's capability to do things he or she reasons to value. Sen explains:

‘A person’s advantage in terms of opportunities is judged to be lower than that of another if she has less capability – less real opportunity – to achieve those things that she has reasons to value. The focus here is on the freedom that a person actually has to do this or be that – things that he or she may value doing or being’ (Sen, 2009, p. 231).

Sen distinguishes two aspects to freedom: the opportunity aspect and the process aspect. The first aspect expresses that the actual opportunity to pursue our objectives is of importance, which will be enhanced by more freedom. The process aspect relates to the process of choosing between opportunities and whether it was the person’s own choice to reach something, instead of being forced into it by constraints imposed by others (Sen, 2009). This aspect is connected to the agency concept, which is further explained later in this chapter. For instance, imagine a girl who does not want to go to primary school, and is forced by her parents to go there, who will punish her if she does not go. She ends up doing what she wants, that is, going to school. But she does not have the freedom to decide for herself; it is forced on her by her parents. So while she has the opportunity freedom, she does not have the process freedom.

Sen argues that we must not only look at the primary goods a person holds like the human capital framework does, such as health, income and wealth. But we must also look at the presence of relevant personal characteristics that enable the person to achieve her objectives or that create opportunities, whether she chooses to make use of these or not (Sen, 1999, 2009). Moreover, primary goods are not the ends of human development but are a means to an end: to enhance people’s capabilities in order to have the freedom to achieve what they find valuable. The capability approach is not about counting the means towards achieving freedom, but about ‘the opportunity to fulfil ends and the substantive freedom to achieve those reasoned ends’ (Sen, 2009, p. 234).

Three concepts are of particular importance in the capability approach: *functionings*, *capability* and *agency*. *Functionings* can be defined as ‘the various things a person may value doing or being’ (Sen, 1999, p. 75). In other words, functionings are the activities and states that an individual considers as important in her life to achieve, for example being educated or having a good job. *Capability* refers to abilities that enable a person’s freedom to enjoy various functionings or the freedom to achieve the lifestyle a person reasons to value. Capabilities could include being able to think and reason, or being able to experience emotions. We need to focus on the combinations of

capabilities, or the *capability set* that a person possesses to achieve the things she values in life and which create the opportunity freedom of a person (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009; Sen, 1999). For instance, a girl who possesses many capabilities has access to more combinations of functionings from which she can make a choice, she has more opportunity freedom, than a girls who possesses few capabilities.

Capability is not to be mistaken with simply a choice, because it does not relate to all the choices that are available – it relates to the valuable choices which contribute to the quality of human life. Therefore, we use the sentence ‘reason to value’ to express a valuable choice a person makes. This highlights the participation and engagement of the person in her own life as well, since it refers to what an individual personally values (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). The individualistic nature of choices are also problematic: capabilities are often the outcomes of joint processes and ‘can only be created and sustained by people acting together’ (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009: 35) As one can see, there is a strong emphasis on the personal value that people place on their functionings and capabilities. It is up to each individual what he or she reasons to value and they need freedom to achieve what they define as well-being.

The third core concept of the capability approach is *agency*, which is discussed earlier within the social studies of childhood. An agent is ‘someone who acts and brings about change’ (Sen, 1999: 19). People, and particularly women, need to be recognised as active agents of change, they are responsible persons who act or refuse to act, and can choose to act one way rather than another. When people are recognised as agents, they can articulate their objectives and choose the best way to achieve them (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009). Greater opportunity freedom, or more sets of capabilities, enhances the agency of people. This ability of people to help themselves and also to influence the lives around them, is central to the human development process. Sen (1999) explains how for instance education strengthens women’s agency through independence and empowerment: her agency also tends to become more informed and skilled through education. Greater agency for women does not only contribute to her own well-being, but it also involves others’ lives. The agency role of women is great in influencing improved child survival and reduced fertility rates. The power of women’s agency reaches beyond their own well-being and contributes significantly to human development (Sen, 1999). Expanding agency is at the centre of the capability approach, as it is central to human well-being (Otto & Ziegler, 2006).

The capability approach does not only look at people's individual capability sets, but is also concerned with the need to examine the context in which economic activity and social interactions take place. First of all, because our ideas of the good life are influenced by familial, religious and cultural structures and these influence what we reason to value and what we choose. The capability approach explains that one needs to accept the fact that everyone is subject to constraints and structural influences which affect how we exercise choices (Robeyns, 2005). In order to understand why and how someone undertakes certain activities, we need comprehension of her societal relations. Thus, the capability approach is about individual freedoms, which should not be detached from the society around them and particularly from their social arrangements (Sen, 2009).

Secondly, examination of the context is important because we must take a close look at whether the circumstances in which people make use of their freedoms, are enabling and fair (Robeyns, 2005). There are conditions that influence the way in which individuals can make use of the goods and services that are available to them. The capability approach makes a distinction between the goods and services that are available to us and our capabilities and functionings (Robeyns, 2005). Certain goods and services, or resources, need to be converted to capabilities in order to achieve the beings or doings that we value.

There are three groups of conversion factors that influence the extent to which an individual can convert her resources to capabilities and functionings. The *personal conversion factors* are personal characteristics such as sex, physical condition and intelligence. The *social conversion factors* relate to social norms, gender roles and power relations. And the *environmental factors* such as climate and geographical location also play a role in the conversion of resources to functionings (Robeyns, 2005). These conversion factors influence to which degree children are able to convert the resources they attain at school to the capabilities they need in order to achieve what they reason to value. Hence, we need to know a whole lot a person's circumstances in which she lives to understand which functionings she can achieve. We can not only look at the resources that are available to her and assume she can use these to achieve her goals. I will draw upon this process later on in the chapter.

3.6.2 *The capability approach and education*

Although the capability approach was originally designed by Sen as an attempt to understand economic disadvantage, it includes significant educational aspects. Since the extent to which

people are able to participate meaningfully in society is impacted by schooling (Kelly, 2012). The capability approach argues that freedom must be ensured in order for an individual to achieve what he or she reasons to value. Education is an important arena through which capabilities that enhance freedom can be formed. Education brings empowerment and is central to human flourishing (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 208). Education does this not only by increasing productivity or economic growth; it opens ways to capabilities that expand an individual's freedom to live the life she reasons to value (Unterhalter, 2009). Through education, people learn for instance to write, read, talk and think critically. These resources facilitate the capacity to participate in decision-making processes at the household, community or national level. It also increases the ability to exercise critical reasoning about the lives and societies in which a person lives (Unterhalter, 2009). All these processes enhance people's agency to act and, therefore, empowers them.

Empowerment can be defined as the processes by which people who did not have the ability to make choices, acquire such an ability. In other words, empowerment refers to 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). The concept of empowerment can be explored through three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency and achievements. Resources are the conditions for choices, agency refers to the process of being able to make choices and achievements are the outcomes of choices (Kabeer, 1999, 2005). In terms of the capability approach, the resources and agency together constitute capabilities: the potential that people have for living the lives they reason to value. School is an institution through which resources are distributed and girls can translate these resources into abilities that enhance their agency and empowers them. By being empowered, or by being able to make strategic life choices, the girls can achieve the functionings they value to do or be (Kabeer, 1999).

However, as discussed before, the capability approach makes clear that several conversion factors influence the ways in which the girls may or may not convert the offered resources to actual capabilities and furthermore to functionings. If school is supposed to expand learning and capabilities, evaluation needs to take place that goes beyond simply input, such as teachers and years of schooling, and outputs, such as enrolment numbers and test scores. Moreover, we have to evaluate 'whether learners are able to *convert* resources into capabilities, and thereafter potentially into functionings' (Unterhalter, Vaughan, & Walker, 2007, p. 2). Agency of people plays a

significant role in the process of transforming resources into capabilities. Girls need to be able to act within the social structures of society, such as the school institution and traditional norms, in order to make use of the resources in a way that her capabilities will be enhanced. She might need to act against the constraints that social structures placed on her, in order to achieve the freedom she needs in order to do what she values.

For instance, we can ask whether a girl is able to convert the resources that are provided at school, such as English classes, to capabilities, such as reading and speaking English, in order to achieve what she values, such as going to university. We might find that some girls have to do household chores at home which makes it impossible for them to study at home for the English classes. Others do not have food at home and are hungry, which affects their concentration during the English classes. A third group of girls does not have to work nor is hungry; they have full concentration during the English classes and have sufficient time to do their homework and study. By looking at the link between the resources, capabilities and the conversion factors, we may find different outcomes for different girls. Even though all the girls receive the same resource, that is, English classes. The capabilities of the constrained groups of girls are affected by social structures such as poverty and traditional norms. However, a hungry girl may find a way to exercise agency and get something to eat on the way to school, which enhances her concentration during the English classes. This illustrates that there are several factors that influence, enhance or constrain, the conversion of the resources to capabilities.

3.6.3 Operationalising the capability approach and this study

The capability approach offers a theoretical framework in which I can analyse and conceptualise three aspects in my data material. These include 1) the importance of education according to the girls, 2) the conversion of educational resources into capabilities and 3) guidelines for future development policies. Note that in the context of this study, by education I mean the formal local school institution in Wa, northern Ghana. I will elaborate on these three aspects below.

The capability approach allows me to analyse and evaluate the importance of girls' education, in the sense of enhancing opportunity freedom to achieve the outcomes they value. This is because education has both instrumental and intrinsic value, it is particularly considered as a means to remove obstacles so that freedom is enhanced to live the kind of life one has reason to value (Otto & Ziegler, 2006). I use the capability approach to develop an empirical line of enquiry regarding

girls' aspirations in life, or the functionings they value to do or be. In addition, the capability approach requires that we do not simply evaluate the functionings, 'but the real freedom or opportunities each student has to choose and achieve what she values' (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 208). Therefore, it is important to evaluate whether education helps the girls in achieving what they reason to value. I can do this by analysing which *capabilities* the girls give particular significance to in relation to the functionings they want to achieve. And whether and how these are enhanced by education. When I compare the groups of girls who go to school and the girls who work in the market, I can analyse the difference in opportunity freedom they have to pursue what they reason to value. In other words, does schooling make girls free to achieve the functionings they value?

Linked to this, the capability approach helps me in evaluating the girls' ability to convert the resources they attain in school into valued capabilities. The conversion factors that expand or constrain this ability play a crucial role in the conversion process, as well their agency. When I listen to the girls who dropped out of school, I can find out how the discontinuation of education bereaved them from the resources they need to form the opportunity freedom to choose what they want in life. In other words, how the dropout constrained them in forming valued capabilities. And I can evaluate which conversion factors and how agency play a role in the process of converting resources into capabilities: how do the girls manage to act within the social structures to enhance their capabilities?

The capability approach finally enables me to conceptualise future development policies. As discussed before, we should not only look at inputs and outputs of school, but attention needs to be paid to the transition from resources to capabilities and functionings (Unterhalter, 2009). As I mentioned before, by listening to the voices of the girls, I can conceptualise the capabilities that contribute to opportunity freedom and the conversion factors that influence this. Development policies need to focus on the conditions that create space where girls can develop these capabilities unconstrained, so that they have the freedom to achieve the outcomes they value (Unterhalter, 2005). Agency of girls will then also be enhanced, which is crucial to human development.

3.7 Being/becoming tension

The social studies of childhood and the capability approach tend to have opposing views on children related to the present and the future. The child viewed as a *being* is perceived to be a social actor actively constructing his or her own life and whose experiences and views are worthwhile

studying in its own rights. The child as a *becoming* is seen as an ‘adult in the making’ who needs to learn skills and achieve features in order to become someone who can participate in the adult world. The issues of seeing the child as a becoming is that it neglects the daily realities of being a child as well as it suggests that children are incompetent and adults are not (Uprichard, 2008). However, the view of children as beings in the social studies of childhood, is not unproblematic neither. It neglects the future experiences of becoming adult: children *are* growing up, changing and becoming somebody. A tension between seeing children as people in the process of becoming and seeing them as competent, autonomous agents in their own right is the result (Kesby, Gwanzura-Ottmoller, & Chizororo, 2006; Uprichard, 2008).

Tisdall and Punch (2012) explain how within the social studies of childhood, the simplified emphasis on viewing children as human beings opposed to human becomings is criticised for its narrowness. The dualistic view of being and becoming as opposites is unhelpful and ignorant of cultural and contextual variations. It would be more useful to move away from the dichotomy and towards more flexible concepts (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Lee (2001) suggests that we can think of all humans alike as becomings and that the becomings are multiple. All humans are competent in some situations and incompetent in other situations, in which their state of being or becoming varies. In addition, there is not a single becoming for both children and adults. Children do not solely become the developmental stage that is known to come, but they are in processes of becoming many other states. The diversity of becomings are hidden by the emphasis on the order of the developmental state and we need to move beyond that kind of becoming (Lee, 2001).

Kesby et al. (2006) argue, that ‘all people are simultaneously both active agents and constantly in a state of becoming’ (p. 199). In line with this view, Uprichard (2008) proposes the ‘being and becoming’ construction of the child which ‘conceptually places children in the real situation of being present and future agents of their present and future lives, and ultimately of the social world around them’ (p. 312). She argues that children are always and necessarily both being and becoming. The adults that children will inevitably become, are shaped by the kind of childhoods they are experiencing today.

By taking into account the contextual variations in which children’s lives unfold and the fact that children are growing up, we can think of the being and becoming concepts as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Within some situations and research settings and topics, it is more appropriate

to be present orientated than future orientated and vice versa. In other cases it will be more helpful to consider both time orientations (Kesby et al., 2006). The girls in this study express their perspectives on education as a means to become somebody in the future and to improve their life chances. The capability approach shares that future orientation of education, by highlighting the instrumental role of education for the future. Simultaneously, the cultural and socio-economic circumstances of the girls in the here and now, shape their future lives as well. The social studies of childhood creates space to explore the factors that shape the girls' present lives. By combining the being and becoming concepts, both frameworks are valid and helpful in exploring the girls' present lives, their future aspirations and how these influence each other.

3.8 Conclusion

The theoretical frameworks of social studies of childhood and the capability approach are in many areas compatible with each other. For instance, the positioning of the child as a social actor in the social studies of childhood is in alignment with the capability approach and the concept agency is central in both approaches (Hart, 2014). Both frameworks encourage us to think particularly about children in research: they emphasise the expansion of participation and empowerment. In addition, the frameworks can complement each other in some arenas: where one framework stops, the other one takes over (Hart, 2014). For instance, the social studies of childhood helped me in constituting my viewpoint towards children and childhood prior to and during the fieldwork and consequently shaped my methodology and methods. It also allows me to analyse and conceptualise the process of school dropout among girls. The capability approach continues by creating a space to analyse the extent to which each individual girl values education and schooling in relation to their aspirations and valued goals. Where the social studies of childhood looks at expanding and achieving children's rights, the capability approach rather looks at expanding individual capabilities, which may overlap with some rights but are more and individual-specific (Hart 2014). However, there are also significant differences between the frameworks. The future focus within the capability approach and the study of education as becoming somebody, may create tension with the focus on the here and now in the social studies of childhood studies. This tension can be overcome when we look at children as both being someone in the present and becoming somebody in the future.

4 Methodology and methods

This chapter presents the process of data collection during the fieldwork. It starts with my epistemological position concerning children and childhood, and includes the research approaches emerging from that position. It continues with the methodological challenges, the execution of the methods in the field and concludes with ethical considerations.

4.1 Methodological perspectives

The way how a researcher conceptualises children and their capacities, affects the way of communication between researcher and child participant. Consequently, methodology influences the choice of methods and thus, shapes the research (Christensen & James, 2008). Therefore, I describe in this chapter the links between epistemology and methodology and how this translates into the choice of methods.

4.1.1 Conceptualising children in research

Children's lives have traditionally been explored through the views and understandings of their adult caretakers who claim to speak for children. Children were considered as objects on who research needed to be done and this excluded them from the research process (Christensen & James, 2008). During the 1990s, there was an increasing demand for listening to children's voices and their opinions in matters that affect them (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). This is related to the paradigm shift that took place in the social studies of childhood in the 1980s. An important aspect of the new paradigm is the acknowledgment of children as social actors who actively shape their own life worlds rather than who passively receive socialisation from adults (Christensen & James, 2008), as elaborated in chapter three.

One of the implications of the paradigm shift was the repositioning of children as subjects or better as participants, rather than objects of research (Christensen & James, 2008). Children are now conceptualised as participants who participate actively in the research as they are functioning social actors whose agency needs to be acknowledged. Significant knowledge can be gained when we listen to their voices and when children's perspectives are accepted as genuine, valid information (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2008). During my fieldwork, I talked with teenage girls about their life stories and perspectives on school dropout. I asked them what they think are the reasons for

dropping out, ideas for interventions to improve this issue and the value of education in their lives. I saw them as capable of having the knowledge and information that I needed for my research and as the primary sources of information on these matters as it concerns mostly themselves.

4.1.2 Qualitative research

The approach of my research is qualitative, although quantitative methods were used as well during the background study. A qualitative approach entails that theory is constructed from practice from the natural, real world setting. This means that experiences and meanings from the field are the basis for the research and one aims to understand these. Knowledge is constructed whereby dynamic processes of change are involved; it is a continuous learning process (Greig, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007). Qualitative research allows participants to contribute what they consider as important and shape the research in ways they can relate to. In other words, qualitative research can be shaped in such a way that it allows children to speak up and have their perspectives heard. I went into the field and learned about the topic as I was proceeding with my research methods. My child participants and key informants taught me about the topic and this led to me adjusting research questions to more relevant and interesting questions as well as adjusting the methods. While I was listening to them and moreover learning from them, I constructed knowledge about girls dropping out of school in the Upper West Region (UWR) of Ghana. Thus, qualitative research ensured space where I could negotiate tools in order to make meaning of what the girls were telling me.

4.1.3 Choice of methods

A debate concerning research methods in research with children is about whether the same methods can be used for children as adults or that special methods have to be designed. Punch (2002a) explains how research with children can be perceived as the same as or entirely different from adults. When a child is regarded the same as an adult, the chosen research methods will not be different from the methods one would choose for research with adults. The children are then treated as mature and competent people. However, this approach might neglect the fact that children are inherently different from adults and complications such as vocabulary and concentration issues may arise. The perception of children as completely different from adults, can result in ‘child-friendly’ methods. But these might fail to attend to the competences of children and abilities to participate in the research process (Punch, 2002a).

