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ISSUES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND STUDENTS' VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING: TOWARDS DEMOCRATISATION OF EDUCATION IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN GHANA

JOHN PEPRA-MENSAH

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BY

JOHN PEPRA-MENSAH

Thesis to be submitted to the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Qualitative Research

APRIL 2018

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature..... Date.....

Name: John Pepra-Mensah

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature.....Date.....

Name: Prof. Joseph Ghartey Ampiah

Co-Supervisor's Signature..... Date.....

Name: Prof. Cosmas Cobbold

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ABSTRACT

Several researchers have documented the relevance of students' participation in their schools' decision-making process to the overall governance of schools/colleges. In spite of these revelations, little research has focused on exploring students' perspectives on their colleges' decision- making process and the extent of their participation in Ghana. Limited knowledge exists regarding how token involvement in decision- making by students at college level manifests a total disregard for students' rights as espoused by the theory of social justice. This study explored the lived experiences of students to understand how meanings their non-involvement in decision-making communicate to them manifests gross disregard of their human rights. The study employed hermeneutic phenomenological analysis to understand the everyday lived experiences of student-governors. Text data were collected from twelve students who were principal officers of their college Students' Representative Council. Observation and conversational interviews were used for individuals as well as focus group discussion. Thematic statements were selected, grouped and analysed through reflexive and interpretive activities. The study found that culture does not promote participatory democracy and that the non-participation of students communicates to them messages that manifest gross injustice and disregard for their rights. The study findings serve as a spectacle on how students at college level in Ghana do not have their voice heard in light of social justice. It is recommended that future studies at college level be carried out to explicate the lived experiences of students' participation in their school decision making process.

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DEDICATION

To my lovely family

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Participation in decision-making at all levels of education in Ghana has become a permanent feature in the educational system. From the basic to the tertiary level particularly, at the Colleges of Education (formerly Training Colleges), Polytechnics and Universities, participation in decision-making by students has led to the practice of institutionalised form of democracy in our tertiary educational system. It has also promoted interesting and healthy awareness of students on current issues in the educational front. Despite such institutionalised practice of democracy in our tertiary education system, limited knowledge exists about students' lived experiences of their school decision-making process and the extent of their participation in that process. The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of students with regards to their involvement or non-involvement in their college decision-making process. Here, the study contends that the meanings students' participation in their college decision-making process communicates to Principals, teachers, policy-makers and other stake-holders of education, manifest violation of students' rights, and injustice-the absence of the practice of participative democracy in the light of social justice.

This chapter presents the introduction to the study report outlining the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and research questions. The chapter continues with the significance of the study, the assumptions, delimitation and limitations of the study and

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definition of key terms/concepts used in the study. The chapter ends with the organization of the rest of the thesis.

Background to the Study

Education worldwide is becoming increasingly accountable to the public. Therefore, it can be argued that learners should play a role in decision-making in their schools and colleges and in the implementation of such decisions, as they constitute a major stakeholder group (Mncube, 2008). Schools have a moral responsibility not just to teach, but above all, to practise democratic values (Griffith, 1998). At best, school life should seek to foster tolerance, right to participation, empowerment and respect for human dignity and individual views (Tshabangu, 2006). It is important to note that before we can have an educated democracy we must offer our democracy an education that is likely to make it one (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). In other words, democracy is not something to be taught; it is rather experienced. People learn from what they experience (Fielding, 2011). It is through participation in decision-making that students 'learn about democracy', 'learn through democracy', and 'learn for democracy' (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). Fielding (2011) suggests that students' involvement in their college decision-making process, could help them develop their civic competences, or the awareness of the negative aspects of democracy.

This study observes that without the creation of a democratic environment, individual ideas and voices, especially those of students will continue to be stifled. Education towards responsible citizenship takes the notion that students have a sacred, moral and legal right to be active participants in the search for solutions bedevilling their world of existence. As

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primary customers of education, it is students who are daily subjected to the educational process, and thus may contribute constructively to the search for solutions.

Social construction Rich (1980) has led to the notion that children, as they pass through school, are not mature citizens but rather citizens-to-be. Such a notion and entrenched belief needs revisiting. Parents, teachers and school administrators must consider striking a proper balance between protecting the child and allowing each the full right to participate in decision-making. Tshabangu (2006) as enshrined in Article 12.1 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, to which Ghana is a signatory. This study contends that genuine participation in school decision-making is one of the ways of recognizing the rights of the child which in turn creates congenial atmosphere for the smooth-running of a school.