Christensen and James (2008) explain that researchers do not necessarily need to adopt different methods for children, because children are capable social actors like adults. Though researchers need to adopt practices which children can relate to their own concerns and routines. This means that researchers can use for example structured interviews with children as much as with adults, but need to adjust their language use and behaviour so that it resonates with children's worlds (Christensen & James, 2008). In other words, methods of data collection need to be adapted to become more inclusive of children and young people (Fraser, 2004). The researcher needs to use methods in a way that a space is created in which children can speak up and be heard (O'Kane, 2008).

From my epistemological standpoint, I reason that research needs to be done *with* children, meaning that children's participation in research needs to be ensured so that children can put forward their own views (van Blerk, 2006). This is not simply done by using participatory methods, but also by using participatory techniques like talking about a content that is relevant for children at an understandable level (van Blerk, 2006). Fraser (2004) explains how the research relationship concerning the methodology between adult researcher and child participant needs to be negotiated. Not only needs the child a vocabulary and conceptions in order to be capable of understanding the researcher's concerns. 'Equally, a researcher must have a vocabulary and conceptions that relate to the child's conception of their world' (Fraser, 2004, p.24). Both researchers and children may lack knowledge of concepts used by the other person and meanings need to be negotiated. Negotiation of meanings is necessary so that a mutual understanding can be achieved. Research methods are designed as a result of this negotiation and are therefore rather 'participant friendly' than 'child friendly' (Fraser, 2004).

I chose to use 'participant friendly' methods which were adapted to the capacities and knowledge of my informants as well as to the research setting. This way, my participants felt comfortable to speak up and meaning making could take place. I used various participatory methods such as storytelling, life-mapping activity, semi-structured interactive interviews and an in-depth group discussion.

The main method that I have used for data collection is the semi-structured interview. The research is carried out with teenage girls who have experienced hardship in their lives. I was eager to hear their stories and saw them as capable of telling me these stories orally. With some of the girls I did

a life mapping activity together with the interview. So that they would have a visual overview of what they were telling me and could talk in a chronological way. The interviews were semi-structured, interactive and adjusted several times, so that there was space for the girls to bring in new topics and other relevant concerns. Thus, in order to make meaning of the perspectives of the girls, I needed to adapt the methods and create spaces in such a way that the girls could tell me all relevant matters, so that I could comprehend their stories fully. Through listening and hearing what the girls said and paying attention to the ways in which they communicate, I could conduct research with the girls rather than simply on them (Christensen & James, 2008).

4.2 Accessing and entering the field

After I decided on the topic and the country where I wanted to conduct my fieldwork, I had to find a place to stay and contacts in order to gain access into the field. A good way of gaining access to participants is through a local youth organisation (Leyshon, 2002). While searching on the internet, I found a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) located in Wa in northern Ghana, run by a Dutch man, Mr. de Jong. This NGO supports children and has a big compound which is a home for over 40 vulnerable girls between the age of six and eighteen years old. More information about the NGO is described in chapter two, background information. I sought contact via email with Mr. de Jong, the general manager of the NGO located in the field, and told him about my ideas. He was enthusiastic about my research and assured me that I could find plenty of participants and information in Wa concerning my topic. He could assist me and introduce me to key informants in the town. Because of the enthusiasm of Mr. de Jong and the context in which the NGO is set, I decided to spend my time at the NGO and carry out my research from there.

The first week that I arrived in the field, Mr. de Jong introduced me to directors of schools and to the Girl Child Education Coordinator of the Ministry of Education (MoE). Mr. de Jong has a good rapport with these people and interacts regularly with them regarding the girls in the NGO. I could benefit greatly from his wide network.

4.3 Being involved in a Non-Governmental Organisation

Being involved in an NGO as a researcher has both advantages and complications. An advantage is that a local NGO can serve as an entry point (Mercer, 2006) and one can make use of and work with the network and members of the NGO. If the NGO has a positive place in the community, it

can help establishing a positive and smooth cooperation between researcher and informants. Because of the positive relationships between the NGO in Wa and several educational institutes, I gained access to informants quickly and the people were remarkably cooperative with me and my research (Mercer, 2006).

Besides that, living on the compound together with participants is beneficial for building relationships. By joining daily activities, sharing food, every day interaction, conversing during unorganised meetings, etcetera, a trustful rapport can be formed between the researcher and the participant.

However, complications that can bring limitations to the research may arise as well. People might see you as a representative of the NGO, even though you work independently of the organisation. To prevent these complications from happening, it is important to maintain an independent identity and emphasise to both informants and NGO staff that one is an external and neutral researcher (Mercer, 2006). Child participants who are members of the NGO or people who benefit from cooperating with the organisation, can be influenced by the fact that the researcher is involved with the organisation. Informants may bend the truth or misrepresent information so that it is in their favour of receiving aid from or enhancing the relation with the organisation. This can result in misleading data.

I avoided this situation by trying to remain independent in my day-to-day activities so that my access to informants was not shaped by the NGO (Mercer, 2006). For example, after I was introduced to key informants by Mr. de Jong, I travelled to interview appointments in schools or the MoE alone. I did this by bicycle instead of taking a ride with the NGO staff in their car with the NGO logo on it. This way, I showed up alone at the appointments without staff accompaniment or other NGO associations. This ensured my independency and I did not have the impression informants were twisting the truth because they saw me as part of an NGO. I informed them up front that the information would be anonymous and confidential. Neither did I mention the name of the NGO during interviews nor did I say that I did the research in name of it. My informants were open and genuine when I was talking with them, and I felt that they saw the importance of their participation and valid information.

4.4 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting children and other informants for data collection. The sample is a small group of people who are taken to be typical of their group (Ennew et al., 2009c). In this study, the research sample consists of 13 girls between the age of 12 and 18 years old. The girls represent three different target groups: girls who dropped out of school and rolled back in with the help of an NGO, girls who dropped out and are working in the market and girls who attend a JHS and struggle to stay in school. See table 3 for an overview of the girl participants. All three groups are related to dropout from basic education, but in a different way. They have different life stories, backgrounds and ‘post-dropout’ activities or survival techniques. I chose to target these three different groups in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the issue of school dropout.

Table 3. Overview girl participants.

Pseudonym	Age	Situation
Samata	14	Dropped out, now back in school in P5, lives in NGO
Hafiza	17	Dropped out, now back in school in JHS 1, lives in NGO
Sana	17	Dropped out, now back in school in JHS 1, lives in NGO
Rita	16	Dropped out, now back in school in P6, lives in NGO
Shida	15	Dropped out, now back in school in P5, lives in NGO
Rushida	16	In JHS2
Shamira	16	In JHS2
Sahada	16	In JHS1
Fatah	16	In JHS2
Shamina	14	Dropped out in P4, works on the market now
Abena	18	Dropped out in JHS1, works on the market now
Akwete	17	Dropped out in JHS1, works on the market now
Efia	12	Dropped out in P3, works on the market now

The sampling techniques that were used are purposive and opportunistic sampling. Purposive sampling means that specific people who are known to have information are targeted (Ennew et

al., 2009c). This technique was used during the fieldwork in the case of selecting key informants, girls living in the NGO and girls struggling to stay in Junior High School (JHS). I knew these girls have had or are having experiences that contained information that I needed. Opportunistic sampling means that one takes advantage of meeting people during fieldwork to involve them as research participants (Ennew et al., 2009c). This sampling technique was used to find girls working the market who could participate in the fieldwork. While walking on the market, I met girls and when they met the conditions of my research, I asked them to participate.

Below is the process of sampling described for the different target groups.

4.4.1 Girls living in the NGO

Every girl in the compound has a different background as well as a different level of spoken English. Mr. de Jong is familiar with the life stories of every girl in the compound and this is why he helped me to select girls who met the required conditions of my research. These conditions were as follows. The girl has to be a teenager, the girl must have dropped out from and rolled back in school, the girl must have a sufficient level of spoken English and the girl has interest in participating in the research. This resulted in a selection of five girl participants from the NGO.

4.4.2 Girls working in the market

The Girl Child Education Coordinator of the MoE agreed to assist me during the sampling and interviewing of the girls. We discussed the way to sample girls in the market and decided to go to the market during school hours and start talking to girls that are working there. We met about five girls and I would introduce myself to them and explain what the research was about. Then we told the girls who were interested in the study to come back to the same spot as where we met, in the morning in one week time. Then I would do the interview and ask them and their caregiver to sign the consent form.

One week later, we went again to the market. This day turned out to be market-day. Market-day is a day once every 6 days when the market is larger than other days. People from surrounding villages come to buy and sell their goods. The market was busy and we encountered many working teenage girls. We realised that it was difficult to find the same girls as the week before, because we did not set a specific time to meet. One girl was waiting for us at the place where we met her the week before and I interviewed her. We did not find the other girls.

We decided to speak to other girls that we came across. Strikingly, many girls told us they were in school, just not on that day, because it was market-day. It appeared that girls often skip school on market-day to work for someone or for themselves. In addition, there were girls who had never attended school thus were not suitable for my research. But we also met girls that did drop out of school and were working in the market now instead of going to school. We asked these girls if they wanted to participate in my research. When they agreed, I would explain all the details, go over the consent form with them and start the interview.

We identified four girls who dropped out of school and who were willing to participate in my research. I conducted semi-structured interviews with these girls.

4.4.3 Girls attending Junior High School

After an interview with the director of a JHS, he told me that I could interview girls from his school if I needed to. Some weeks after that interview, I went back to the JHS and asked the director if I could interview girls. He asked one of the teachers to assist me in selecting participants. I told the English literature teacher that I wanted to interview girls who struggle to stay in school. She would ask the class teachers to find out which girls are in such a situation. I asked her to not tell the students anything about my research nor the reason why they were picked out to work with me. A week later I came back to the school and I was introduced to four girls who were selected for my research. I introduced myself, explained the research and asked the girls if they were interested in participating.

4.4.4 Adult participants

Fraser (2004) argues that children and young people can never be the only voice that is heard within research, other stakeholders should have a voice too. Even though this research concerns teenage girls, adult key informants are involved as well. Key informants are individuals who have a special place in the local conditions from which they gain specialist knowledge. This makes them experienced observers and a valuable source of information (Ennew et al., 2009b).

Mr. de Jong introduced me to three key informants in the beginning of the fieldwork. These were the head masters of a Primary School and a JHS. The third key informant in that early stage of the fieldwork was the district Girl Child Education Coordinator. These professionals were willing to help me by sharing their views and knowledge with me concerning my research topic.

After the interview with the district Girl Child Education Coordinator, she recommended me to talk to the regional Girl Child Education Coordinator as well. The regional Coordinator has been in the function for an extended period of time and has a rich experience on the topic. I was given the details of the regional Coordinator, and talking with her led me to more insightful information. Whilst waiting for appointments at the JHS and the MoE, I met an English literature teacher and a counsellor. They were interested in my research and it turned out they were very familiar with the topic. I had useful informal conversations with them. I expand upon informal dialogues later in this chapter.

4.5 Methodological reflections

4.5.1 Role as an outsider researcher

As a researcher from the north doing research in the south, I had to negotiate my role as an ‘outsider’ as opposed to an ‘insider’ researcher. Both challenges and benefits are associated with the effects of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status. Main criticisms of ‘outsider’ research is ‘the tendency to produce knowledge or interpret societies from a position of location of power and privilege, and in most cases without sufficient input from the local people’ (Apentiik & Parpart, 2006, p.35). It is assumed that when a researcher is more similar to the participants in terms of culture, gender, race and so on, more access will be granted, meanings shared and confidentiality assured. A more truthful understanding of the culture of the study is supposed to be achieved when an insider undertakes the research (Merriam et al., 2001). On the other hand, some say insiders are too close to the culture to be curious enough to provoke good questions. Outsiders can get fuller explanations than an insider who is assumed to ‘already know’ and their strength lies in curiosity with the unfamiliar and the ability to ask taboo questions (Merriam et al., 2001). I felt that being an ‘outsider’ researcher was a beneficial position in the sense of being curious and asking everything. The challenges that come with this status were partly overcome by being aware of the local context and by going into the field well-prepared.

4.5.2 Building rapport

A trusting relationship between researcher and participant is necessary in order to carry out good research. Participants are unlikely to reveal their life stories to a stranger, especially about sensitive

topics (Ennew et al., 2009a). Therefore, rapport needs to be built before starting with conducting research methods.

With all the three research samples, I started off by introducing myself and telling some personal aspects of my life. I let the girls ask any question they wanted about me. I was open and honest about myself and hoped this was a good entry for the girls to be open and honest as well.

With the girls living on the compound of the NGO, I had the opportunity to join organised and daily activities and have informal dialogues. I organised for example a ‘game evening’ where we played several board games, ate cookies and talked. Daily activities such as eating lunch and dinner was often done seated on the floor outside and with the hands. At times, I joined these meals while seated on the floor and eating with my hands. By engaging in these activities, I was able to establish a good and trusting relationship with the girl participants (Abebe, 2009).

With the girls working in the market and attending JHS, it was more difficult to build rapport due to limited time together. However, I tried to be as open and truthful as possible and introduce myself genuinely. The girls working on the market were surprisingly open to me about their hard life histories and current situations. But some of the girls attending JHS were not open to me. I felt that they did not want to tell me, a stranger, about their personal struggles in life. They were chosen by their class teachers because they have difficulties to come to school every day. But some of them did not want to go much in detail about their issues. I think this problem could be overcome if I had spent more time with these girls. If I had more time before the interviews to talk with them informally and join activities, they would have been more open to me.

4.5.3 Use of an interpreter

English is the official language in Ghana and teaching in formal school is done in English. Most of my participants had a sufficient level of English to be able to participate in my research without the help of a translator. However, the girls working in the market spoke little or no English. Therefore, I asked for the help of the district Girl Child Education Coordinator, Anna, while conducting my interviews with the girls on the market. She is from northern Ghana and speaks the local language as well as fluent English. Going to the market and talking with out-of-school-girls is a part of the job of Anna. She tries to identify girls who are out of school and assist them where

possible in going back to school. So while Anna was helping me, she was also partly performing her own job.

Local interpreters can be more than solely a translator, they can become intermediaries who will open doors. They can also understand and explain why people behave the way they do (Bujra, 2006). Anna assisted me a great deal in this sense. Besides translating during the interviews, she established the first contacts between me and girls working in the market. This would not have been able without her intermediary efforts. She knows the local attitudes and behavioural manners so she was great in making positive contact with the people and girls on the market.

4.6 Methods

‘Research methods are the ways researchers and research participants communicate’ (Ennew et al., 2009b, p 5.5). For my research, I used a variety of methods that established effective communication between my participants and me in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the dropout issue. This included the naming activity, storytelling, remembering with life mapping, semi-structured interactive interviews, in-depth discussion group and informal dialogues. In addition, I used researcher-centred methods that supported and complemented the other methods (Ennew et al., 2009b): semi-participation observation and research diary. Below I describe per method the motivation for choosing this method, the modifications I decided to make whilst in the field and the successes and challenges I had with the several methods.

One can see that I carried out more methods with the girls living in the NGO than the girls attending the JHS and girls working in the market. The second and third group of girls lead busy lives and it proved to be difficult to organise times and places for meetings (Leyshon, 2002). I worked with them during short breaks in their schooling or working activities. Realising some methods was only possible with the girls living in the NGO with whom I had the time and space for it since I was present during the spare times in their daily life: after school, in the evenings and in between their household chores.

4.6.1 Unstructured and semi-participant observation

When I entered the field, I came to live together with 43 girls on a compound of the NGO. The first two weeks of my stay before I carried out any other method, I observed the lives of the girls staying in the compound. I did not structure the observations, I was open and curious to all matters I saw:

routines, behaviour, conversations, atmosphere, daily structure, distribution of tasks, all happenings in daily life and school activities. During the early stages of research, unstructured observations can be useful (Ennew et al., 2009b). Observation is necessary in order to understand the context of data and researchers need to make use of unstructured observation throughout the research process (Ennew et al., 2009b). Not only did I make unstructured observations during my daily life in the compound of the NGO, but I also observed life on the market, on the streets and people going about their daily activities in the town Wa. After I got to know the girl participants for my research, I used apart from unstructured observations, semi-participant observation. I observed more focussed those girls to grasp their behaviour and personality.

The observations helped me understanding the situation and circumstances in which people and children in Wa are living life, struggling and in the case of my study, dropping out of school. By observing and taking in everything I saw, heard and smelled, I could experience the context in which my research participants live their lives. It was essential to observe as a means to comprehend the events that my participants were telling me about.

4.6.2 Research diary

I carried my research diary in my bag every day. I wrote down everything I observed, my questions, challenges, impressions, feelings, issues, planning of the day, interview preparations and reflections, ideas that popped in my head and summaries of informal dialogues. It is important to record all of these components, because they provide valuable information throughout the research process (Ennew et al., 2009b).

4.6.3 Naming activity

The naming activity is a good way to ensure anonymity in the research. I asked the girls living in the NGO and attending a JHS to think of an alternative name for themselves. I explained to them that it would be their research-name so that their stories will be handled anonymously. My experience was that the girls enjoyed making up a different names for themselves and that they felt comfortable with their pseudo name. Starting the research with the naming activity enabled me to work with the girls anonymously from the start. I used their pseudo names in all the written and verbal recordings and I did not have to go through the process of anonymising all the data afterwards.

With the girls working in the market I had very limited time for collecting data so I decided to not spent time on the naming activity. I used all the available time for data collection methods with these girls.

4.6.4 Storytelling

After the naming activity, this was the first method I started to do with the girls living in the NGO. I chose to start with this method to get familiar with the topic for both me and the girls. When making up a story, one can get into a different role and talk about sensitive topics without having to talk about him- or herself (Ennew et al., 2009b). Story telling enabled us to start talking in a comfortable way about the issue of dropping out in northern Ghana and other sensitive topics that come with it, without talking about specific persons or personal experiences.

The initial plan was to do individual story writing instead of group storytelling. When I found out that the girls are not fluent in writing, I changed the method to storytelling where the girls would tell the story and I would type it as they were telling. The girls said they preferred to do story telling in a group instead of individually. They initially wanted to do it all together in one group. But I noticed from the beginning that one girl was dominant and taking the lead in most of the conversations as well as answering questions for the others. To be able to give everyone a voice, I suggested to make two stories. The girls agreed with that and we formed two groups. One group with the older girls and one group with the younger and quieter girls. Thus, I adapted the method to the capacity of the research participants and the diversity in the group, so that there would be a space in which everyone felt comfortable to speak up.

After some encouragement from my side to overcome shy starting hesitations, the girls got into the activity and created engaging stories, see appendices F and G.

4.6.5 Remembering with life mapping

In this study, memories of the girls' childhoods are of great importance. Children have memories and are capable of telling their own life stories (Ennew et al., 2009b). Therefore, I planned to do a remembering life mapping activity with the girls living in the NGO individually. They would first draw a long horizontal line on four A4 papers taped together. The beginning of the line is the beginning of their lives and the end point of the line is the future, see figure 4 and appendix E. In between those points, the participants can write all the events that happened in their lives, such as

dropping out of school. I chose to do this activity because it would give the girls a visual overview of their own life histories. They could look at it and fill in all the events they remembered that they have experienced prior to and after the dropout. In addition, this activity would be a convenient tool to start a dialogue about their life histories with space in which the girls could express the complexities of their lives (Leyshon, 2002).

My initial plan was to solely do the life mapping activity with the girls first and after that, individual interviews on the basis of the life mapping outcomes. As I was starting the life mapping activity with the first girl, I noticed that we automatically started to dialogue about what she was writing down. It was a natural consequence for me to ask questions and for her to narrate about what she was writing down. This is why I decided to start the sound recorder and conduct the interactive interview simultaneously with the life mapping activity.

First we wrote the point 'born' on the beginning of the line. We started discussing her life history starting when she was born and wrote down the events and experiences in chronological order on the line, among which the school dropout, the present and the future.

The remembering life mapping activity was an excellent tool to have a visual overview of the dialogue we were having. Both the girl participant and me could for example point out on the life map an event to clarify what we were talking or questioning about.

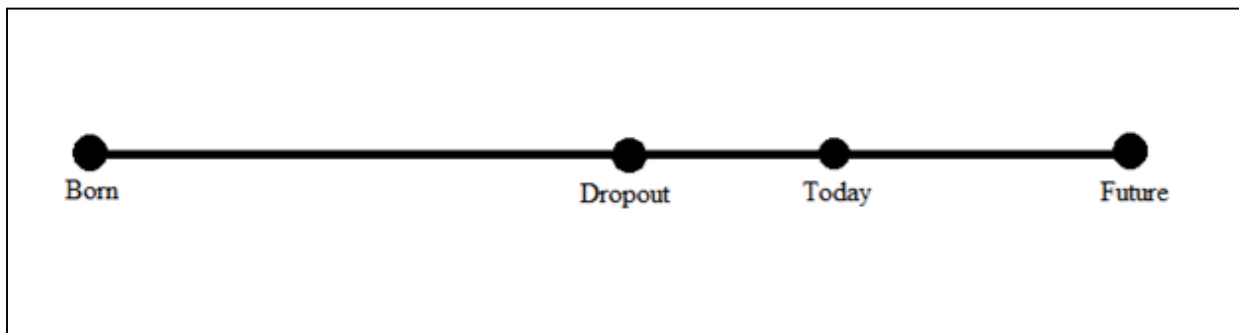


Figure 4. Life mapping activity.

4.6.6 *Semi-structured interactive interview*

The first interviews of my fieldwork were conducted with three key informants. They provided me with useful background knowledge about the issue in Wa before I started the interviews with the girl participants. All these three informants, two principals of schools and the district Girl Child

Education Coordinator of the MoE, deal with girls who drop out of school or struggle to stay in school every day. It was interesting to start off the fieldwork with these interviews and hear their point of view.

After the interviews with the key informants, my inquisitiveness increased to hear what the girls themselves had to say about the issue and if that would correspond with the viewpoints of the adult key informants.

With all the girl participants I conducted semi-structured interactive interviews. Semi-structured interviews are relatively informal using an interview guide (appendix C) with a list of possible questions or themes rather than fixed questions. This way, the researcher can phrase and structure the questions freely so it is appropriate for the situation and person. Semi-structured interviews enable the participant to have greater control over the direction of the conversation (Ennew et al., 2009b). The semi-structured interviews contained space where meaning making between me and the participants could take place.

The individual interviews with the girl participants provided me with a large amount of diverse data. I was impressed by the openness and honesty of the girls. Most of them did not hesitate to tell me about the hardship and personal issues they have gone through. The girls brought in some new and interesting perspectives that I did not think of yet. This made me adjust and add interview questions. For example, when I asked one girl if she had anything to add at the end of the interview, she introduced a, for me, new topic. She started to talk about the reason why it is important for a girl in particular to be educated compared to a boy. Her answer intrigued me and I decided to ask the other girl participants a question related to this.

During the interviews with the working girls I experienced some challenges that might have influenced the data collection. I carried out the interviews on the market where there was a lot going on around us and where some of the girls kept working during the interview. This led to interruptions and made the girls distracted at times. I was distracted sometimes as well because of everything that was going on around us. A combination of the pressure to not take too much of the girls' time and the distractions, hindered me from taking the time to think whether I had asked everything I wanted to ask and rechecking my interview guide. After listening to the interviews again on the recordings, I wished I had asked more questions that could complement the generated data.

4.6.7 In-depth group discussion

I held one in-depth group discussion with the five girls living in the NGO. The group discussion took place after the other methods were carried out. The themes we discussed can be found in appendix D. During the in-depth group discussion the girls encouraged each other to talk and challenged and complemented the answers of each other. This way, I obtained relevant data on top of the data obtained from the individual interviews and other tools. It was a beneficial tool to provoke discussion and to complement and complete the existing data. In addition, it was a good opportunity for me to discuss topics that were put forward by the girls themselves during the individual interviews. I could hear what the other ones had to say about themes that other girls brought up.

One of the challenges I experienced was that at times the girls were interrupting each other and that one girl was dominating the group discussion. As Leyshon (2002) argues, the management of group dynamics is important to make in-depth discussion groups successful. To overcome this challenge, I ensured that every girl got the chance to express herself (Leyshon, 2002) by emphasising several times that we have to let each other speak and by giving turns to speak.

Another challenge was that occasionally the girls discussed in their local language. Due to the language barrier (Abebe, 2009), I could not understand everything that was said in the discussion. However, I experienced that the girls only switched to their local language when they did not manage to express themselves in English. It turned out to be beneficial when they discussed it first in the local language and then helped each other to explain it to me in English. Therefore, I let them speak in their local language now and then, instead of limiting the girls to speak only English and probably not being able to express everything they wanted.

4.6.8 Informal dialogues

Informal dialogues were an important part of the fieldwork as these unplanned conversations gave me insightful information and greatly complemented my data obtained with the formal research methods to get a deeper understanding of the issue. The different groups of girls that I obtained data from had different life stories with various aspects of the entire issue. This made it sometimes difficult for me to see the full picture of the issue. The informal unprepared dialogues I had with

people did not focus only on a few aspects as I did inadvertently during formal conversations. Hence, the informal conversations were extremely important in order to understand the issue fully. Informal dialogues often occurred while I was waiting for an appointment to carry out a formal interview. For example, I was waiting for the school-going girls to finish their class so that I could talk with them. While I was sitting outside on a chair, a teacher came sitting next to me. She asked me about my research topic and it appeared she knew a lot concerning the topic of girls dropping out from JHS. We talked for about half an hour and during this conversation, the teacher unknowingly connected the dots of my fieldwork. Because of that informal dialogue, I started to see the big picture and understand the issue more comprehensively.

The same thing happened with research participants, both children and adults. Because I spend a lot of time with the girls in the NGO and also with the Girl Child Education Coordinator from the MoE, they sometimes told me important information while we were informally conversing and the recorder device was not running. In these ‘off-the-record’ moments, I had unexpectedly interesting conversations with them and this was a great contribution for my understanding of the context and the issue.

4.6.9 Data analysis

The way how I carried out my data analysis could be defined as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within empirical data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of analysis already started when I was in the field, where I began to notice and look for patterns and issues of potential interest in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After the fieldwork, I was reading and re-reading the generated data thoroughly, in order to become familiar with the content. The transcription of the data was a great way of doing this, which I did myself. By listening to and transcribing the interviews and in-depth discussion, I was exposed to the data a lot. After becoming well-known with the data, I was able to summarise the individual interviews in which the main topics were highlighted. After that, I sorted and re-sorted the data according to the research questions and I discovered recurring themes, links, similarities and contradictions (Ennew et al., 2009d).

First I used colour codes for the various recurring themes and subthemes within the interviews and discussions in order to get an overview of and distinguish the contained themes. Later I categorised

the summarised data generated by each tool and participant under the various topics and themes, including details of which tool and which child and her characteristics (Ennew et al., 2009e). While keeping the research objectives and questions in mind, I could now start writing the data analysis report. Because I placed the empirical data under the various themes, I was able to efficiently combine the data that related to a particular theme. Writing was not something that only took place at the end; it was an integral part of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While I was writing, I went regularly back to the data to find more or new ideas. The analysis report that I have written is an attempt to tell the complicated story of my data in a merit and valid way (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.7 Ethical considerations

Ennew et al. (2009c) explain how ethical issues are not something that need to be dealt with only during the planning process prior to the fieldwork. It rather needs to be dealt with throughout the research process with children. Fieldwork with marginalised groups of children, such as the girls in my fieldwork, can raise unique ethical challenges (Abebe, 2009). Below are ethical considerations described that applied throughout the research process.

4.7.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Informed consent means that we may carry out our research only after we have explained to the involved people why we are doing this and what the intended outcomes are. Only if the people have agreed to participate can we begin to work with them and achieve results (Potter & Desai, 2006). In research with children, it is important to explain the research details clear and simple so that children understand it and are able to make informed decisions about whether to participate or not. Consent may be required from adult gatekeepers as well, though consent from an adult alone is not sufficient. Researchers must ask children themselves (Ennew et al., 2009a). Obtaining consent from all the girl participants and their caregivers or gatekeepers proved to be difficult in some cases. I made easily understandable consent forms prior to the study with information about the research details, aims and methods. The form stated that participation in the research was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the process at any time if they wished to, see appendix B. Before carrying out any methods for data collection with the girls, I went through the informed consent form together with them. I explained the research and answered their questions

about it. Signing the consent form meant that the girls agreed to participate while still having the option to step back from the research at any time.

Obtaining informed consent from the girls living in the compound of the NGO was not a problem. After reading the form all together in addition with an oral explanation about the research, the girls agreed to participate. The gatekeeper of these girls, Mr. de Jong, agreed by signing the informed consent forms as well.

The task of obtaining informed consent from the girls working in the market, and especially from their caregivers, turned out to be more complicated. One of the girls was selling water on the market and said we could ask consent from the woman she was working for, who was a friend of the family. We searched for the woman and found her elsewhere on the market. When we asked her for her agreement on the participation of the child, she refused to say anything about it. She said she was not the parent of the child and did not want take responsibility for the consent form. In another case, the working girl and her grandmother did not know how to write their signature nor their name. They gave verbal consent for participating in the research and did not want to sign the form at first. When I told them that they could write anything on the form as a sign of agreeing, they signed the form with a simple signature. Two other girls did not have any parents anymore and were living on their own with their baby. These girls were above 16 years old and I decided to not seek for consent from caregivers, since they were their own caregivers.

Abebe (2009) explains how he encountered similar complications while seeking informed consent from caregivers of his participants in Ethiopia who were street children. He raises the question ‘How can one obtain informed consent from adults in cases where one finds none?’ (Abebe, 2009, p.456). Abebe (2009) decided to obtain informed consent verbally as securing written consent proved difficult.

Seeking informed consent from the caregivers of girls attending JHS was in some cases a difficult task as well. Once I was introduced to the girls and the girls to me, I described the research, its aims, methods and outcomes. I gave the consent form with written information to them and asked them to bring the form a week later, signed by themselves and a parent or caregiver. When I went to the JHS a week later, only one girl brought the signed consent form with her. I decided to conduct an interview with only that girl. I agreed with the other girls on the day I would come back to receive their consent forms and do the interviews with them. Two days later I came back to the

school and received the consent form from two girls. The last girl told me she had forgotten her form, but that her parents said that they agreed on her participation. At this point, I decided to do the interviews with all three girls, even though one of them only gave me verbal consent instead of a written agreement. These interviews were the last week of school before holiday and I did unfortunately not have the opportunity to return another day to the school to collect the last consent form.

The consent forms stated that participation was voluntary and that one could withdraw from the research at any time. This proved sometimes troublesome in the practical world. I noticed in some cases that adults were pressuring girls to participate and that the girls are used to follow the adults' instructions. For example, when I asked a girl in the market if she wanted to participate and when she took some time to think about it, adults started to interfere and tell the girl that she must participate. The adults felt that it was a good project for the development of Wa and wanted the girl to participate. I therefore emphasised that the girl had to make the decision herself and could say no if she did not want to participate.

4.7.2 Privacy

Maintaining privacy during interviews turned out to be challenging in some situations. Conducting interviews with the girls in the compound of the NGO was not a problem, there was an empty and private room available where we could sit without being disturbed, seen or heard by the other children.

Finding a place to talk in private was more challenging on the market. The girls who agreed to participate in my research were all working and had their goods exposed on their spot in the market. They could not simply walk away to find a quiet spot to talk to me. Hence I sat down or stood with them on the spot where they were working or behind their market stall. This meant that some people around us could hear us talking and it would happen that bystanders would get involved in the conversation I was having with two of the girls. In these cases, the one or two people around us that would meddle in the conversation were relatives of the girls. They encouraged the girls to say more or even helped me by asking more questions to the girls or explaining my question better to the girl, to get the issue clarified. On the one hand was this helpful for me because it made the girls talk more. On the other hand, one could think that the girls might have felt uncomfortable to reveal their issues with more people listening to them. I had the feeling

that the relatives were familiar with the situation and the girls talked to me openly about their lives nevertheless. Moreover, I had the impression that the girls felt even more comfortable with their relatives around them and encouraging them, than only talking with me, the unfamiliar researcher. I repeatedly told the surrounding people that I wanted to hear what the girl had to say, so that we should let her speak. They understood that and I did not experience the difficulty to find a private spot as a big limitation to obtain the necessary data for the research. In point of fact, I experienced it as positive in the sense of making the girl more comfortable and talkative. Although the interview would probably have been different, less influenced by others if I could sit down with the girl alone without any influences from other people.

One girl kept working during the interview. I felt that it was not appropriate to ask her to stop selling her oranges and earning money. This resulted in interruptions in the interviews. Though it is not the ideal situation for an interview, I felt that the interruptions were not a very big limitation for the data collection.

Carrying out interviews in private with girls in the JHS was complicated due to unavailable rooms in the school. It was exam time and all the rooms in the school were occupied. We found a big tree behind the school where we placed a table and chairs. Even though other students of the JHS could not overhear us talking, occasionally a student noticed me and the girl sitting there. I had the impression that this made the girls feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. Although this did not have an effect on the data collection since no-one could overhear any information, it might affect the girls' life in the school. Others may ask why she was sitting there with that white woman.

4.7.3 Confidentiality

Research participants reveal their personal stories in the research and need to be protected against 'personal reprisals, disadvantages, publicity or embarrassment' (Ennew et al., 2009a, p. 2.22). All information and data must be kept confidential and not be discussed outside the research team. I kept my storages with collected data, like the recording device and research dairy, always in a closet with a lock. My computer has a password so that no one could access the data on the computer. In addition, the translator signed a confidentiality form.

Names are not relevant to most social research (Ennew et al., 2009a). I gave the girl participants, or let the girls themselves choose an alternative name. This way, I did not have to record their real

name and the data was anonymous from the start. More about the naming activity can be found under methods.

There was another important aspect that I took into account. Since I ensured my research participants that I was independent from the NGO, in order to collect independent and truthful data, it was important for me to not share any data with members of the NGO. The master thesis with only anonymous and unidentifiable data will be shared with the NGO.

4.7.4 Sensitivity

My research is about girls who dropped out of school and who experienced difficulties in their lives. Talking with the girls about these difficulties they went through, can bring up sensitive topics and the girls may become emotionally upset. Ennew et al. (2009a) write how researchers need to be prepared for this. It is important to have access to sources of support for children.

Before carrying out my research methods with the girls, I made sure there would be someone available to give aid to the girls if necessary. At the NGO, this were the mothers that worked there. At the school it was the class teacher of the girls and at the market, it was the Girl Child Education Coordinator Anna. They were the contact persons for the girls if they wanted someone to talk to after the interviews with me or any other support.

During one interview on the market, a girl became emotionally upset and started to cry due to the topic we talked about. I felt that it was inappropriate to try to dig deeper into the topic, even though it would have been interesting for my research. After asking if the girl if she wanted to add anything to the interview, I stopped the interview to not upset the girl more. Anna the Girl Child Education Coordinator took the contact information of the girl and would figure out how she could be helped with the process of going back to school.

4.7.5 Power imbalance

Unequal power relations exist between participants and researchers in any research with people and always need to be considered. It is especially important to recognise this power imbalance between child participants and adult researchers. Children face adult power constantly in their daily lives and this can influence the way these participants behave in the presence of the adult researcher and affect the data collection (Abebe, 2009; Punch, 2002a). On top of complications related to the adult-child relationship, uneven power relations between the wealthy researcher and disadvantaged

participant can have an impact on the fieldwork. The fact that I am a white researcher from a wealthy background who travelled overseas to carry out research with African children in a poor community, can increase the power imbalance. It can as well raise expectations about benefits for the participants (van Blerk, 2006).

Therefore, wealthy adult researchers need to negotiate their relationship with the disadvantaged child participants in order to reduce the inequality in power (Abebe, 2009) and be clear about the outcomes and intentions of the research (van Blerk, 2006). I started negotiating my relationship with my informants by changing my appearances and behaviour that are typical for adults. Such as changing my clothes to similar clothes as the girls, speaking with terms that children use and by neither exercising authority over the children nor imposing discipline (Abebe, 2009). By adapting my behaviour and appearance as one of them, I took the 'least adult role' in order to minimise the power differences (Mandall, 1991). I also engaged in daily and organised activities together with the girls living in the NGO compound to build a confident relationship that was based on mutuality.