According to Harber and Trafford (1999), students all along have been educated and socialized into accepting the status quo, characterised by inequalities and injustices through conformity to authoritarian structures. Therefore, in democratising education efforts should be made to foster democratic institutional management which seeks to introduce a school governance structure that involves all the stakeholder groups who play active and responsible roles in an environment where tolerance, rational discussion, and collective decision-making are encouraged.

Waghid (2005) argues that teachers and learners ought to become responsible, democratic, and critical – they need to act justly in order to break with the colonial legacy so as to create the spaces for responsibility, readiness and deliberation which would enable education to produce responsible,

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responsive and democratic citizens. Educationists the world over, agree that one major reason for the existence of schools is the acculturation, enculturation and politicisation of students. In playing such a role, schools must regard students as equals, which is one issue in which social justice manifests itself Mitra (2006). Students' voice has been stifled for long in the democratising process of education in other parts of the world including Ghana Sithole (1995); Waghid (2005); Asiedu-Akrofi (1978); Asare-Bediako, (1990); Badu (1994); Mireku-Kusi (1994); Ankomah and Pepra-Mensah, (2006); Kyei-Badu (2010). Cockburn (2006) found that learners' voice is effective when they attend the proposed meetings, but is more effective when learners actively take part in shaping the agenda of those meetings. He therefore, devised three definitions of involvement, namely, opportunity- where learners are given the opportunity to attend meetings; attendance- where learners take up that opportunity; and engagement- where learners not only attend, but are given a chance to make effective contributions in meetings. Thus, educators must make every effort to make sure all the three dimensions of involvement are operational by encouraging students' participation in decision-making.

Discussion of participative democratic principles and practices, and social justice

The need for greater democracy in education is supported by a great deal of literature both internationally and nationally UNICEF (1995); UNDP, (1993; 1994; 1995); Harber and Davies (1997); Asiedu-Akrofi (1978); Badu, (1994); Asare-Bediako (1990); Ankomah and Pepra-Mensah (2006). However, various communities define democracy differently and the term

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democracy is highly contested (Davies, 2002). When defining democracy, most people will quote 'government by the people' (Abraham Lincoln), implying that everyone should have political power. However, with the present increase in population, not all citizens can be involved in making the needed decisions. This calls for representation. In this study democracy is understood as participative democracy.

Participative democracy, defined as a management process which allows and encourages subordinates to participate in decisions that will affect them, is the focus of this study. It emphasizes the broad participation of constituents in the direction and operation of political systems. It advocates more involved forms of citizen participation. It strives to create opportunities for all members of a population to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities. Participative democracy differs from traditional democratic theory, in that authentic deliberation, not mere voting, is the primary source of a law's legitimacy (Gianpaolo, 2005). It thus adopts elements of both consensus decision-making and majority rule. Its operation makes it possible for decision-making to be both fully participatory and deliberative (Osborne, 2006).

Traditional democracy unlike participative democracy is concerned with mere voting as the primary source of a law's legitimacy which is based on the extent to which citizens accept and follow the decisions made by authorities. Traditional democracy focuses on majority rule irrespective of the involvement of all the stakeholders in a polity in decision-making. Thus, the operation of traditional democracy does not make it possible for decision-

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making to be both participatory and deliberative (Osborne, 2006). It is less concerned with the horizontal links in society and is focused on the hierarchical or vertical links of representative democracy. Noticeably, traditional democracy uses rhetoric as enriching participative democracy, but participative democracy enriches representative democracy by striving to restore power to all stakeholders in a polity by way of involvement in decision-making.

From the above, participative democracy is the term for the active part played by people in the working of democracy; the willing contribution of citizens in a micro or macro environment. It has to do with involving all citizens in decision-making irrespective of their status or position in society. It therefore puts more emphasis on the horizontal links in the society, as opposed to the hierarchical or vertical links of representative democracy. It enriches representative democracy by restoring power of proposal to all stakeholders in a polity. It is therefore concerned with how unequal distribution of power and resources affects people's daily lives and how they can influence decision making which affects them. It implies that the power to make decisions should not be left to a small number of people, but that power should be more equally shared among all stakeholders, so that everyone has an opportunity to influence collective affairs (Osborne, 2006).

Accordingly, Kyei-Badu (2010) indicates that one major characteristic of participative democracy is that 'it gives every participant in a decision-making process a chance to say something stupid' (p. 12). Thus, participative democracy promotes a system of governance in which there are broad ranges

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of decision making arenas, a system in which decisions can be made collectively and on the basis of an agreed agenda. With this understanding, Cockburn (2006) feels strongly that students' voice is effective only when they actively take part in shaping the agenda of those meetings they attend.