While I was talking and interacting with the girls, I showed interest to know many things about Ghana, their culture and their lives. I asked them a lot of questions about and explanations for what I saw or heard. The girls found it sometimes funny and strange that I did not know things that were obvious for them. But it gave them the feeling that they were the experts, which they were, and confidence to talk to me freely since they were the experts. Clark (2010) calls this the 'authentic novice' role whereby the researcher acknowledges 'a lack of understanding about a particular setting or routine' (Clark, 2010, p. 192).

Besides power imbalances between the participant and the researcher, I experienced power differences among the girls living in the compound of the NGO. Older and higher educated girls had more power than the younger girls who were schooling in a lower grade. I noticed this power imbalance immediately when we were coming together as a group. The two girls in class one of JHS, took the lead in most of the conversations and corrected the other ones repeatedly. The younger girls were often more quiet and respected what the older girls were saying. I also noticed that there was an unspoken rule that if there are little chores to be done - such as getting a chair, closing the door, fetching a pen - the older girls instructed the younger girls to go and do it.

One afternoon, the three younger girls who are in Primary School came to me and told me they wanted to go for a walk around the compound with me. I was curious what they had to tell me.

Strikingly, they did not have anything very important to say, they just wanted to have the opportunity to chat with me without the two older dominant girls. All this shows the power imbalance between the girls themselves that have implications for the fieldwork. It made me decide to make some changes in the way I carried out some of the methods, namely story writing and the focus group discussion, so that all the voices of the girls would be heard. You can read about these modifications under the particular methods later in this chapter.

Although I tried to make the research relationship between me and the girls as equal as possible, I am aware of the practical factors that still point out the difference between us. For example, even though I was living on the same compound as the girls, I had my own furnished room.

4.7.6 Reciprocity

I wanted to give something back to the girls who participated in my research. As a way of saying thank you for the time they put in helping me and as a way of motivating them to continue with their schooling. I thought of adequate and appropriate forms of expressing this. The girls staying at the NGO indicated they wanted to gain some practical ICT experience. At school they learn theory about computers but they have never touched a computer. So I let them work with Word on my computer and I explained some basic functions. I also gave them clothes of me when I left Wa with which they were very pleased.

Although paying children can be seen as buying information and as creating divisions and increasing power differentials (Abebe, 2009), I decided to give the girls working on the markets a small amount of money to compensate the time I kept them from working. This was more or less the amount of money they could have earned in the time of the interview. I discussed the appropriateness of this idea first with Anna, my interpreter, and she expressed that it would be a suitable form of reciprocity. Abebe (2009) explains how he struggled with the same dilemma of reciprocity during his research with street children in Ethiopia. He believed that giving a certain sum of money was an adequate reward for their time and labour. Besides giving a small sum of money, Anna contributed in the reciprocity by giving non-material support to the girls after I would leave the field. The girls indicated that they wanted to go back to school and Anna would find a way to support the girls in achieving that. For the girls attending JHS, I purchased pencils and pens. I gave these in addition with some candies as a thank you and a motivation to stay in school and write their exams.

5 Analysis I – the dropout process

This chapter shows how several factors contribute to the phenomenon of school dropout, specifically in a deprived area among teenage girls. It is done according to personal reflections of girls who went through the process of dropping out. The causes of basic school dropout among girls in northern Ghana are diverse and complex, as this chapter will show. Every individual girl has a different life story which took place in specific circumstances and in which varying events occurred.

In this first analysis chapter, I work with the first main research question: ‘What are the familial, socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors that contribute to the dropout process of teenage girls from basic education in northern Ghana?’ and the three connected sub-questions. This chapter is structured according to three themes that are highlighted in the dropout process, including poverty, migration and institutional circumstances. These three themes are closely interconnected with each other and contribute to the dropout process together. The familial, cultural and socio-economic contexts of the girls are hereby closely examined.

Finally this chapter examines the agency of the girls versus the societal structures in which their lives and the dropout process unfold.

5.1 Household poverty

Most of the interviewed girls named poverty in the household as the cause of their drop out. Out of the 11 girls who dropped out, 10 expressed that the reason for their dropout was poverty. Sometimes it was general household poverty and in other cases it was livelihood adversity caused by an income shock that provoked the girls’ dropout. The fact that there was no money in the household to pay for direct costs, including school fees, uniforms, sandals, books, stationary or other school materials, was often the reason to stop schooling. However, the costs of schooling are two-fold. Besides the direct costs that cannot be met in some cases, the opportunity costs are also a barrier to girls’ education. These are the indirect costs of the girls’ labour which is lost when she goes to school instead of working for the household (Punch, 2002b). Poor households may depend upon the labour of their children for household survival and where girls are expected and needed to perform household chores and to look after younger siblings, the opportunity costs of sending them to school may be higher than for boys (Colclough, Rose, & Tembon, 2000).

I describe first how general household poverty, direct costs and opportunity costs contribute to school dropout, linked to traditional and cultural mind-sets. I then describe how livelihood adversity caused by an income shock may lead to school dropout. However, the poverty related factors for dropout are not isolated. Household poverty affects dropout through its interactive effects with other contextual factors, such as familial and cultural factors, that result in dropping out from school (Ananga, 2011c).

5.1.1 Household poverty, direct costs and opportunity costs

Household poverty is expressed by the girls as poor living conditions and a lack of basic needs provision. Samata illustrates this.

‘The house we stayed in, there was no light. Sometimes when rain is coming and the water is coming from the sticks, the room will be wet. And sometimes no food in the house.’ – Samata, 14 years

Even though basic education is for free in Ghana, there are various fees that need to be paid, such as administration and library fee. In Junior High School (JHS), there is an exam fee that needs to be paid three times a year before every exam period. Other school expenses are school uniforms, books and pens. A lack of money in many households makes it difficult to pay for these direct costs of schooling. Shamina, who is not schooling at the moment, explains how small fees used to make her struggle to stay in school.

‘When I was in school, they used to tell us to bring money like three cedi’s⁵. And I couldn’t afford it, so sometimes I used to not go to school.’ – Shamina, 14 years

She skipped school when she could not bring the money that the teachers asked for. And this repeated problem lead to her dropping out eventually.

Akwete tells me how the demand for exams fees in JHS made it difficult for her to come to school:

‘When I was schooling, when it was time for exams, I wouldn’t get the money to go and pay for my exam fees.’ – Akwete, 17 years

She could not find the money to pay her exam fees and this prevented her from continuing JHS.

⁵ Three Ghanaian Cedi’s is about one USD.

Similar outcomes were found in the study of Colclough et al. (2000), who carried out a detailed case study in Ethiopia and Guinea about the relationships between poverty, schooling and gender inequality. One of the most important reasons for dropping out in their study was the inability to meet the costs of schooling. Furthermore, the schooling expenses are more difficult to meet for poor households than for richer households (Colclough et al., 2000).

The other way around, Fatah who is in the first class of JHS, explains that she does not face any difficulties to go to school at the moment. Interestingly, the reason she gives why it is not difficult for her to go to school is, to use her own words, 'because my parents have money small'. This indicates that the girls perceive having money in the household as very important for being able to maintain school attendance.

In addition to the basic needs of children, teenage girls have extra needs that are sometimes difficult to provide for. Anna, the local Girl Child Education Coordinator explains to me how these extra needs can be a challenging expense for girls which can influence their school attendance:

'Some of them when they are in their menstrual cycle, they don't get pads to put on. So because of that they will absent their selves from school for a number of days. Sometimes after that they don't go back.' – Anna

Thus, household poverty makes it difficult for the girls' households to meet the direct costs of schooling or basic needs that are a requirement for schooling. In addition, the opportunity cost of sending girls to school is high in these circumstances of household poverty. They are more needed in the household than would be the case of richer household who do not need the labour of children in order to survive.

During the in-depth-discussion, the girls broached the topic of opportunity costs, linked to the traditional notions of girls' futures. They illustrate clearly how this works, especially in the rural villages where they are from.

Hafiza: 'In our rural villages, they always say that a girl is not supposed to go to school. But it's not true!'

Researcher: 'And why is it that sometimes the boy is send to school while the girl has to stay at home?'

Shida ‘It is because the woman can be pregnant or have a baby, so the woman cannot go to school again.’

Hafiza: ‘And another reasons too is that they think the boy is free. He can go to school. And the girl is supposed to help the mother in the household chores. So the girl will be there, whilst the boy is schooling. And they also think that the girl cannot study further than the boy. That the boy is having a good mind and what and what. In the meanwhile, some girls are more intelligent than the boys.’

Rita: ‘Yes, the boys have free time to learn. But the girls don’t have free time, they will be cooking, fetching water, sweeping, washing bowls, so they will not have time to read.’

The above quotations collectively reveal that factors related to cultural norm, traditional beliefs and practices affect the attendance and performance of girls negatively (Colclough et al., 2000). Girls are needed in the household to carry out gender specific chores, which makes their opportunity costs of schooling high. The encouragement for girls to stay and perform well in school are less than for boys in a society where the main leadership roles are occupied by men and beliefs about the duty of the woman as a housewife and mother predominate (Lambert, Perrino, & Barreras, 2012). Benefits of schooling may be perceived as less for girls than for boys when many jobs are reserved for men and gender discrimination in the labour market is found (Colclough et al., 2000). Furthermore, families might see primary schooling as irrelevant to girls’ future roles (Boyle, Brock, Mace, & Sibbons, 2002). Girls are traditionally expected to master skills like cooking, taking care of siblings, cleaning the home and doing the laundry. When a girl goes to school and does not learn these skills, she might not be suitable for marriage early enough (Colclough et al., 2000; Lambert et al., 2012). Girls are encouraged to marry early in some communities, and may become pregnant early. A girls’ obligations after marriage often lie in her future husband’s family. It is therefore not beneficial for a family to educate a daughter since she will marry, leave the home and take care of her children. As a result, education of boys is favoured over girls in many households (Boyle et al., 2002; Colclough et al., 2000; Hunt, 2008), especially when household poverty is prevalent.

In summary, household poverty contributes to school dropout in a way that direct costs of schooling cannot be paid as well as the opportunity costs of girls are high. This is closely linked to a traditional and cultural mind set about girls' futures, which is stronger in rural villages.

5.1.2 Livelihood adversity

School dropout occurred in many cases after an adverse event took place in a household which caused an income shock and affected their livelihood. Adversity in this study can be conceptualised as 'circumstances and processes that undermine household functioning and represent a risk to children's well-being and development' (Boyden, 1990, p. 112), including their schooling opportunities. Sickness, weakness and bereavement among parents caused livelihood adversity and made the girls vulnerable to dropout. The sudden loss of income in the household as a parent was forced to stop working, had a direct influence on the schooling process of the girls.

For example, Shamina who sells water on the market, told me that her migration and dropout incidence was a consequence of the fact that her father could not work any longer:

'My father is no more strong enough to farm. He can't farm again. My parents are poor and could not take care of me, so I moved to Wa. I am living with my aunt now.' – Shamina, 14 years

The father of Shamina was not strong enough to do the physical job of farming for a reason that is not clear in the interview. Because of that, the household income was not enough to take care of Shamina and to send her to school. She migrated to her aunt in Wa in the hope of earning money for herself so she can go back to school.

Similarities can be found in Sana and Rita's life story and causes of dropout. Both experienced an income shock after their fathers died. As a consequence of that first income shock, they dropped out of school temporarily. Their mothers managed to recover from the difficult situation and were able to send the girls to school again. Some years later, both Sana and Rita's mother passed away as well. Both girls were then left with the families of their older siblings, who were not able to afford the schooling expenses of the sudden extra care recipients. Thus, the inability to pay for the school costs as a result from an income shock and livelihood adversity, lead to school dropout.

Akwete also explains how school dropout was a respond to livelihood adversity in her household. Her household consisted of her and her grandmother since she was young.

‘When I got to JHS 1, my grandmother was not strong enough to work so that she can take care of her. I have nobody to take care of me.’ – Akwete, 17 years

Akwete indicates that when her grandmother’s income dropped, she had no-one else to take care of her. In a society with a lack of a governmental support system and where children’s livelihoods are entwined with that of the family collective (Abebe, 2013), it is the social support system that takes care of you. A disruption in the extended family like in the case of Akwete, meant that her support system fell away and she stood completely alone. She was forced to drop out of school since she did not have someone who could be her back up in times of livelihood adversity.

While she was alone, Akwete sought for support from other people than her family. She got involved with a man who impregnated her. The Girl Child Education Coordinator explains that ‘sometimes the poverty drives the girls to go to a man to get something and then they get pregnant’ (Anna). The father of Akwete’s baby died when she was pregnant and she has again nobody to take care of her and has in addition a baby for whom she has to provide. That is why she was forced to start working for an income to take care of herself and her baby and her schooling opportunities are diminished. Akwete indicates that she would like to go back to school ‘if she gets somebody to take care of her’ (Akwete). She can be described as an unsettled dropout (Ananga, 2011c), because she dropped out permanently but does have the possibility to join school again, only when a special project or support comes to help her out. We can see that the extended family as a social support system is of major importance for a girl to be able to attend school in a society where there are few other systems that she can count on.

The director of a JHS in Wa outlines many reasons for drop out among girls. This includes ignorance of girls’ education, traditional notions of girls’ roles, early pregnancy, school environment and girls’ work. Interestingly, he describes how all these factors are related to poverty:

‘The underlying factor is poverty. At the end of the day, it will boil down to the poverty again.’ – Director JHS

This implies that many socio-economic, cultural and traditional factors are linked with the poverty condition, which ultimately leads to drop out. It can be said that poverty is a contributory factor to the dropout. The poverty was either always present in a household or is the result of livelihood adversity and worked in combination with other factors to lead to dropout. In the view of the interviewed girls, poverty is the cause of their dropout. ‘If it is not because of the poverty’ (Hafiza),

the girls would not have dropped out. However, when we look at the complete stories, we see that poverty is linked with other contextual factors that relate to socio-economic conditions and cultural, familial and traditional settings. It is apparent in narratives of the girls who participated in this study, that poverty is interacting and intertwined with these factors.

5.2 Migration

Migration was a frequently recurring theme in the individual interviews and a substantial segment of the dropout process. 12 out of the 13 interviewed girls narrated about migration from their deprived and poor village, to the city Wa. Two girls migrated with their nuclear families to Wa and the others migrated independently. They were sent by their family to Wa for socio-economic reasons and often in times of stress, on which will be expanded later in this chapter. In Wa, the girls stayed with extended family members or older siblings. The reasons why girls migrated was to assist extended family members in productive or reproductive work, to improve their own life chances and as a coping strategy to deal with the household's livelihood adversity. In many cases, these reasons played all at the same time whereby interdependent relations between the girl and the family intended to provide both help in the household and better life chances for the girl.

'Household', 'extended family' and the 'family collective' are frequently used terms in this chapter and it is therefore important to clarify the definitions. 'Household' refers to those who reside together, while 'extended family' are those who are bonded through kinship ties and do not always live in the same household (Young & Ansell, 2003). The 'family collective' involves the extended family, households in which different family members live and expanding social networks of support based on for instance friendship, religious affinity and ethnicity (Abebe, 2012).

The linkages between migration and education are evident. Hashim (2007) explored the interconnections between children's migration and their educational opportunities in north eastern Ghana. He found that children might migrate to ensure their continued access to education by either entering a foster arrangement or by securing resources in some manner. Similar processes were found in this study in which child migration was initially planned to be positive for their educational

prospects. But as this study will show, migration does not always improve the educational prospects of the girls in reality; it is in fact closely linked to school dropout.

The reasons for migration and the linkages with school dropout mesh in many cases of complex life stories with more than one migration involved. Samata's life story is such a complex story with several migration moments and is highlighted in box 1. She migrated three times before she joined an NGO and I will analyse these migration moments throughout this chapter.

The story of Samata

Samata lived with her parents, brothers and sisters in the village under poor household conditions. Her parents could not afford to send Samata to school and decided to send her to an older sister in another village when she was seven years old. Samata moved to her sister with the intention of gaining access to school there. This sister had a small child and had to work on the farm. Samata started schooling for several days but was withdrawn soon. She then was employed to take care of the young child instead of going to school. After two years, the parents of Samata found out that she was not schooling and took her back. Soon her grandmother died in Wa and the family travelled to Wa for the funeral. While the family went back to the village, Samata was left in Wa with her aunt in the hope that the aunt could send her to school. She started in the first class of primary school (P1). But before the end of the year, Samata's aunt stopped her from going to school. She was sent to a woman who was told to be another sister. She had to work full time on the market for the woman and was not allowed to attend school. Her aunt came once in a while to collect the money she earned. After three years of working, she was targeted by the NGO and escaped her harmful working situation to join the NGO.

Box 1. Source: individual interviews.

This chapter goes on to describe migration and the interdependent relationships within the family collective and the linkages with school dropout. I will use examples from my empirical data to illustrate this. After that, it describes the process of migration as a coping strategy to livelihood adversity. All these processes of migration are an attempt to cope with difficult circumstances and improve life chances and are viewed in relation to school dropout among girls in northern Ghana.

5.2.1 Migration, the family collective and school dropout

The girls in this study often assist family members in productive or reproductive work. In a context of poor economic conditions with a lack of social and financial support from the government, children's contribution in the family collective is essential for household survival. Migration of children between households of extended family, is perceived as 'normal' child raising in many societies in West Africa. For the purpose of providing something to the child or employing children's capacities, or both (Ansell & Van Blerk, 2004). In relation to caring duties, when there is no-one else to step in, socio-cultural expectations often lead to 'automatic' assumptions of the child, moreover the girl, to become a carer for a relative or for younger children (Robson, 2004). The girls in this study contribute to households as a care worker as well with other forms of work to relief relatives' difficult circumstances. For instance, Samata took care of younger children, carried out household chores and was involved in economic activities. More attention is paid to girls' work later on in this chapter. Girls' productive and reproductive work within the family collective and the interdependent relationships they hold is interconnected with migration and school dropout, which is elaborated on below.

The exact motivations for a family collective to decide that a girl migrates to a different household within the collective is very context-dependent (Serra, 2009). Regardless the motivation, a fostering arrangement takes place whereby the girl provides services while the host household has in turn something to give back to the girl. For instance, access to education or other basic needs such as shelter, food and clothing. Fostering of orphaned and non-orphaned children is a common phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular in the West, whereby the child and foster family maintain an interdependent relationship (Abebe, 2012; Ansell & Van Blerk, 2004; Hashim, 2007; Serra, 2009). Ansell and Van Blerk (2004) highlight the use of children's migration as a household/family coping strategy in which they maintain a reciprocal relationship.

Hafiza's first migration illustrates the interdependent relationships within the family collective. She migrated for one year to her crippled aunt in order to carry out reproductive work in the household. She was given, in turn, a school uniform as her aunt was a seamstress.

'My aunty was crippled. Like her legs... but she was also a seamstress. So they say I should go and help her. And she was giving, she has given birth to a baby. So I should go and help her to take good care of the child. When

I was with my aunty, she always make the uniform for me'. – Hafiza, 17 years

The migration of Hafiza contained on the one hand a positive stimulus for school maintenance as she received a school uniform from her aunt. But on the other hand, because she was taking care of the young children and carrying out other household chores, she did not have much time to study and review her school work. So the migration to her aunt also had negative implications for her schooling. It did not make her eventually drop out but it was a contributory factor and precursor to dropout as the absence of time for studying affected her performance in school (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009; Boyle et al., 2002). Pilon (2003) investigated the fostering phenomenon in West Africa and explains similarly that fostering situations that are supposed to enable children to attend school is in reality not always what it seems (p.19).

Samata narrates how her parents could not take care of her due to household poverty. Her father decided to send Samata to her sister because she would have better life chances there.

‘So my father knows that he can’t take care of me to go to school. Then he send me to one of my sisters. When my father send me to my sister, and said my sister should send me to school.’ – Samata, 14 years

The father of Samata was not able to afford Samata’s schooling expenses and send her to her sister, in the hope that the sister could send her to school. In return of the provision of basic needs, Samata had to take care of the child of her sister.

‘She was also having a small child and she also need to go to the farm. So every day she would get up and say I should take care of the baby before and she will go to the farm and come. So because of that she did not send me to school anymore’ – Samata, 14 years

This quote describes how Samata’s sister did send her some days to school, but found that Samata would be of more use in the household. While Samata took care of the baby and carried out other household chores such as fetching water, the sister could go to the farm to work. So the first intention of Samata’s migration to give her access to schooling while simultaneously being a helping hand in her sister’s household, turned out to work out different in reality.

Shamira, who is currently in the first class of JHS, did not drop out herself, but she knows girls who have dropped out. In her experience, the reasons for girls to drop out can be that they are not living with their biological parents.

‘Some are not with their biological parents and when they wake up, they have to do household chores. So they find it difficult to learn and they come to school late. And they don’t get their books, they will have to be learning, but they don’t get it.’ – Shamira, 16 years

This shows that is commonly know that fostering does not always work out positively. Shamira did not experience it herself but has seen this happening around her.

Samata experienced two more migration events in her life as we have seen in box 1. The second time she migrated was another attempt to gain access to education and maintain an interdependent relationship with her extended family. Her parents left her with her aunt in Wa who was asked to send Samata to school. She joined the first class of Primary School for two terms, while she worked for her aunt during the school holidays. When the third term started, her aunt withdrew Samata from school. She was then send to a woman who was told to be a sister, but who was unfamiliar to Samata. She had to work on the market, wash rice bowls all day long. Samata was exploited in the work she had to carry out, was not allowed to go to school and had to give the earned money to her aunt. Moreover, Samata was treated harmful in the new household, receiving the leftovers of the woman’s own children and being verbally abused, which she describes as follows:

‘When I was working in the market, by the end of the month my aunty would come for money and collect the money. So I work with the woman for three years and I didn’t get the money. And sometimes, like the dress her son don’t like, it’s the one she gave to me.’ – Samata, 14 years

In addition, Samata found that the household’s own children attended school while she did not. Young migrants who move into a new household frequently appear to be treated differently from the other children in the household. Migrants like Samata, may be given different food and may not be provided with clothing, due to a larger number of household members who need to share resources (Hashim, 2007; Young & Ansell, 2003). The children of the woman were favoured over

Samata and worse, she was exposed to exploitative and abusive working conditions in her new household (Hashim, 2007) and forced to drop out of school.

Thus, fostering may bring negative aspects to education opportunities, particularly for girls as they are expected to engage in time-consuming reproductive tasks and productive tasks typically reserved for girls (Hashim, 2007). This is further illustrated in Hafiza's second migration. An aunt who lived in Wa indicated that she needed someone to assist in her economic activities. It was promised that Hafiza would continue schooling.

‘One of my aunties from Wa here came to our village and said that she needs someone to help her selling in the shop. Whilst the person would be schooling’ - Hafiza, 17 years

Hafiza explains that her parents hesitated about sending her to her aunt in Wa. The decision to eventually send her, was influenced by the fact that they had to choose between the schooling of their son or Hafiza. Hafiza's brother and she were in the same class and the family was aware of the future high secondary school fees for both children at the same time. Hafiza mentions that the schoolmaster got involved in the decision making and suggested that it would be wise to send the girl away because of the future high school fees. This gendered decision may have its roots in traditional and cultural notions of girls' future roles. The education of girls is often less favoured than boys' education because a girl marries into the husband's family where she is expected to cook, take care of children, wash and clean. Families might therefore not see the benefits of educating a daughter (Boyle et al., 2002; Colclough et al., 2000; Hunt, 2008). This, in combination with the promise of the aunt to send Hafiza to school if she would come to work for her, made the father to decide to send Hafiza to Wa. The idea of moving to the city was attractive for Hafiza at first. Until she found out that the migration outcomes did not live up to expectations:

‘First when I was still in the village I was happy because I said I was going to school in the town. And I was very very happy. But when I came to Wa and I realised I was not schooling anymore, I was not happy.’ – Hafiza, 17 years

The intended interdependent relationships were in reality found to be disadvantageous for both Samata's and Hafiza's schooling. There are several causes for foster arrangement to work out negatively for girls' schooling maintenance. Samata explains that she felt that her sister did not like

her and that she did not feel good in her sister's home. In addition, Samata was told to lie to her father about the fact that she was not schooling. Whether the interdependent relationship turns out to be advantageous for both parties, depends partly on the emotional relationship with the host family (Pilon, 2003). Negative relationships with the host family can cause the family to be hesitant to send the girl to school and rather use her for household work. This has a negative influence on the schooling of children, resulting possibly in class repeating, failing and dropping out. Since girls are requested to perform more domestic chores, the problem is more present for girls than for boys (Pilon, 2003).

The emotional relationship between the host family and the girl is not the only determining factor for an interdependent relationship to be beneficial for the girls' schooling. Receiving educational support also depends upon the host household's resources available and on the will to provide that support (Ansell & Van Blerk, 2004). This study found that host families may live in difficult financial circumstances as well and are not able or do not want to invest much in the girls' schooling. Girls are then found to be more useful to fill labour or economic gaps in the host household. Traditional and cultural beliefs around the tasks of girls also play a part in the reluctance of a host household to invest in girls' schooling. These factors reduce the likelihood of fostered children to go to school (Hashim, 2007). In other words, the larger socio-economic and cultural structures of society and the contextual conditions of the host household have a big influence on children's migration and consequently on school dropout.

Shida's household livelihood consisted of farming in the village and the circumstances appeared to be economically difficult. Shida had to drop out of class 3 to take care of her younger siblings in order for her parents to work on the farm. Two years later, Shida migrated with her parents, sister and two little brothers from the village to Wa in the hope for better life chances in the city.

‘Because here in Wa is a city, a big city, you know that if they come here they can get something better here than the village.’ – Shida, 15 years

Shida started to sell onions on the market of Wa together with her mother to ‘get something to eat’ and sustain their livelihoods. While the household composition of Shida stayed the same, their livelihood changed considerably due to the joint migration. The migration did not live up to hopes of a better life and educational access for Shida. She had to work for household survival, also after the migration.

I found Efiā on the market of Wa, washing bowls at the market stall for rice dishes of her grandmother. Efiā (12 years) explains that she used to go to school in the village until class 3. Her parents told Efiā that they could not afford her school fees any longer and that she had to move to Wa to work for her grandmother. Thus, in order to cope with the difficult financial situation in their household, her parents made an arrangement within the family collective. Remarkable in this case is that Efiā's brothers and sisters are still schooling in the village. She does not know why only she was sent to her grandmother in Wa, the only thing that she was told is that her parents could not pay her school fees.

5.2.2 Migration to deal with livelihood adversity

As described earlier, livelihood adversity leads to changes in the household including migration and interrupted schooling. School dropout due to livelihood adversity is often temporary and children in this situation can be defined as an event dropout or sporadic dropout. School dropout in this category is caused by a certain critical event preceding the adversity that shaped the situation in such way that children are forced to drop out. These children may return to school when the situation that led to dropout improves. But it is also possible that they move into a more permanent dropout status (Ananga, 2011c).

The life story of Shamina demonstrates the coincidence of adversity in her livelihood, migration and event dropout. She migrated to Wa after her father was forced to stop working on the farm due to poor physical conditions. Adversity in the livelihood of the household took place as his income dropped and there was no more money to take care of Shamina. She dropped out of school, migrated to her aunt in Wa and works on the market now to sell water and earn some money. Shamina indicates that she wants to earn enough money to go back to school again. Shamina left the situation of economic hardship and sought for provision for her needs with her aunt (Ansell & Van Blerk, 2004). So migration and as a consequence dropout, took place in order to cope with the livelihood's adversity as well as to gain better life chances.

Sporadic migration after a funeral was the case of Sana at first. After her father died due to a traffic accident, she travelled to her patrilineal home village near Wa for the funeral, where her grandfather and extended family of her father's side reside. They wanted Sana to move and start schooling there. In other words, the family collective wanted her to migrate to their village as part of a coping strategy to deal with the livelihood adversity Sana experienced when her father died. But she and

her mother did not agree with that. Sana was able to successfully exercise agency over her own school opportunities, against the traditional patrilineal structures of society.

‘The way they changes me at the school I don’t like it so my mother send me back to the village and I was attending the school.’ – Sana, 17 years

This quote shows how Sana’s own opinion about her life, influenced her migration. Sana stayed several months with her grandfather while the family sorted out the place for her to go. Eventually she moved back to her village together with her mother. The temporary migration did not lead to permanent dropout, although it put Sana at risk of dropping out since she missed a substantial part of the school year (Ananga, 2011c).

Two years later, Sana had to deal with livelihood adversity again when her mother passed away due to heart problems. She moved into the household of her oldest brother who had a wife and his own children as well. Sana explains that she had to work on the farm of her brother every day after school. So also here are the interdependent relationships within the extended family visible: Sana received shelter and her basic needs in her new household and contributed by working on the farm. But Sana indicates that the obligation to work did not create an ideal situation for her schooling opportunities:

‘If you come home from school you have to work, you have to go to the farm. In the night you come home, if you come home you need to bath, eat, and by the time that you finish doing this thing, the time... it is late. So I need to go and sleep.’ – Sana, 17 years

Sana was not happy in her new household, because she did not have ‘a peace of mind’ (Sana) or time and energy to study and revise her schoolwork. In other words, the migration in order to cope with livelihood adversity, had negative implications for the quality of her schooling, which can be a contributory factor for school dropout (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009). But we must not forget that the hardship in her former household could have pulled her out of school. So while she was exposed to factors for possible school dropout, the migration enabled her to stay in school instead. Thus, the migration paradoxically prevented Sana from dropping out and created an at-risk-factor for dropping out at the same time.

5.3 Institutional circumstances

The educational institution is a social structure of society which can create both opportunities and constraints for girls' schooling maintenance. Its processes and practices may be negative for the girls' schooling and work in such a way that it contributes to school dropout. Constraining conditions within the school setting can be perceived as supply factors and usually interplay with demand factors to result in pushing children to dropout. School-related causes of dropout relate to quality of education, schooling resources and facilities, school environment and safety issues, teacher behaviour, academic performance and gendered practices inside schools (Ananga, 2011a; Hunt, 2008). The interviewed girls, JHS director and Girl Child Education Coordinator Anna explain how supply factors in the Upper West Region (UWR) are a significant part of the school dropout process.

5.3.1 *Teachers' behaviour and school environment*

My empirical material shows that teachers' behaviour in schools influences the school attendance of girls in such a way that it influences the willingness of the girl to go to school every day. In other words, teachers' behaviour shapes the environment of the school in which girls may feel safe and comfortable or not. The teachers' behaviour that is described as having a negative influence on the girls' schooling includes punishment, sexual harassment and the quality of teaching. These classroom practices of a teacher are not the main causes of dropout: none of the girls indicates this as the ultimate factor leading to the decision to drop out. But during many interviews and the in-depth discussion, the practices of teachers which shape the classroom and school environment is mentioned as a contributory factor to school dropout. It is a circumstance that plays together with other circumstances to lead ultimately to dropout.

During the in-depth discussion, all the girls agreed that punishments of teachers can make a girl scared to come to school, as illustrated below.

‘Some of the teachers, if they teach you something and you don't know the thing, they will use all the adjectives to describe you and they will cane you. So tomorrow you can decide to not come to school.’ – Hafiza, In-depth discussion

These punishments are sometimes cruel and used for poor performance. Girls were for instance insulted by the teacher when they did not understand an explanation. Physical punishment is also

named as a contributor to an unsafe school environment and therefore to school dropout. Fatah shares similar thoughts.

‘How the teachers always cane us and punch us, some they don’t want to come to school.’ – Fatah, 16 years

Corporal punishment like caning is in Ghana not allowed to use for poor academic performance (Dunne, 2007). However, the interviewed girls indicate that this is indeed a common practice in their schools and that it might scare away girls from school. The girls even need to buy cane sticks to bring to school so that they can be punished with their own sticks.

Harassment did not come forth from any individual interview. However, the girls who spoke during the in-depth discussion told me they had seen sexual harassment happening to other girls in their schools. A male teacher approached a girl in these cases and the girl refused to get involved with the teacher. Sana narrates how this may occur:

‘The teacher says oh this girl is beautiful, I like the girl. The teacher will say, I love you. If the girl did not want the teacher, the teacher will try anything to do, to make you... to punish you if you don’t agree.’ – Sana, in-depth discussion

The girls’ rejection towards the male teachers leads again to punishment. And the combination of circumstances contributes to an unsafe school environment for girls which in turn contributes to school dropout.

The JHS director explains that the quality of teaching may also be a factor.

‘We can also give a percentage of the blame to we, the teachers. Sometimes too when you don’t engage the pupils in class during the instructional hour period, there is a tendency that they will get more than enough time to go out and do what is not expected of them.’ – JHS Director

The JHS director explains that children may become bored in school or may not see the benefits of schooling when the lectures are not engaging or when a teacher is absent. This can lead to irregular attendance of the children. Although the quality of teaching is not a factor that ultimately leads to dropout, it may be a small contributory factor. Interestingly, the interviewed girls were mostly positive about their own schooling experiences related to the school environment. The girls did not

see the quality of teaching as a factor that could contribute to school dropout, nor the teachers' behaviour and school environment. They enjoy going to school and are positive about their teachers and their courses as, for instance, Rushida explains to me.

‘They just make sure the children work hard. Like they always do, like the teachers do so. Because some of the teachers come they always tell to struggle and become somebody in the future.’ – Rushida, 16 years

However, whilst talking about others, various supply factors that lead to school dropout came up. They could tell me stories about cases of other girls dropping out of school because of things happening in the school. This may be because they were not familiar with the home or personal situation of these other girls, only the school situation. So to them it might have looked as those girls dropped out due to the punishments or harassment that happened inside the school. In addition, the attitude of these girls was mentioned to be a big factor, as some of the girls were said to provoke the harassment or the punishment themselves. But the dropout and the behaviour of the other girls could have been a consequence of the adverse home situation these girls were in and not only of the institutional issues.

We must not overlook the role of the girls themselves as they are social actors acting within the social institution of the school and not just passive receivers of education, punishments or harassment.

‘The girls too, some of them will sit down in the class and show their breasts, they remove one of their buttons. And also they open their legs and when they bend down, you can see their thighs. Which is not good.’ – Hafiza, In-depth discussion

According to Hafiza, some girls in her class provoke sexual harassment in the classroom. The traditional culture in northern Ghana disapproves the exposure of certain body parts, which is perceived as highly inappropriate. By showing the cleavage and thighs inappropriately, male counterparts or male teachers could be aroused and this can help bring about sexual harassment as well as bullying in the school. The JHS director shares similar thoughts. He argues that Western type of movies that are shown on the television nowadays contain women exposing themselves with short skirts and in a way that is not in accordance with the African culture. Young girls try to

copy these images of women and do not appreciate the African culture. Male teachers or male pupils may be affected by this way of inappropriate dressing of girls in school. Thus, the way the girls behave and show themselves in this particular cultural context, affects the way they are treated by their male teachers and colleagues. They are not passive victims of the negative practices but often have an active role in it.

5.3.2 Academic performance and school facilities

Rita narrated her life story to me and tells me how the death of her parents and the resulting poverty forced her to drop out of school. In the end of the interview, I ask again whether there are any other reasons why she dropped out. Then, she explains that she was not good at English reading and speaking, which made it difficult for her to follow any subject. Her mother used to help her with the reading but with the death of her mother, this assistance fell away.

‘If you can’t read, you cannot have any subjects. They say that I come and learn how to read and speak first.’ – Rita, 16 years

Rita was facing academic difficulties in school, even more after her mother died, and it was clear that the school could not provide help to solve that problem. So she was told to first learn English and reading before she could continue with the other subjects.

Sahada did not drop out from school but indicates that she is having difficulties with the continuation of her schooling due to, among other factors, her academic performance.

‘I cannot read. I cannot write. When the teacher dictates some work, I cannot write. That’s my problem in this school.’ – Sahada, 16 years

The fact that Rita and Sahada are not good in reading and writing and that the teachers cannot help them solving that problem is in some degree due to institutional and its economic challenges. The household circumstances as demand factors are partly to blame for this issue, as describe earlier in this chapter. Supply factors contribute on the other hand also to these issues. For instance, the generally high number of pupils in one class of sixty or above, makes it unable for the class teacher to support all the pupils in their academic special needs. In addition, the fact that Wa is located in a deprived area in Ghana where the socio-economic conditions are challenging, makes it an unattractive place to work as a teacher. Many educated and talented teachers prefer to migrate to

the South of Ghana to find work. A common practice in Wa and specifically its surrounding villages is that uneducated voluntary teachers become employed teachers due to the lack of educated teachers. This means that the professional skills of teachers are low, which affects the learning process of the pupils negatively.