Emphasizing the need for the practice of participative democracy in schools, Carter, Harber and Serf (2003) suggest that some values such as democracy, tolerance and responsibility, grow only with experience of them since it will be useless to have the most beneficial rules of society fully agreed on by all who are members of that society if they are not trained and have their habits formed for that society (Harber, 1995). Therefore, schools need to practise what they seek to promote. Participation in decision-making is one arena for students' empowerment, a process by which students, subordinates or any marginalised individual, gain control over their lives by knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society-micro or macro (Stromquist, 1997).

The school itself must be organized along democratic lines, taking into consideration that democracy is best learned in a democratic setting in which participation is encouraged, freedom of expression and a sense of justice and fairness prevail and democratic approaches function which allow the nurturing of qualities such as participation, innovation, cooperation, autonomy and initiative in learners and staff (Mncube, 2008). Griffith (1998) observed that school life should seek to foster tolerance, right to participation, empowerment, and respect for human dignities, rights, and individual views.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child has important clauses on children's right to education and participation in

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decisions that affect them. Article 12 of the convention states: "when adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account" UNICEF (1989, p.2). Fielding (2011) and Edelstien (2011) add that there is the need for children to experience democratic processes to be able to contribute to social change. Thus, in Ghana there is abundant opportunity for children UNICEF (1995), UNDP (1995) as well as the youth and adults in pre-tertiary and tertiary institutions to take part in collaborative decision making concerning the governance of their schools and colleges.

The National Youth Policy (2010) in Ghana emphasizes this right and opportunity for the Ghanaian youth. Article 8 on the Rights of the Youth states: 'The rights of the Ghanaian, including the youth as enshrined in the 1992 constitution of Ghana, and any treaty/convention related to the youth to which Ghana is a signatory, shall be respected and upheld by all stakeholders' (p. 20). Article 6 provides that Good governance and civic responsibility are basic ingredients for national development. The key principles of good governance include transparency, accountability and protection of rights under the rule of law, empowering vulnerable groups. This is to be achieved through education and the promotion of active participation in decision-making at all levels.

The Youth Policy (2010) addresses eleven principles. Under equity, (the fifth principle), it is stated that "government and other stakeholders, shall at all times recognize the rights, responsibilities and equality (social justice) of opportunities for the youth...the views of the youth and their participation in national development must be sought. Government and other stakeholders

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must consciously and consistently involve young people in decision-making (p. 15).

Youth development does not occur in a vacuum. They develop through experience. Their development and empowerment involve the process of preparing them to meet the challenges of adulthood through series of activities and experiences which help and motivate them to become socially, morally, and emotionally independent and cognitively competent. One such experience is involving the youth in decisions that are made—affording them an appreciation of decision-making processes and how these decisions affect them (National Youth Policy, 2010).

At the College of Education level in Ghana, decisions are made in all the sectors of college life through the committee system. These decisions affect students who are politically alert (Mitra, 2006). They are social actors with equal rights just as adults to share their lived experiences of their college decision-making process and the extent of their involvement. Tikly and Barrett (2011) add their voices to others who continue to call for the voice of marginalized groups to be heard and their opinions to be sought in matters that affect their lives. Thus, research with the youth at college level on their lived experiences is necessary for improvement in policy and practice. Accordingly, Dewey (1859-1952) as cited in Blasé and Blasé (1994) considered authoritarian schools as disservice to the practice of participative democracy; for students should participate in shaping their education, and that not only should school be a preparation for democracy, but also it should be a democracy (Sadker & Sadker, 2000).

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Democratic theory and the theory of social justice cannot be divorced from one another, particularly when one deliberates on participation and representation. The theory of social justice has been influenced primarily by John Rawls - a philosopher. According to Rawls (1972), social justice is the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people of every level of society. He gives the tenets of the concept as: human rights, equality, life and dignity of the human person. The principal idea is justice.

Fraser (2008) defines justice as 'parity of participation'. She explains that according to this radical–democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth, justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. According to her, overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating at par with others as full partners in social interaction. By institutionalised obstacles, Fraser, refers to structures that deny access to opportunities that people need to interact with others as peers; institutionalised hierarchies of cultural value that may deny them the requisite standing; and, exclusion from the community that is entitled to make justice claims on one another (Fraser, 2008; Tikly & Barrett, 2011).