A similar institutional challenge that emerged from the interviews is the inadequate school facilities as supply factors that push girls from school. Especially when girls become older and start to menstruate, they need separated shielded sanitary facilities in order to change themselves privately. The local Girl Child Education Coordinator, Anna, explains that some schools are not girl-friendly, meaning they are not equipped with the facilities that girls need. Girls often withdraw themselves from school during the monthly period and the irregular attendance may encourage girls to drop out from school as they miss out on many classes.

The poor academic performance of girls and the inadequate facilities, as a result of institutional and economic challenges, can be perceived as a contributory factor to school dropout as opposed to the critical event that leads to dropout. These at-risk factors are precursors to dropout whereas final critical events are particular sets of circumstances which ultimately influence the decision to leave school (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009). Rita did for instance not mention academic difficulties problem as a cause of her dropout at first. But later in the interview, the issue of learning difficulties in school came up as contributing to her dropout process.

5.4 Agency versus structure examined

The social studies of childhood advocates for the acknowledgment of agency in children's lives. Agency is often defined as the power to act and shape one's own life, lives around one and to some extent society (Mayall, 2002). Where the girls in this study live in highly constraining structural circumstances, agency is not always evident. However, although poverty and various socio-cultural do limit the girls' freedom to choose the life they want in terms of schooling, I found ways that the girls do exercise a small amount of agency. This could be defined as *thin* agency (Klocker, 2007) and I will expand on this term later on. In this section, the agency of the girls is examined in relation to the societal structures in which their lives unfold. I explore what 'thins' the agency of Ghanaian dropout girls as well as how their 'thin' agency manifests in their lives.

Samata's life story is an example of a life story in which family and community contexts pull the girl in different directions. The familial circumstances are, in turn, acting in a certain way that is shaped by the socio-economic conditions of the location. Samata is sent from one place to another to represent interests of different people whereas her own interests are pushed to the background. Samata has little power to influence or to have control over the migration and decision processes that affect her life; her family takes most control over her life path. However, at one point she attempted to escape the constraining circumstances by running away. In the time that she was taking care of the younger child of her sister in the village, Samata's sister took her to visit their parents one day. When it was time to go back to the sister's house after the visit, Samata did the following:

‘The day that she's (sister) getting ready to go back to her village and I ran away and hide. And I hide so she'll go and leave me.’ – Samata, 14 years

Samata ran away at the moment they were supposed to leave to go back to the sister's village. This way, she managed to find a gap where she could exercise power to take control over her own life. For a short while, her agency ensured that she did not have to go with her sister and stay with her parents. But after three days, her parents brought Samata to her sister's village after all. So while Samata was able to influence her life path shortly, her life path did not change on the long term to the way she wanted it to go. The social structures forced her to live the life her family determined for her. Samata did what was in her power and was able to shape her own life path to a very small extent. In other words, she negotiated her ‘thin’ agency in the constraining environment of the household and family collective. These social arrangements diminished her power to act and her freedom to become the person she reasons to value. Bell and Payne (2009) explain that the concepts of agency and power are negotiated and resisted in multiple and dynamic ways in the contexts of the family collective. That is visible in the case of Samata.

Poverty is one ‘thinner’ of the girls’ agency. Klocker (2007) uses the concept of ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ agency to demonstrate how children's capacity to shape processes and forces of social change are either constraining or enabling. Drawing on the lives of domestic workers in Tanzania, Klocker (2007) argues that ‘thin’ agency relates to the decisions and everyday actions that are exercised within highly restrictive contexts with few alternative options. Whereas ‘thick’ agency is the freedom to act within a broad range of options. Structures, contexts and relationships can act as

‘thinners’ or ‘thickeners’ of an individual’s agency by constraining or expanding their freedom to choose (Klocker, 2007). Although poverty and socio-cultural factors constrain the girls’ freedom, their agency in the dropout process cannot be completely denied as they understand and negotiate the power relations that surround them (Klocker, 2007).

Thin agency can be found in Hafiza’s life, which took various turns that were outside of her power. She was sent several times to family members to work for them. This constrained her schooling opportunities and Hafiza was not able to exercise any agency to influence the life path her family was shaping for her. But she found a gap in which she did manage to take control over her own life. This happened when the NGO tried to recruit her on the market. Her aunt did not allow Hafiza to move to the NGO and stop working for the aunt. Hafiza knew that the NGO would be her chance to escape the hard working life and early marriage and she was determined to leave her aunt’s house. One day her aunt went to the market and left Hafiza unsupervised at the house. Hafiza packed her things quickly and ran to the NGO. Hafiza still lives at the NGO and her aunt accepted that eventually. So Hafiza managed to negotiate her agency within the powerful constraining familial circumstances and shape her own life path.

Sahada’s life story (box 2) shows that her determining personality ‘thickens’ her agency. The socio-economic and institutional structures in which she finds herself, work in such a way to try to pull and push her out of school. Yet, Sahada wants to finish school no matter what. She tells me that some girls of her age who are in the same situation as her, get involved with boys, which influences their school performance and attendance negatively. But Sahada does not want to have anything to do with boys, she does not want to get married nor get pregnant. Even though Sahada does not have anyone to help her financially nor academically, she has the power to act in such a way that she can shape her own life and not let anyone or anything influence her school maintenance. While the societal structures lurk at her to make her drop out happen, she has the agency to act against it. In other words, Sahada’s strong determining personal characteristics give her the freedom to choose to stay in school.

It is evident that the force of social influences on the individual freedom of the girls living in a poor and deprived area, is great. Moreover, their agency is ‘inescapably qualified and constrained by the

The story of Sahada

Sahada lived in the village with her parents and her six siblings. She started schooling in Primary School class 1 and continued until class 4. Her family lived in poverty and at this point, her parents could not afford her schooling expenses anymore. Sahada also indicates that she had problems with reading and writing in school. The combination of poverty and poor academic performance led to the decision to leave the village and move to Wa in the hope for better life chances. In Wa, Sahada started to live with her grandfather and continued in class 4. Unfortunately, both her parents died in the village along the way. In addition, the death of her grandfather in 2012 resulted in financial struggles for Sahada to stay in school. But she was determined to continue with school and started to work on the market after school hours. School closes at 2 pm and Sahada goes to market to sell tea at 3 pm every day. By doing this, she earns a small income with which she buys sandals, clothes, school materials and sanitary pads. Sahada comes home late in the evening to her grandfather's house, where she stays alone. After a long day of schooling and working, she does not have energy to revise her schoolwork. Sahada is in JHS 1 now and faces great academic difficulties as she does not study at home nor receives extra help from the teachers. Nevertheless, she is resolute to finish JHS and Secondary School.

Box 2. Source: individual interviews.

social, political and economic opportunities that are available to them' (Sen, 1999, p. xi). Many of the girls' agency is shaped and often constrained by the challenging economic circumstances in which they live. Due to household poverty and interdependent relationships within the family collective, girls migrated between households as an attempt to cope with livelihood adversity and poverty. They were not able to have much control in this process: it was mostly the adults in the family who made the decisions over the girls. Despite the constraining forces of the structures, the girls find ways to negotiate their agency within the ongoing processes so that they can shape their own life worlds to a small or larger extent. Looking at agency of young people as a continuum seems like an appropriate way of examining agency in the context of this study in which agency moves between 'thin' and 'thick'. The continuum of agency illustrates that a young person is able

to exercise agency in some situations and experiences a lack of agency in other situations. An individual moves along the continuum over time and in relation to decisions that are made (Klocker et al., 2007). The continuum suggests that there are significant links between agency and power and between agency and the structures or contexts within which young people live (Bell & Payne, 2009). Sometimes the agency of the girls may be 'thin', but we need to be careful to not overlook it. For instance, the girls may not be able to exercise any agency for some years in their life path. But a situation can appear any time in which the girls find a space to exercise agency and control their own life paths significantly. Rita explains this:

This study also found that the girls may be able to exercise more agency on a certain level in their lives, such as in the school institution, than on another level, such as the economic level. The girls' agency is thicker on the institutional level than on the economic level of society. Their behaviour inside the school has consequences on the way how they are treated by peers and by teachers. Behaving and dressing inappropriately according to the culture of northern Ghana will affect the way a girl is treated and may provoke harassment in the school. Thus, the girls have a big role themselves in this area. The interviewed girls also indicate that one's attitude towards learning is important.

'If you are serious and learning hard, that can support you too.' – Rita, in-depth discussion

The other girls in the in-depth discussion group agreed with what Rita stated. It shows in my empirical material that the girls place a responsibility on themselves to achieve what they reason to value. In other words, the girls are able to influence their schooling maintenance to a certain extent with their attitude towards schooling, the teachers and the schoolwork. They need to appeal to their agency in the institutional level to increase their opportunities for a brighter future.

In addition, the girls' personal characteristics play a role in the negotiation process of agency. For instance, Sahada's determining and strong personality ensures the opportunity to prevent herself from dropping out while she has no one else and nothing else to look after her. Her personality helps her negotiating her agency positively to achieve what she reasons to value.

Klocker et al. (2007) give an explanation that is particularly in accordance to what was found in this study:

‘Agency appears to be inhibited or encouraged by young people’s (constrained/opportunistic) locational contexts; identities they are expected to fulfil, and alternative identities they choose to portray; their position of power/lessness; their state of emotions and well-being at a particular time; their stage in life course and other factors’ (Klocker et al., 2007, p. 142).

The ‘thin’ agency of the girls who participated in this study is mainly inhibited by their constrained locational contexts, the identities they are expected to fulfil as a teenage girl in a gendered society and the powerlessness they experience in these roles. However, the girls do find small spaces within the constraints where they have a position of power and where they can exercise agency to a smaller or larger extent. At the same time, the girls’ attitudes towards school and their personal characteristics are factors that may encourage their agency. The girls need make use of these factors to influence their schooling positively on the level they are able to use.

6 Analysis II – the value of education

In this chapter, I work with the second main research question: ‘How do the girls value basic education?’ I analyse how the girls value education by exploring which capabilities the girls value as important and attainable through education and why these are important to them.

The chapter starts with describing how education is a means to become somebody. It continues with education and the ability to earn an income, to aspire and to dream. After that, this chapter presents how education enhances the capacity to stand up for oneself, which is linked with empowerment and enhancing agency. It finally explores how the conversion factors of girls from poor households in a deprived area in Ghana, hinder the transition of resources offered in school into capabilities.

6.1 Education as a means ‘to become somebody’

‘School is important, education is the key to success. If I’m not educated, I cannot even become somebody in the future.’ – Rushida, 16 years

Rushida’s thoughts illustrate the idea that participation in education is fundamental for a better future, to become somebody worthy. Education does that by expanding different capabilities of girls. Sen (1992, in Unterhalter 2009) suggests that education has three ways of expanding capabilities in which the various roles of education are highlighted. It has firstly an instrumental social role: the girls can, for instance, dialogue about social arrangements in their lives, such as marriage. Education has secondly an instrumental process role: it facilitates the girls’ capacity to participate in decision-making processes in the household or community. And third, it has an empowering role: it facilitates the girls in enhancing their agency and in gaining power to make their own choices within the constraining social structures of society (Unterhalter, 2009). Thus, education through schooling enables the girls to become somebody in the future by expanding related capabilities. Moreover, these roles of education are of great importance in the lives of the interviewed girls and, therefore, makes the girls value education highly.

Sahada and Abena express how school dropout, that is, the disruption of education, leads to a future without hope.

‘If you don’t stay in school, you will be in trouble. You cannot do anything in this world, in future.’ – Sahada, 16 years

‘When you drop out of school, you face a lot of difficulties’ – Abena, 18 years

From the girls’ point of view, schooling is a significant element needed for achieving a life without troubles and difficulties. Education promises the pathway to better lives (Crivello, 2011) and school dropout eliminates that promise. The interviewed girls live in a challenging environment and their life chances are shaped by constraining socio-economic structures. As explored in the former chapter, household poverty and livelihood adversity are daily realities of the girls. Education is seen as an escape from this poverty and a way to have access to better life chances than they have now, by providing resources for various capabilities.

It is evident from my empirical material that the girls value more greatly capabilities that relate to living a good and healthy life and to being empowered in society than capabilities that relate to a particular professional aspiration. Thus, according to the girls, ‘becoming somebody’ signifies becoming someone who can live an acceptable and respectable life. Education has partly an instrumental role in enhancing capabilities that are required for future professional occupations, as for example Rita explains that she is good in science which is important for becoming a nurse. But education enhances more substantially capabilities that are needed for generally living a decent life inside the deprived area that the girls live in, so that they can protect themselves from harm and take care of their family. Rushida and Samata explain this as follows:

‘I have to continue schooling to become somebody in the future who can help me and my family’ – Rushida, 16 years

‘I’m happy I’m going to school. And I want to go to school and also come and help my brother and junior sister and the rest.’ – Samata, 14 years

These quotes reveal that schooling equips the girls with the capacity to live and survive within the conditions in which their daily realities of life unfold. And equally important, it enables them to help their families and sustain good interdependent relationships with the family collective. When the girls can contribute to the family collective, both the extended family and the girls benefit from it. Crivello (2011) found similarly that education creates hopes and strategies for moving out of poverty. She argues that children are involved in complex intergenerational dependencies and,

therefore, play a role in alleviating family poverty. In Crivello's (2011) study in rural Peru where structural inequalities are persistent, education of children is seen as the main hope for disruption of the intergenerational transfer of poverty. Children who are educated have a brighter future ahead than their parents, and this allows both parties to improve life chances and for the poverty to come to a halt.

As we have seen, education has an instrumental role in facilitating the expansion of capabilities of children (Saito, 2003). There are two aspects of capabilities: the first is the expansion of a child's capacity or ability and the second is the expansion in opportunities (Saito, 2003). A girl learns skills through education and as a result, a wider range of opportunities is created. For instance, when a girl learns the skill to speak English, opportunities like studying English literature and going abroad, open up to her. So opportunities are added to the capability set of girls through education, by acquiring abilities. Closely related, Gasper (1997) suggest that we can distinguish 'S-capabilities' and 'O-capabilities'. The realm of 'S-capabilities' ('S' meaning 'skill' and 'substantive') consists of capacities, skills, abilities and attitudes. The realm of 'O-capabilities' ('O' meaning 'option' and 'opportunity') is formed by the particular life-paths potentially attainable to a given person as a result of the acquired 'S-capabilities'. And the other way round, not having 'S-capabilities' leads to constraints in 'O-capabilities', meaning that these capabilities are interconnected (Gasper, 1997; Otto & Ziegler, 2006). This chapter continues exploring the abilities, capacities or 'S-capabilities' that the girls attain in school as well as how the girls see their options and future lives. In other words, I explore how the 'S-capabilities' expand their 'O-capabilities' or opportunities and as a result, empowers them.

6.1.1 Intrinsic value of education

It is clear that education has an instrumental social and process role as well as an empowering role for the girls (Biggeri, 2014). Besides the instrumental value, education is also concerned with intrinsic value (Saito, 2003), which we must not overlook. The interviewed girls who are schooling express that they are happy to go school. They enjoy learning, meeting with their friends and they admire most of their teachers. All the girls express that when they dropped out of school, they were not happy. They missed going to school during the period they were out of school. The girls who are working on the market also express that they are not happy to work in the market. They do not enjoy the work that they carry out and they do not enjoy the environment in which they currently

are. For instance, Efia, who washes rice bowls on the market for her grandmother, expresses that she is not happy in her current circumstances.

‘I think about school, I want to go back to school.’ – Efia, 12 years

The environment in which Efia finds herself at the moment, is an environment mostly occupied by adults. She prefers to be at school, where she can find peers and things that are of her interest. The same feelings were shared by the other girls who are working and not going to school.

The JHS director expresses how school protects children. When the children are in school, it is the duty of the school to protect them during schooling hours. So the girls who are not in school, do not fall under the protection of a school. Although there can be hazardous practices within the school that may harm the girls as explored in the previous chapter, they feel more often protected and they feel comfortable in school. The girls are exposed to a more endangering environment on the market, where no one besides themselves, has the responsibility to protect them. The girls express that they feel freer from fear in school and this seems to be a more appropriate environment for them. Thus, schooling contributes intrinsically to the well-being of the girls, by offering protection, providing knowledge and allowing time with their peers.

6.2 Being capable to earn an income

Though the girls do not articulate abilities for working in a specific job, they do express the importance of education for enhancing abilities related to working and earning an income.

‘Because if you go to school, you can get some job to do. And get some salary so that you can do whatever you want. But if you don’t go to school you can’t get anything you want, you’ll struggle’ – Shida, 15 years

According to Shida, earning a salary enhances freedom to do things that one reasons to value. And education is believed to prepare the girls for working and earning an income. Education teaches the girls among other things to read, write, do mathematics and engage in critical thinking. All these skills are important requirements for getting involved with a job or for carrying out jobs efficiently and profitable, like starting a small business, so that it provides a sufficient income.

Some argue that for the human development and capability approach it is mainly important to develop reading, writing, mathematical and critical thinking skills to improve personal reflection

rather than for its economic value. So that one can lead ‘examined lives’ (Saito, 2003). However, these skills do have an economic value, which is particularly important for the girls living in economic disadvantaged conditions. The girls view the ability to earn an income as very significant in the kind of lives they live, and as a requirement that needs to be met in order to be able to engage in further development. A decent job holds the promise of escaping poverty and marginalisation (Crivello, 2011) and education equips the girls with the necessary skills for that job.