Social justice theory posits that all societies have a basic structure of social, economic and political institutions, both formal and informal. These structures are built to ensure justice. In testing how well these elements fit and work together, a key test of legitimacy is to ensure that the social contract; that is, the social order in any society ensures legitimacy by seeing to it that there is agreement by the people who are subject to the social arrangement in a society (Rawls 972; Edelstein, 2011). Thus, social justice fosters rationality; a

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rationality that does not repudiate the views of others especially subordinates--the historically marginalised groups in the African context including for example, women, orphans and children. Furthermore, it fosters an appreciation of the place of individuals as citizens within their own communities, states and world Greenfield (2004); Tikly and Barrett (2011). Social justice then presupposes a firm commitment to rationality, autonomy, democracy, justice and equity.

Social justice theory has the following dimensions: distributional, re-distributional, relational, and recognition Rawls (1972); Gewirtz, Ball and Rowe (1995); Bates (2006); Fraser (2008); Sen (2009); Polat (2010); Tikly and Barrett (2011). The distributional dimension of social justice refers to the way in which goods are distributed in a society. Rawls (1972) indicates that the subject matter of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine distribution of advantages from social co-operation Gewirtz et al. (1995). The re-distributional dimension of social justice is concerned with the issue of redressing undeserved inequalities – in wealth opportunity, access to attendance to meetings and expression of views (i.e. the right to be heard), as well as deprivation i.e. denials (Rawls, 1972).

The general principle of distributive and redistributive justice is easily understandable especially in education where gross inequalities are observed and documented (Griffith, 1998); (McPherson, 2000); (Tshabangu, 2006); (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Thus, the emphasis is on advocating for the equalisation of resources available to all. The relational dimension of social justice deals with procedural rights. It is concerned with ordering social

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relations according to formal and informal rules that govern the way in which members of a society treat each other at both micro and macro levels. This dimension of social justice is 'holistic, non-atomistic; for, it is concerned with the nature of the interconnections between individuals in a society rather than focusing on an individual' (Mncube, 2008, p 80).

The recognition dimension of social justice has concerns which are more cultural than economic or political. It means first identifying and then acknowledging the claims of historically marginalised groups (Nussbaum, 2006); (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Participatory justice includes the rights of individuals and groups to have their voices heard in debates and to actively participate in decision making. According to Fraser (2008), this is a pre-requisite for realising issues of redistribution and recognition. The focus is that cultural justice would involve a positive affirmation of the cultural practices of oppressed groups (Nussbaum, 2006; Bates, 2006). Cultural justice therefore, involves a principle of recognition that seeks to redress cultural domination; that is, being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and or hostile to one's own ; non-recognition; that is, being rendered invisible by means of authoritative, representational, communicative, and interpretative process and disrespect ;that is, being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and or in everyday life situations (Nussbaum, 2006; Bates, 2006; Sen, 2009).

Ferman and Shield (2003) argue that there is an essential and dynamic interplay both within and between the concepts democracy and social justice that provides a sort of check and balance. Whereas democratic processes

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permit the construction of what social justice means, social justice, on the other hand, suggests some essential underlying values and offers a construction of moral purpose that provides the compass for common good. This idea of 'the common good' sets out the foundation for approaches to social justice. Or rather, it is observations of injustice Nussbaum (2006) that set the scene for considerations of social justice and common good; for, according to Martin Luther King (Jnr), 'injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere' (Anagwonye, 2010, p. 93).

As indicated above, advocates of children's and youth's rights continue to call for their voices to be heard and their opinions to be sought in matters that affect their lives. Thus, the importance of research with students on their lived experiences cannot be over-emphasized.

The principles of participative democracy as well as social justice have implications for the democratising of education-the issue of students' voice. There has been a "cultural colouring" (Rich, 1980). The African culture which posits that the child is only to be seen but not heard (Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978; Tshabangu, 2006; Mncube, 2008), is an issue that school heads, practitioners of education need to note (Bates, 2003b, 2005). The issue of 'recognition' for example, places social justice at the centre of school governance, so concerns about bureaucracy, hierarchy, efficiency, and even instruction and achievement are secondary.

The theory of social justice proposes adequate mechanisms used to regulate social arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all (Mncube, 2008). In terms of this study, such theory refers to participation by all stakeholders in the governance of schooling, taking into consideration issues

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of power relations among the adults and students. Thus, Young (2000) posits that democratic norms mandate inclusion as a criterion of political legitimacy and democracy implies that all members of a polity are included equally in the decision-making process and, as such, these decisions would be considered by all as legitimate. The foregoing discussion on the need for greater democracy in schools, in the light of participative democracy and social justice theories, provided the conceptual framework for a qualitative inquiry which explored students' participation in College decision-making in different settings without conceiving whether these forms of exclusion prevail in the governance of Ghanaian schools, by addressing the perspectives of students on their colleges' decision-making process and the extent of their participation. The theories of participative democracy and social justice have been revisited extensively under the chapter of literature review. This is because they are the fundamental theories that underpinned the study.

Participation in decision-making at all levels of education in Ghana has become a permanent feature in the educational system from the basic to the tertiary level (Kyei-Badu, 2010). According to Pryor, Ampiah, Kutor and Boadu (2005), it is important to take into account the culture found in the environment where Ghanaian schools operate. Thus, they ask: 'To what extent are the social relations of a school council possible within an authoritarian field such as a Ghanaian basic school where the expectation of both children and adult is likely to be adult direction and children's compliance? They observe that children speaking out and negotiating with adults has been problematic in Ghana. There is a fine line between what is acceptable from a cultural standpoint' (p. 75). Their observation is a strong point for advocates

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for the voice of students in a cultural environment where there seems to be a demarcation for what children can say and where they can say what they want to say.

In their study, Pryor et al. (2005) found out that introduction of student councils and the functions they played, led to the atmosphere of the schools being more conducive to learning, 'as well as better attendance, punctuality, and adherence to rules which might be interpreted as increased self-actualization' (p. 77). Their study reinforces the practice of democracy in Ghanaian schools, even at the basic level, and that if the ideal is one of a participatory democracy, then children must be given room to learn at school to question, to speak out, and to debate. One way of doing this is through a genuine participation in their schools' decision-making process. By so doing they will learn about democracy, learn through democracy and learn for democracy (Edelstien, 2011).

At the time of the research, there were thirty-eight public Colleges of Education and eight privately-established ones awarding Diploma in Basic Education in Ghana. Presently, there are forty-nine Colleges of Education; forty-six are state owned and three are private. A greater number of these educational institutions are jointly managed by the government and missions. In the new phase of tertiary status of the Colleges of Education, the call for some level of autonomy for students is being advocated. One key area of focus is students' participation in governance and decision-making process in the Colleges National Youth Policy (2010); Colleges of Education Act, 2012; Harmonised Statutes for Colleges of Education (2013).

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A number of studies have been conducted at the Colleges of Education Mireku-Kusi (1992); Gyasi-Badu (1994); Pepra-Mensah (1999); Ankomah and Pepra-Mensah (2006); Mustapha (2009); Kyei-Badu (2010). Gyasi-Badu and Mireku-Kusi did their study in the central region. They both found out that student's participation in decision-making empowered them to be vocal in debates and discussions. Non-involvement in decision-making on the other hand, stifled students' initiative. Pepra-Mensah (1999) and Ankomah and Pepra-Mensah (2006) did their study in five of the Colleges of Education in the Eastern Region. They found that students' genuine involvement in decision-making, promoted trusting relationships between students and teachers, administrators and students and students themselves. Again their study revealed that students' participation in decision-making gave them a sense of belonging and as a result become committed to the achievement of set goals and objectives of their schools. It also promoted the creation of congenial atmosphere for teaching and learning.

Mustapha (2009) and Kyei-Badu (2010) did their study in the Northern and Ashanti Regions respectively. Their findings were very identical. They found that students' participation in decision-making process enhances their commitment to the programmes of their school, promotes cordial relationships between students and staff, and also enhanced students' feeling of belongingness in their respective Colleges. Finally, they found that the fear of being victimized prevented them from playing active role in students' politics. All the studies referred to above, used the quantitative mode and thus focused on the factors that either promoted or hindered students' participation in

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decision making at college level. Nevertheless, their studies are very relevant because they set the context for this study.

Thus, this study, in its attempt to fill the gap in the educational literature, sought to articulate the importance of students' genuine involvement in their school's decision making process at College level from the perspective of the students.

Statement of the Problem

Students' involvement in the decision-making process of their schools and colleges can be of great potential. It can help create congenial environment for teaching and learning; they experience and appreciate some of the problems school and college administrators go through and as a result identify with them (Bates, 2006; Mustapha, 2009; Kyei-Badu, 2010).

Furthermore, it can prepare them to be responsible citizens, who are motivated to become socially, morally, and emotionally independent, creative, and empowered, because through their participation in decision-making processes, they acquire socio-moral competences (Mitra, 2006; Bates, 2006; Kyei-Badu, 2010; Edelstein, 2011).