6.3 Ability to aspire and to dream

I asked the girls what they want to become in the future. The *functionings* that the girls express as important in their lives, in the sense of the professional aspirations they have, showed some interesting and remarkable outcomes related to capabilities. I realised that the ability to aspire is a not a naturally present condition; it needs to be developed before the girls can actually articulate their aspirations. When I asked the girls about their professional aspirations, what they want to become in the future, their answers were rather corresponding. Seven of them tell me that they want to become a nurse and three want to become a teacher. The girls, particularly the ones who are not schooling or who are in primary school, show few ambitions and excitement for their professional aspirations. In addition, they cannot explain why they want to become a nurse or a teacher. Apart from Rita, who has reasoned the occupation and has awareness about becoming a nurse: it requires knowledge of science. The other girls shrug their shoulder when I ask them why they aspire these occupations, or they reply that they simply admire nurses. They do not reason their choice. I found that many of the girl participants are not very aspiring about achieving functionings in their lives in terms of future professional occupations.

The reason for this might be because they do not know which professions actually exist. A nurse or a teacher are occupations that are concrete and visible in their community. The girls know what a nurse or a teacher does and these occupations are fairly easy accessible to them. Therefore, the girls mention it as their future aspiration. The limited articulation of professional aspirations is partly a result of the limited range of options of the girls to choose from, simply because they are not exposed to more available options. Unterhalter (2012) explains how the lack of an informational base can make it difficult for children to assess their futures. Thus, some of the girls do not have the capability to aspire due to the limited knowledge of ‘what is out there’.

Some girls who are schooling in JHS, do have the capability to aspire. For example, Sana who is in class one of JHS, expresses that she wants to become an actor. She aspires this because she wants to teach people right and wrong through acting in movies. Hafiza is also in the first class of JHS, and she tells me the following about her occupational aspirations.

‘My wish was that I wanted to become a doctor. But they say that it causes a lot of money. And the law of the NGO also stated that if you’re 18 years you have to leave here. So, I don’t have enough money.’ – Hafiza, 17 years old

Hafiza wants to become a doctor but she realises that it requires a lot of money to study in order to become a doctor. She is staying at the NGO right now that pays for her school fees. But she has to leave the NGO when she turns 18 years old, which will be in one year. So while it is a dream of Hafiza to become a doctor, this is in her view not a real opportunity for herself. Apart from becoming a doctor, Hafiza also wants to become a journalist, because, to use her own words, ‘to discover information of other parts of the world’. Thus, Hafiza has the capability to aspire as well as the capacity to understand the obstacles she may face in achieving the desired occupations. It is evident that JHS provides the girls with the capability to aspire, possibly because here they are informed about professional options. The more the girls climb on the educational ladder and learn skills, the more they become aware of occupational opportunities and the more they develop their capability to aspire.

Another reason for the limited ability to express occupational aspirations is because the girls think they will not be able to achieve it due to the deprived situation they are in. They do not dare to dream; the capability to dream is blighted by their constraining circumstances. Many interviewed girls, and particularly the girls who are not schooling or who are in primary school, do not dare to dream big about their future lives. This is firstly because they are not aware of possible opportunities as explained before. And secondly because they realise that their situation is so constraining that they will never be able to achieve the dream. The less the girls were educated, the less they were able to express the dreams they have in life. Abena does, for example, not have the capability to dream. She is selling oranges on the market, and expresses the following.

‘I am working because I want to survive, I want to feed myself, not that I want to go back to school.’ – Abena, 15 years

Abena does not think about education or other professional aspirations, she just wants to sell oranges so she will have some money to feed herself and her baby. She does not have the capability to dream about the future, she can only think about how to get through the day. Abena's circumstances after she dropped out from school are constraining in such a way that it deprives her from, among other things, the capability to aspire and the capability to dream.

In conclusion, the limited expression of occupational aspirations in my data material is a consequence of either the lack of awareness of the available options or the inability to dream about the future. This is due to the constraining socio-economic circumstances in which the girls live their lives and which constrain their educational chances. The girls who are not schooling express less occupational aspirations than the girls who are attending JHS. In other words, the non-schooling girls have less opportunity and freedom to achieve big ambitions. It is evident that education enhances the capability to aspire and to dream, by providing the girls with an informational base to make assessments about their futures (Unterhalter, 2012). Education plays a role in learning the girls various skills and as a consequence, expanding their opportunities (Saito, 2003). It also enhances the capacity to understand the way how to achieve something.

6.4 Education and the ability to stand up for oneself

During the in-depth discussion, the girls explained why it is important for a girl to go to school. While doing that, they articulated the ability to stand up for oneself, which a girl can attain through education. The following quotations illustrate this.

‘A girl can be forced into marriage young. The girl gets slapped, gets locked up in the house. The girl cannot do anything. The girl will only give birth, there is nothing else to do.’ – Rita, in-depth discussion

‘But if the girl is schooling, and a man comes and says he wants to marry her, the girl can talk whatever nonsense that she has for him, things like ‘as you can see, I’m a student, you cannot say you love me. Me I’m ready to go to school, you cannot lock me up. Please go away and find something better for yourself.’
– Hafiza, in-depth discussion

From these extracts, we can derive that the interviewed girls consider the ability to stand up for oneself as an important capability that is enhanced by education. A girl who goes to school is able

to defend and stand up for herself. Education makes a girl capable of verbally standing up and form arguments why she does not want to marry for example. In other words, it makes a girl able to have control over her environment to some extent (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009).

Especially in the gendered challenging circumstances in which the girl participants live, it is important for them to be able to deal with the situation so it does not constrain their freedom. This is closely connected with the agency of the girls: the capability to stand up for oneself and the capability to have control over one's environment enable a girl to exercise agency in her life. Education enhances their agency, so that they can act within the structures of society and exercise power to control their own lives, lives around them and society to some extent. This way, education increases the girls' freedom to choose what they reason to value. Education helps to empower the girls so that they have greater freedom and, therefore, a better well-being. Sen (1999, in Kabeer 2005), found similar outcomes in her study in West Bengal. Educated women are able to exercise control in their lives through a combination of literacy and numeracy skills and an enhanced self-esteem. They are therefore better able to deal with violent husbands. Education also appears to increase women's capacity to deal with the outside world, such as government officials and service providers (Kabeer, 2005).

During the in-depth discussion with the NGO-girls, I asked what consequences girls face when they drop out of school and how this relates to boys dropping out. This is what they had to say about it.

‘If the boy drops out, the boys can do carpenter, pushing, all kinds of jobs. But girls only go to the market and sell tomatoes.’ – Samata, in-depth discussion

‘Other people can even say whatever nonsense to her. Education is very very very important for girls, more important for girls than for boys.’ – Sana, in-depth discussion

The following extract from an individual interview with Shida explains similar issues.

‘You know, men can work and get money. But women, you know, men is stronger than women. So he can do whatever he wants. But women, how will you work and take care of your child and take care of you too. Some men they don't care whether they have children or not. They all try to do and that to get

something to eat, it's just finished. But the women you have to buy clothes and whatever to the child. So it's important for women to go to school.' – Shida, 15 years old.

According to the girls, it is easier for men to live a satisfactory life without education than for women. There are several manual jobs that men as well as boys can take up, even if they did not study, such as loading trucks, driving and transferring goods. In addition, men do not have to nurse children, cook or carry out other domestic work. They can easily go out of the home and find work to do. Women and girls on the other hand have responsibilities in the home and cannot simply go out and find any kind of job, as many manual jobs are not perceived as appropriate for women. Shida also refers to the fact that women are often the breadwinners in the household, when the men are away for work or where there are no men to be found in the household. So women need education in order to find an appropriate and sufficient job as well as being able to take good care of children and manage the household affairs.

It comes forth again here that a woman who is not educated may face difficulties standing up for herself or defend her interests. She may receive less respect when she is carrying out her job or even be treated unfair on the market because people 'can say whatever nonsense to her', she won't be able to defend herself. Without education, the girls can be subject to abuses and may be constrained to find menial jobs on which others will look down. In the gendered conditions the girls live, education may provide resources to 'denounce the injustices they suffer from and to claim their rights' (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 208). So education enhances the ability to stand up for oneself and the ability to make a choice: it empowers the girls.

6.5 Conversion factors

Education may be considered as expanding capabilities of people or their freedom to choose, and providing young people with access to necessary resources (Otto & Ziegler, 2006). The capability approach creates space to examine the personal, material and social resources available to an individual and the extent to which these resources can be converted into capabilities by him or her (Otto & Ziegler, 2006). The locational or environmental, personal and social contexts of the interviewed girls as investigated in the former chapter, are factors that influence the extent to which the girls are able to transform their resources offered in school into valued capabilities and,

consequently, into functionings. I will elaborate how these contexts influence the transformation process as follows.

One of the resources that the girls, like all the pupils in the primary schools, can access through education is the various subjects, such as English, mathematics and science. These informational resources may be transformable into the ability to read, write and understand the world around us. However, it shows in my empirical material that the girls who used to live or who live in extreme poor living conditions, have not always been able to attain these capabilities through the resources. For instance, Samata, Rita and Shida who currently live in the NGO, indicate that previous to their dropout they had difficulties reading and writing and therefore understanding the subjects. Their social arrangements in combination with the geographical location, gendered practices and the economic situation, led to the fact that there was a lack of basic needs, no time to study and no educational support from their surroundings. So their social and environmental conversion factors constrained them in the transformation of the informational resources into capabilities.

Now that the girls live in the NGO, these conversion factors have changed significantly in such a way that they are able to transform the resources into valued capabilities more effectively. The NGO provides their basic needs, such as shelter, food and school material, and supports and motivates them in their schooling. Since they live in the NGO, their grades in school have gone up and they have improved their ability to read and write and follow the subjects in school. As a consequence, these girls attained other valued capabilities such as the capability to aspire and the ability to have confidence and believe that they have a chance to become somebody in the future. We have seen in this second analysis chapter that valued functionings among the girls are to live a decent and good life within the prevalent constraining social structures and to be able to take care of their family. The capability sets or the freedom to choose the life that the girls value, were greatly enhanced when their conversion factors changed beneficiary.

However greatly enhanced, the NGO girls as well as the interviewed girls who are not living in the NGO, still have difficulties with transforming the resources of school into the capability to read, write and understand the subjects. This is partly due to the large number of pupils in the classrooms and the quality of teaching. Teachers generally do not manage to provide differentiated directions and lessons that are adapted to the individual needs of the pupils. The JHS girls who have little academic support from home because they have, for instance, uneducated caregivers, also do not

receive the needed help at school. When girls, and children in general, are very intelligent or when they receive academic help from home, they can manage to understand the lessons in school. And convert the offered resources into capabilities to achieve valued outcomes, despite the high number of pupils in their class and the low quality of education. However, the interviewed girls who struggle academically, do not possess those factors to help them, as is the case for many pupils. In addition, some of the NGO girls who do receive academic motivation at 'home' turn out to still struggle academically due to negative personal and institutional conversion factors.

For instance, Sahada does not know very well how to read and write, even though she is in the first class of JHS. Her social and environmental conversion factors limit her in the effective transition from resources into capabilities. So while she is schooling and is determined to complete school, she does not benefit so much from schooling as she is not able to convert the resources into capabilities. What she needs is extra help from for instance the school, in order to convert the offered resources into capabilities so that she will achieve the freedom to choose the life that she values. Because of the diversity in background among the girls, they need a different amount of resources or different resources in order to achieve valued capabilities (Unterhalter, 2009). The capability approach 'stresses that different people need different types and different amounts of capability inputs to reach the same wellbeing' (Robeyns, 2005 in Otto & Ziegler, 2006, p. 14).

As stated, resources are very important, 'but what then matters are the opportunities each person has for converting their bundle of resources into valued doings and beings' (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 221). The interviewed girls who live or have lived in disadvantaged environments, have limited opportunity to transform their resources into capabilities and therefore into valued doings and beings. Furthermore, their conversion factors limit them so much that they lose access to school and thus to the resources. Teenage girls partly drop out of school because they are not able to convert the standard available resources of education into capabilities. They may need different resources in education than boys or younger girls. This is because teenage girls have a different ability to convert resources into capabilities due to their specific needs and their socio-economic and cultural circumstances. Therefore, policies need to pay close attention to the contextual factors that limit or enable the transformation of resources into valued achievements.

When I compare the three different participant samples, it is clearly visible that the girls who are living in the NGO and the ones who are in JHS and have a stable home, have the most favourable

conversion factors. As we can see in the case of the girls who went to live with the NGO, they do not only manage to keep having access to resources in school, they also manage much better to convert the resources into abilities than they used to before they dropped out of school. However, the institutional challenges and the personal characteristics are factors that may also hinder the transformation of resources into capabilities and that are still present in the lives of those girls.

7 Conclusion

This chapter summarises the findings of the study, accompanied by final remarks. This will be done in relation to the research objectives that were formulated in the introduction. It then provides recommendations for future policy.

7.1 Summary of findings and concluding remarks

The research questions as formulated in the introduction were the guidance of this study. I will first summarise the findings that relate to the first main research question: ‘What are the familial, socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors that contribute to the basic education dropout process of teenage girls in northern Ghana?’ The first section contains besides the contributory factors and final events that lead to dropout, the way how the girls negotiate their agency within the process where structural forces constrains their agency.

After that, I summarise the findings that relate to the second main research question: ‘How do the girls value basic education?’ This section highlights the capabilities that the girls value as important to attain through education. Besides that, it examines the conversion factors that limit or enable the girls in the formation of capabilities.

The main point that I want to argue with this thesis, is the necessity to go beyond access to school and the outcomes of schooling. We need to go towards investigating the processes that are happening both at the individual and structural level, and the interconnected factors that shape the processes of dropout. School dropout among Ghanaian teenage girls is an under researched issue, although commonly occurring, and consequently, substantially obstructs personal and national development. Therefore, this issue needs to be addressed in order to improve schooling achievements, girls’ well-being and development of the nation. And this can only be done by examining and learning from the lives of the girls who went through the process of dropping out and accordingly shape policies that prevent other girls from going through the same process.

7.1.1 *The dropout process*

This research demonstrates that dropout among teenage girls in northern Ghana plays out as a complex process rather than a single event. Familial, socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors characteristic to the area, interact in such a way that dropout occurs. Familial, socio-cultural

and economic factors can be categorised as demand factors whereas institutional factors are supply factors. These demand and supply factors work together to push and pull girls out of school (Ananga, 2011a; Hunt, 2008).

I distinguished three themes which emerged in the generated data and that are concerned with the causes for dropout. These include poverty, migration and school environment. In addition, gendered practices is an aspect in northern Ghana that is interwoven with all the three themes, which work together toward school dropout. These practices are due to an adverse cultural and traditional mind set and make particularly girls vulnerable to school dropout. Therefore, unfavourable circumstances that relate to poverty, migration and the school institution, affect girls more than boys with a cultural bias in favour of males (Dhar, 2014). As follows, I will elaborate on the three themes respectively.

Poverty is a prevalent condition in the lives of the interviewed girls. Household poverty in this study is either the result of adversity in the livelihood, due to for instance the bereavement of a parent, or a condition that had been transmitted from generation to generation. This reveals that there is an intergenerational transmission of poverty that shapes the process of dropout of girls. However, although poverty may seem to be the direct cause of dropout at face value, when I examined the complete life stories of all the girls, we see that it is linked with other contextual factors. These together make the dropout happen as explained below.

Household poverty makes it difficult to meet the direct costs of schooling. But female education is not only deterred by the direct costs; opportunity costs are high too (Dhar, 2014). Poverty in combination with traditional and cultural notions about girls' current and future roles in the household, is the reason why girls are sometimes kept at home to carry out household chores. Their labour in the form of cooking, cleaning, looking after siblings and fetching water, is needed in order for the household to survive. It is also seen as a more appropriate preparation for future life as a housewife than school (Colclough et al., 2000). Girls have less time to study after school hours because of their household obligations, which affects their performance in school (Boyle et al., 2002). Poverty is thus a contributory factor to the dropout process and is interlinked with other socio-economic, cultural and traditional factors to ultimately lead to dropout.

The social, economic, cultural and political structures of the society in northern Ghana shape conditions of households in such a way that family collectives need to adopt coping strategies that

include girls' migration, in order to survive. Independent girl migration and fostering are common practices in Ghana and host households intent to maintain an interdependent relationship with the fostered girl with mutually beneficial exchanges (Serra, 2009). But as this study reveals, it proves to be difficult for girls' schooling opportunities to always benefit from the interdependent relationships especially in times of hardship or difficult economic circumstances. Girls often need to engage in reproductive work or economic activities in their host household and exploitation may take place. In other words, fostering resulting from crisis situations appears to put the girls at greater risk (Serra, 2009), possibly resulting in temporary or permanent school dropout.

Institutional challenges that are a result of economic difficult conditions, influence the school environment and create constraints for girls' schooling opportunities and maintenance. These challenges relate to teachers' behaviour, sexual harassment, academic performance and school facilities. Although an unsafe school environment was not mentioned as the ultimate reason to dropout, it contributes to school dropout as it slightly pushes the girls from school.

7.1.2 Agency

The agency of the interviewed girls cannot be presumed to be present; it is sometimes difficult to find where the social structures have a highly constraining influence on their lives. The girls hold interdependent relationships with the family collective whose daily livelihoods are entwined with that of their relatives. Their agency is regulated by family contexts, livelihood opportunities/constraints and interpersonal relationships (Abebe, 2013). It was found that the social arrangements often had a negative effect on the girls' school life paths in the cases of extreme poverty and gendered practices. These girls were forced to drop out against their will and engage in activities that benefited household survival. Thus, poverty, gender and social arrangements are identified as 'thinners' of the girls' agency

However, most of the girls do find spaces where they can exercise 'thin' agency at a certain time and setting in their life. Their difficult circumstances as well as their efforts to survive and to build better lives need to be acknowledged (Klocker, 2007). We cannot say that agency is either present or not; it rather moves along a continuum (Klocker et al., 2007). The girls are more limited in exerting agency independently in some situations than in other situations, due to context specific influences (Bell & Payne, 2009). For instance, the girls who are working on the market, have few power to take control over their situation due to the highly constraining socio-economic situations

in which they are. Whereas the girls who are living in the NGO and are schooling have ‘thicker’ agency due to a more advantageous economic situation.

This study found that the girls’ attitude towards and behaviour in school as well as their personalities have an effect on their agency. And it has consequently a negative or positive effect on their schooling. Thus, the girls’ behaviour plays an important role in the dropout process, especially on the institutional level. Although we have to keep in mind that these personal factors are again influenced by the socio-economic settings in which live.