Again, students' non-participation in decisions that affect them can have negative results (Cockburn, 2006; Mitra, 2006; Mncube, 2008; Kyei-Badu, 2010; Fielding, 2011; Arthur, 2011). A number of student agitations on school campuses leading to strike actions can been traced to the fact that in the majority of instances, students have been denied the opportunity of letting their voices be heard in decisions the implementation of which affect them (Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978; Asare-Bediako, 1990; Harber & Trafford, 1999; Ankomah & Pepra-Mensah, 2006; Aba Sam, 2009; Kyei-Badu, 2010; Arthur,

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2011). However, limited research knowledge is available regarding the meanings communicated to students through their involvement or non-involvement in their College's decision making.

Every Ghanaian youth is guaranteed the right to participate in decision-making by the UN convention on Human Rights as well as the Youth Policy (2010) at all levels of society. However, at college level it seems the rights of students to be genuinely involved in decision-making is not being encouraged. Empirical studies conducted at the Colleges of Education show that student leaders are consulted on issues, and involved in meetings but invariably, the decisions arrived at are those that college authorities have decided on before calling students for meetings (Asare-Bediako, 1990; Mireku-Kusi, 1994; Kyei-Badu, 2010; Aba, 2010; Araba, 2011). This shows the absence of building capacity for youth leadership.

My interest in learning more about student participation in decision-making stems from two incidents that happened at the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) training college now College of Education, Koforidua in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Towards the end of each second term of the academic year, election of new officers is carried out. During the last week of the same term (second term), there is a handing-over ceremony. The second year would-be officers take the mantle of student leadership from the third years at the beginning of the third term. Unfortunately, it was realised that the third year students never co-operated with the officers-elect. College administration saw this as an affront and this led to strained relationships between them, teachers as well as the school administration. The school administration considered such behaviour as insubordination since the second year prefects-elect were

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'ruling' on the instructions approved by the administration. Such chaotic situations repeated themselves for four academic years. Finally, it was suggested at a staff meeting that students be invited to find a lasting solution to the perennial problem.

Students suggested: elections to elect school officers could go on as before; however the handing over power to the second-year prefects-elect could wait till the tail end of the third term, and by which time the prefects-elect would have under-studied their incumbents. The administration including staff saw 'wisdom' in the students' voice. Their suggestions were implemented and the tug-of-war situation came to an end. A year later, two nearby colleges facing the same problem came to find how best a similar problem being faced could be solved. The solution was 'sold' to them and as was in the former case, it worked like magic.

Another time, the college decided to buy a ceremonial cloth for the students. The school administration chose the type of cloth. The students rejected it. Their reason was that they were not involved in the selection of the type of cloth. The administration called for students' views. The students asked the administration to select a tutor to go with selected students to choose specimens of cloth types. Three pieces were brought. They were labelled at the school's assembly hall. Students chose one out of the three. The majority carried 'the vote'. These two incidents indicated that listening to the voice of students not only solved a perennial problem but also brought a chaotic situation to an end. Thus, it is strongly believed to be an example of a micro situation which buttresses the fact that it seems students at college level are not genuinely involved in the decision-making process of their colleges. The

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incidents brought me into their world' (Lee, 2010:5) and challenged my assumptions and perceptions about students – that they has nothing or little to contribute to the governance of a school. It revealed the truth that students have ideas about their school which adults will find difficult to replicate.

The incident reported above reveals that despite the institutionalized practice of democracy in our tertiary education system, limited knowledge exists about students' lived experiences of their school decision-making process and the extent of their participation in that process. It is true a few qualitative studies on student voice Pryor et al. (2005) the majority of empirical studies conducted on student involvement in their college decision-making process employed the quantitative mode of investigation (Gyasi-Badu, 1994; Ankomah & Pepra-Mensah, 2006; Mustapha, 2009; Kyei-Badu, 2010; Arthur, 2011). The focus of such studies referred to above, was on the statistics of the factors that promote or prevent students from genuine involvement but not on the meanings such involvement or non-involvement of participation in decision-making communicated to them through their lived experiences.

This qualitative research was designed to address this problem by seeking to provide detailed views of students on their perspectives concerning their school decision-making process in their own words, and specific contexts that shape students' everyday experiences of their school decision-making process (Creswell, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study sought to carry out thick description of the nature of the decision-making process in the context of the Ghanaian Colleges

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of Education within the Eastern and the Brong-Ahafo regions of Ghana. The study aimed to understand and articulate how meanings communicated to students by their lack of genuine involvement in their colleges' decision making revealed injustice and violation of students' rights. The study also sought to elicit the lived experiences of students through their participation in their Colleges' decision making-process and the interpretation of these experiences by students to posit that in the context of social justice, genuine students' participation in decision-making might not be available.

Research Questions

This study addressed the over-arching research question: What are the perspectives of students on the nature and extent of their involvement in the decision-making process of their Colleges? The following three sub-questions derived from the major question, were addressed.

1. What are the perspectives of students on the nature of their college decision-making process?
2. What is the extent of students' involvement in decision making in their colleges?
3. What meanings do students make of their involvement or non-involvement in their college decision-making process in the context of participative democracy and social justice?

Significance of the Study

The research would be of immense benefit to lecturers/tutors, principals/administrators, Education providers, students and future researchers. Principals and administrators who have a direct contact with students need to understand the essence of students' participation in the

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decision making process. This is because students are likely to obey rules which they have set for themselves than those imposed on them by school authorities. Thus, the study reveals the extent to which students abhor authoritarian decision making process in their colleges.

Again this study would help administrators to view college students in perspective of their age and status. Administrators often see students as children who should always be seen but not heard. There is therefore, always a limitation to the extent to which students should be involved in making decisions. Thus, the study would contribute to literature by exploring the lived experiences of students' involvement in their school decision-making process in the context of College (Teacher) Education in Ghana. The presence of gross violation of students' rights on college campuses Bates (2006) as revealed by students' meanings is proof of the absence of equity which would be important education policy objective for government to look at.

In addition, providers of college education and other stakeholders of education would gain insights into why students at college level should be genuinely engaged in decision-making from the knowledge the study has provided. Their shared experiences will bring about a better understanding of what prevents students from genuine engagement in school decision making, the contributions they can make towards the creation of an environment for the teaching and learning enterprise and thus inform policy.

Furthermore, students' participation has been found to be 'just a token'. With better insights that the study has provided, College Education providers would strive to collaborate with students in decision-making and thus build their capacity for leadership (Mitra, 2006).

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Again, the findings of this study would help tutors and those in authority to know how to handle their students with specific reference to empathy-'the capacity of teachers and administrators to place themselves inside the shoes of their students and to see the world through the students' eyes (Mitra, 2006). When empathy is practiced, authoritarian attitudes shall give way to mutual respect, appreciation, consideration, and collaboration.

Besides, this study is important because against the backdrop of calls for students' voice in decision-making, the study findings would encourage majority of students to speak out. Their voices would give better insights into the necessity and importance of involving students in decision-making at all levels (Youth Policy, 2010). Thus, the study would be an eye opener to students about their right of involvement in the decision making of their colleges. This will encourage them to rise for their rights and demand a genuine involvement in the decision-making process of their schools or colleges. I have emphasized "rights" of the youth with the understanding that rights go with responsibility. However, I have been silent on the responsibilities that go with rights because that is outside the scope of my study. I think a further study can be undertaken to look into the area of responsibilities that go with rights.

Finally, the findings from the study would help extend existing theories and methods that illuminate the phenomenon of students' participation in decision-making. Educational theorists and researchers interested in exploring students' perspectives on their schools' decision-making process could be guided. The result would be that the methodology and methods used in this study could be replicated in future studies.

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Assumptions

As indicated, this study focused on the meanings students' participation in school decision-making communicate to them through their lived experience with the decision making process of their college. The study made the following assumptions.

First, it was assumed that students' experience with their school decision-making process and the extent of their involvement would communicate messages and meanings to them. This assumption was based on the premise that experience is not what happens to an individual but the meanings derived from "what happened". It presupposes that meanings are derived from experiences.

Second, the study assumed that Colleges of Education are institutions where Students Representative Councils (SRCs) operate and that students would be engaged in the governance of their colleges. This assumption was based on the declaration that all Colleges of Education must see to it that Students' Representative Council (SRCs) are put in place and made operational (Harmonised Statutes for Colleges of Education, 2013; Colleges of Education Act, 2012).

Delimitations

The scope of the study was limited to the messages and meanings students' participation and non-participation in decision making communicated to them through their lived experiences. The study was confined to the students' perspectives of their colleges' decision-making process; and the extent of their involvement or participation in that process.

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The study was delimited to two Colleges of Education in Ghana – one in the Eastern Region and the other in the Brong-Ahafo Region; one Faith-based and the other non Faith-based. The study involved a small sample of twelve participants drawn from the two colleges.

Finally, the study was delimited to student leaders were in the third year of their 3-year program of study (out-segment).

Limitations

The first limitation was my inability to fully bracket the information and experience I had prior to the study. Phenomenological bracketing takes time to practice (Lee, 2010). As a novice to phenomenology, I may have distorted the study by seeing what I wanted to see. Aware of this possibility, I intentionally increased my sample size to twelve participants to vary the experience and remove anything I may have perceived about the phenomenon before embarking upon the study. Nevertheless, my personal experiences could have had a negative effect on the findings of the study.