7.1.3 The value of education

The capability approach offered a framework for assessing the value of education according to the girls. This study explored the girls’ views on the importance of schooling and in which ways it prepares them for future life. Education contributes to girls’ flourishing in broad terms, expanding various capabilities that helps them to ‘become somebody’ in the future. By talking with the girls about their occupational aspirations, the consequences of school dropout and the importance of education, I explored the different capabilities that are obtainable through education and that are important for the girls’ well-being. These are elaborated below.

Education makes the girl capable of earning a good income in the future, which makes her independent to some extent and which increases her freedom to make choices in her life. Thus, the economic value of education can be seen as a pre-condition to empowerment. Schooling enhances the girls’ ability to aspire and to dream, by exposing them to and informing them about the possible options that are out there. It also enhances the ability to stand up for oneself: the girls can defend themselves and form arguments concerning choices in their lives. So it gives them control over their own environment, which is particularly important to girls due to the gendered challenging environment in which they live. In other words, by bringing about cognitive abilities, education enhances ‘women’s capacity to question, to reflect on and act on the conditions of their lives and to gain access to knowledge, information and new ideas that will help them to do so’ (Kabeer, 2005, p. 16). This study shows that education empowers the girls and enhances their agency. It increases their power to act and shape their own life worlds, which means that it increases their freedom to choose.

The capabilities that the girls value, point to functionings that relate to living a good life and surviving within the constraining conditions in which their daily realities of life unfold. And equally important, helping their families and sustaining good interdependent relationships with the family collective

Education has an instrumental role in preparing the girls for future life as well as an intrinsic role. It contributes to their well-being in the here and now due to time with peers, protection and provision of knowledge.

To ensure the mentioned capabilities effectively, the education that is provided in the schools needs to meet some of the needs of the girls. The capacity of the teachers and schools to nurture the capabilities are of crucial significance (Unterhalter, 2012). Especially girls who do not receive much help in the home situation, need to be taken care of in the schools in order to effectively transform the educational resources into capabilities.

7.1.4 Conversion factors

The conversion factors of girls relate to the locational, institutional, personal and social contexts of the girls that influence the transformation of resources into capabilities. In the sense of this study, the resources include the subjects and teaching in school. It is important to not only explore the resources and the outcomes but also the transformation of them, in order to understand and address the problem of school dropout fully and in order to make schooling beneficial for every girl. It highlights the importance of the process as well as the diversity among the girls (Otto & Ziegler, 2006).

This study reveals that girls who have their basic needs secured and who receive academic support and motivation from their social surroundings, have an advantage in converting the educational resources into capabilities. This compared to girls who have an unstable home, a lack of basic needs and educational support. The institutional challenges, such as the number of pupils in the classroom and the quality of teaching, are characteristic to schools in northern Ghana and are disadvantageous factors which affect the girls in a deprived situation negatively in their conversion. In addition, the gendered practices in the society contribute to the negative conversion as well. The personal conversion factors, such as learning difficulties, of some of the girls might makes the

transformation difficult as well. The diversity among the girls is evident, meaning that every girl needs different resources in order to achieve well-being (Otto & Ziegler, 2006).

7.2 Policy recommendations

The outcomes of this study have implications for the design of policies that address and prevent the dropout issue among teenage girls in northern Ghana. While it is impossible to simply remove macro structural forces that cause the dropout, such as household poverty and a traditional and cultural mind set, the government, schools and girls can do things on a more micro level that will help the teenage girls to stay in school.

Policies need to go beyond access to education. The government of Ghana has put policies into place that have taken care of and improved school access for many children and girls. The enrolment rates have gone up significantly. While initial access to school is very important, school completion is possibly more important, especially among teenage girls who get higher up the education ladder. Their agency will be enhanced and their well-being ensured when they complete secondary school. This, in turn, will help the development of the nation. In addition, school dropout is a more problematic and occurring issue at the moment than access. Thus, policies need to pay attention to the process that happens after access to school is ensured. By not just focussing on input and outcome, but also on the process in between, disadvantaged girls will benefit.

Based on the above arguments and on the findings of the study, I formulate the following three policy recommendations.

First, due to deep seated nature of poverty in the study area, girls need more input of resources in order to reach the same well-being as girls and children in non-deprived situations (Unterhalter, 2009). I have found that the provision of basic needs of teenage girls, such as shelter, food, school material, sanitary facilities and pads, is an important condition that needs to be met in order to improve their school attendance. Where the households of girls are constrained in meeting some of these basic needs, the government of Ghana should provide these resources to a certain extent. School maintenance will significantly be improved by ensuring proper sanitary facilities separately for boys and girls on the schools. In addition, if schools are provided with sanitary pads, girls can use them if they cannot provide it for themselves. Schools need to be made 'girl-friendly' so that girls feel safe and can privately and properly change themselves when needed. By doing this,

deprived girls do not have to stay home when they menstruate and this will improve their attendance.

Second, it is found out that the girls who find themselves in disadvantaged home situations and who do not receive any educational support or motivation from home, tend to have academic difficulties in school. And this is a contributory factor for school dropout. Therefore, these girls need to receive academic and emotional help from the school. In order to be able to convert educational resources into capabilities, they will need extra educational input in the form of additional, special or remedial instructions from the schools. Governments need to give schools an extra fund to hire a teacher that can give these additional or remedial lessons. In addition, class teachers should be trained to counsel, support and motivate the girls. For instance, Sahada indicates that she would be helped so much if someone would support her emotionally. The girls need someone to talk to in hard times, someone who gives them a helping hand where no one else is there to look after them emotionally. And teachers could adapt this role. Or someone in the school can be appointed to take that role, a trust person who the girls can always turn to.

Third, the girls need to be trained to use their agency. Moreover, to use it in a way that benefits them; they need to be informed what the consequences of their behaviour can be and why it is important to complete school. In other words, their agency needs to be thickened. The local and regional Girl Child Education Coordinators organise camps for girls, with the aim of sensitising the girls. They inform the teenage girls about the importance of school, and present role models that can inspire them. This is a very good start, but because of the lack of money, these camps are only held for a selected number of girls and only occasionally. There should be organised more easily accessible camps that inform and sensitise teenage girls. One idea is to have afternoon or evening workshops at schools. This way, all the girls of a certain school can join and it only takes one afternoon instead of a whole weekend.

8 References

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9 Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical approval letter NSD

Appendix B: Informed consent form

Appendix C: Interview guide semi-structured interviews

Appendix D: Themes in-depth discussion

Appendix E: Example of life mapping activity

Appendix F: Storytelling Hafiza and Sana

Appendix G: Storytelling Rita, Samata and Shida

Appendix A: Ethical approval letter NSD

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
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7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 22.05.2014

Vår ref: 38706 / 3 / HIT

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 06.05.2014. All nødvendig informasjon om prosjektet forelå i sin helhet 21.05.2014. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

38706	<i>Teenage girls' perspectives on school dropout and life aspirations in rural Ghana</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	<i>NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
Daglig ansvarlig	<i>Tatek Abebe</i>
Student	<i>Anneke Kneppers</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 09.09.2014, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Katrine Utaaker Segadal

Hildur Thorarensen

Kontaktperson: Hildur Thorarensen tlf: 55 58 26 54

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Kopi: Anneke Kneppers ankneppers@gmail.com

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

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TROMSØ: NSD, SVF, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. redmas@svuif.no

Appendix B: Informed consent form

Request for participation in research project

Research details

Name researcher: Anneke Kneppers
Age: 27 years old
Sex: female
Nationality: Dutch, Netherlands
E-mail address: annekek@stud.ntnu.no
Supervisor: Tatek Abebe
E-mail address: tatek.abebe@svt.ntnu.no
University: NTNU, University of Trondheim, Norway
Study: Master of Philosophy in Childhood Studies
Department: Norwegian Centre for Child Research

Information about the Research

I, Anneke, am doing my master thesis research here in Wa, Ghana. The topic that I am researching on is the dropout experience of teenage girls from compulsory basic education and linked to that, the life aspirations of these dropouts. So I want to know what teenage girls have to say about the reasons why they have dropped out of school and what their life aspirations are. I want to learn more about the dropout experience and the impact it has on the lives of girls.

Methods

The activities and interviews that we will be doing are the following.

- *Remembering recall sheet with life mapping*: the participants can draw a life line on a long sheet of paper and write down or draw events related to their school dropout, in chronicle order.
- *Story writing*
- *Ranking tool and focus-group discussions*: with the ranking tool, the participants can rank the events that happened in their lives according to most important factors for dropping out.
- *Group discussions*
- *Individual interviews*

Confidentiality

All the information that will be gathered during this research will be handled with strict confidentiality. Names will be anonymised and all the stories of the participants will be kept confidential throughout the whole research process. The date that all the data will be anonymised is the 9th of September 2014.

Voluntary participation

It is voluntary to participate in this research project, and you can at any time choose to withdraw your consent without stating any reason.

If you have any questions concerning the project, please contact Anneke Kneppers or Tatek Abebe.

Consent for participation in the study

I have received information about the project and am willing to participate.

Signature participant

Date and place

Consent from parents/guardians

I have received information about the research project and I give permission for my child/care receiver to participate.

Signature parent/guardian

Date and place

Appendix C: Interview guide semi-structured interviews

Topic: the familial, socio-cultural and economic circumstances of girls dropping out of school.

Questions:

What was the composition of your household before you dropped out and how is it now?

Were there any challenges, difficulties or issues within your family/household? Which ones?

What circumstances were making it difficult for you to attend school?

Topic: The challenging institutional circumstances of girls dropping out of school.

Questions:

What did you like about going to school?

What did you dislike about going to school?

What circumstances within the school made it difficult for you to attend school?

Topic: specific events that leads to the school dropout of girls.

Questions:

Was there a single event that caused your dropout?

What happened in your life that ultimately caused your dropout?

Topic: Consequences of school dropout.

Questions:

What did you do immediately after you dropped out of school?

How do you feel about dropping out of school?

Could your school dropout have been prevented? If yes, what circumstances should/could have been different?

Topic: value of education.

Questions:

How important is school for you? And Why?

Why is it important for girls to go to school?

Topic: life aspirations of girls who dropped out of school.

Questions:

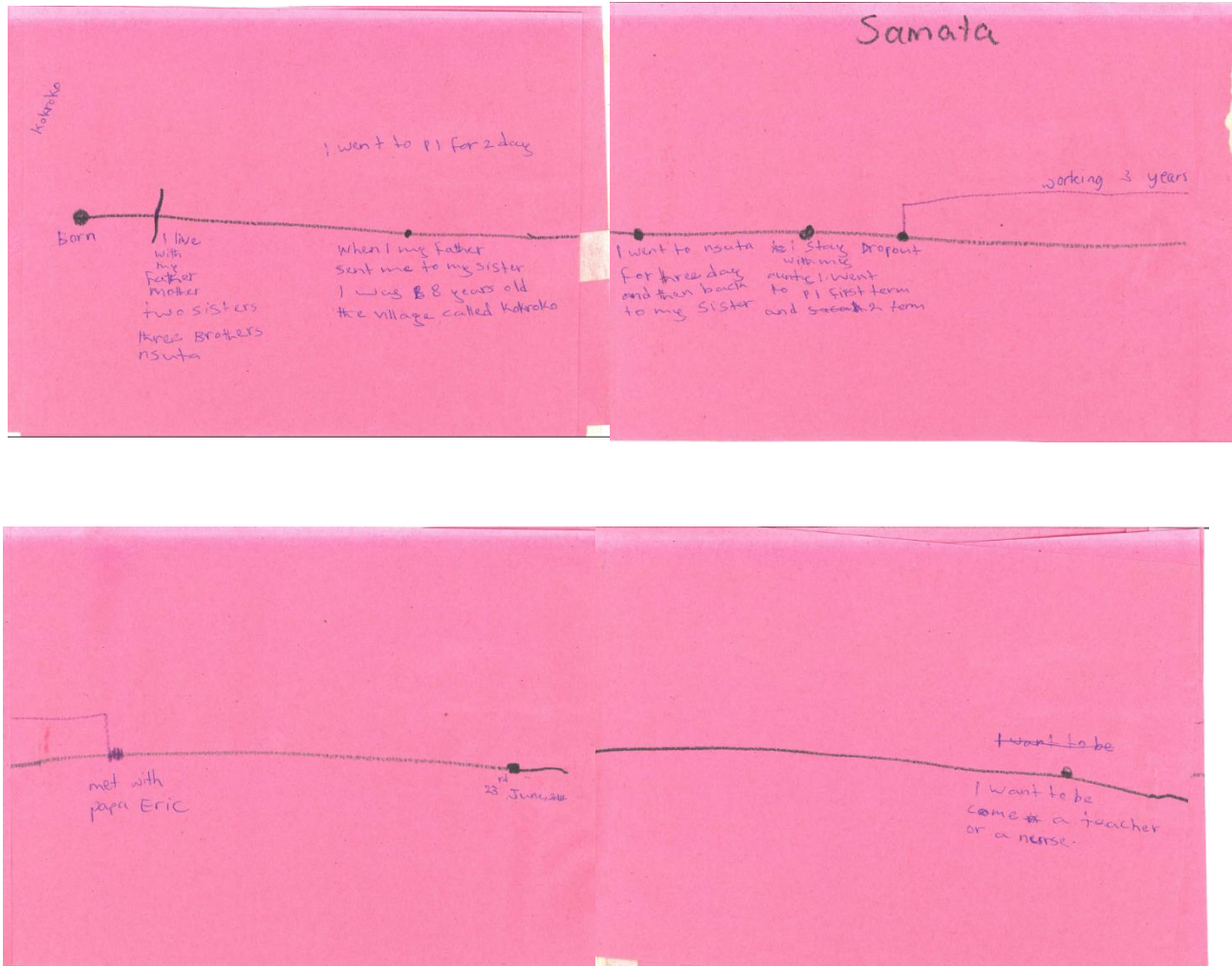
What are your plans for the future? What do you want to become?

How do you want to achieve that?

Appendix D: Themes in-depth discussion

- The difference in reasons why girls drop out and why boys drop out of school
- Struggles of girls to stay in school
- The consequences of girls dropping out and the difference with boys
- The ‘inside’ school and ‘outside’ school factors that make teenage girls drop out
- The importance of school for girls
- Solutions to tackle the dropout problem among teenage girls

Appendix E: Example of life mapping activity



Appendix F: Storytelling Hafiza and Sana

The life story of a poor girl

Once upon a time there live a man and his wife, mister and misses Dongu. They were very poor. But they gave birth to eleven children. They were farmers. It was difficult for them to give their children clothes to wear and provide them with food, and they were not taking good care of them. The children were often sick because they were having inadequate protein. It was not nice to live for them in the house because they were lacking their basic needs. When the children come from school, they need to go to the farm to help their parents to farm.

And they were supposed to send all the children to school. Whilst the children were schooling, they couldn't pay the school fees of all the children and they have to send them out of the school.

One girl was pregnant and she dropped out. And the boys wanted to help their parents to become rich so they dropped out and started to do armed robbery and pickpocketing.

When they were out of the school, they always asked their parents for their basic needs like clothing, shoes, panties and pads. Their parents were not able to provide them their basic needs. Each and everyone of them were doing his or her own things in order to earn a living. For example selling water in the market.

One of the girls decided to come to the city. She was 15 years old and she dropped out from class 6. When she came, she was not having any place to sleep. She was sleeping in the market and then a boy saw her. The boy raped her unfortunately. She got pregnant. And the boy ran away. When the boy ran away, the girl was crying and people came to see what was going on. The girl explained everything to them. Then a man said that he is having a wife who needs someone to help her to do their household chores. Then the man send the girl to his house. The wife of the man thinks that the husband brought his girlfriend to the house. The wife was maltreating the girl with her pregnancy.

One day the man went to work. When he came back from work he saw that the woman beat the girl up. So the man was not happy with that. The man was complaining to the woman. Then the woman said if the girl will not go out from the house but she will divorce her husband. So the girl went out of the house, sleeping in the market again.

Then a woman saw her and said that she was selling things and she needs someone to help her carry out the things to sell. When she selling the things, unfortunately she poured someone's oil on the floor. And the woman says she has to pay for it. Then she send the woman to her master's shop. The master said that the woman should take the girl away because she was not having money to pay for the oil. And whatever that she want she should do to the girl.

The woman hold the shirt of the girl and said she has to pay for the oil. Then a man saw the girl and the woman and the man stepped out of his car. And asked what was the matter. The woman narrated everything what happened to the man, and the man paid for the oil. And the girl was free.

The man said he wants the girl to work as a housegirl. Whilst the girl was working as a housegirl, it was also time for her to deliver. She told the man and he send her to the hospital. She delivered a bouncing babygirl. And they discharged her from the hospital. The man said she has to go to her real parents because she cannot work in his house with her baby. The man send the girl to her parents. After a while, she got married to an old man.

Appendix G: Storytelling Rita, Samata and Shida

Dropping out from school

There was a girl called Fadila. Fadila and her parents and two brothers and two sisters were staying in Nsuta Region. She was going to school, class 2. Her grandmother died in Wa village. So the family came to the funeral. After the funeral they left Fadila at her aunty in a village in Wa district, and her parents went back to Suta and left only her. The mother and father told the aunty she should send Fadila to school. After they left, the aunty went and bought the uniform for Fadila and send her to school. And she was in class 1. She was going to the school for some time. There was a sister in Wa city, she was working. When the aunty send her to school, and they had vacation, the sister picked up Fadila and took her to Wa city. The sister worked at a fufu place, where they pound the fufu. When they vacated after the first term, the aunty took Fadila to the sister to work at the fufu place, to also work.

When school opened again, the aunty came and took Fadila back to the village to go to school again. Fadila went to school, the second term. After the second term, the aunty took Fadila to the fufu place again to work. The aunty always collected the money and used it. Then the aunty said that Fadila will not go to school again and that help her to get money to eat. Fadila did not go to the third term anymore.

Fadila went to work with her sister at the fufu place for a while. Then the aunty send Fadila to another woman selling rice. Fadila had to pick the rice and wash the bowls. And she was staying with that woman. Every month the aunty came and collected the money. But she did not let Fadila know that she took the money, the salary of Fadila. And the aunty never bought anything for Fadila, she just collected the money for herself.

Fadila did not get clothes from the aunty and was roaming on the street everyday collecting bowls. While she was roaming on the streets, she ran away to the village. But the aunty did not let her go to school again.