The second limitation is the length of time spent on the field. Phenomenological studies are usually conducted over a long period of time. Since I could not spend that length of time as required in phenomenological studies, some vital information could have been lost because I consider that the time spent on the field was not long enough or adequate.

Definitions of Term

Following are a list of terms and concepts used in the study:

Lived experience – those experiences which involve the immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of the students' life in relation to their participation in the decision making process of their schools.

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Essence – the inner true being and nature of the decision making process in the Colleges of Education that has to do with the 'whatness' of things as opposed to their 'thatness'.

Decision making – A process influenced by information and values, whereby a perceived problem is explicitly defined, alternative solutions are posed and weighted, and a choice made that subsequently is implemented and evaluated.

Involvement or participation – Taking part actively and sharing in decision making according to one's capability.

Democracy- Fair and equal treatment of everyone in an organisation and their right to take part in making decisions.

Social justice- the idea of creating a society or an institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being.

Students' voice: The many ways in which students might have the opportunity to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers.

Participative decision-making: A management process which allows and encourages students to fully participate in decision making processes of their Colleges.

Out-segment: it refers to students who are in the third year of their 3-year program of study.

In-in-out: the Colleges of Education go through a 3-year program of basic education. During the first two years, students are on campus studying; however during the third year, they go out to practice the competences

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thought them. The first two years are referred to as "in-in" and the third year as "out".

Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized in five chapters. Chapter two details the literature review focussing on the research context, and empirical research. Chapter three gives an overview of the research approach, describes the research paradigm underpinning the research methodology, the research methods used, the implementation of the study design, contextualizing the research setting and participants' verbal data. Chapter four looks at the meanings participants derived from their lack of genuine involvement in decision making, interpreting the research findings and discussion of results and an overview of the study. Chapter five gives the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to the research topic. It is an attempt to situate and justify the need for the study. It addresses the following: definition and context of Teacher Education in Ghana, social justice, democracy in education, students' voice, socio-cultural beliefs as factors that militate against students' voice in decision-making, students' participation in decision-making process, and the messages and meanings their participation or non-participation conveys to them.

Definition and Contextualizing Teacher Education in Ghana

Several explanations to teacher education process exist. Agyemang (1993) as cited in Adentwi (2005) views teacher education as a special kind of apprenticeship in which the future teacher in a training college is trained to master three forms of cognitive skills; namely, the subject to be taught by the teacher–trainee, the philosophy of the teaching profession, and the code of ethics of the profession. These three cognitive skills correspond to the academic, pedagogical and normative contents of teacher education. Thus, teacher education is expected to prepare the future teacher to master the disciplines the teacher-trainee will teach, the methods and techniques to be used in teaching as well as the rules and regulations that govern the teacher and his/her relationship with his/her pupils and other stakeholders of education. According to Anamuah-Mensah (2002), teacher education is the

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type of education and training given to, and acquired by an individual to make him/her academically and professionally proficient and competent as a teacher. Here, teacher education is defined in terms of the teacher's academic and professional competency.

Good (1980) defines teacher education in terms of formal and informal activities and experiences that help to qualify a person to effectively assume the responsibilities and play the roles expected of a teacher. The relevance of Good's definition to this study is his emphasis on the informal activities and experiences. According to him these informal activities and experiences include the teacher–trainees' involvement in all that takes place in his college in terms of governance and especially, involvement in decisions.

Thus, according to Good (1980), informal activities and experiences relate to the hidden curriculum "which is often the by-product of school ethos and discipline (school climate), the personal meaning, insights and behavioral patterns that teacher trainees consciously or unconsciously acquire and exhibit as a result of their membership and participation in the subculture of the teacher training colleges" cited in Adentwi (2005, p. 4). Edelstien (2011) corroborates Good's (2001) ideas by saying that as students in training go through informal activities and experiences such as involvement in their school decision-making process, they learn about democracy, learn through democracy and learn for democracy. Thus, they acquire socio-moral skills that prepare them for their future. The importance and relevance of Teacher Education can thus not be over-emphasized. For this study, the Colleges of Education in Ghana are where teacher-trainees of my study are found.

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Forms of Teacher Education

Mireku (1999) as cited in Adentwi (2005) and Aboagye (2015) identify three forms of teacher education in Ghana. They are pre-service (initial teacher training), induction as well as in-service. They also agree that these forms of education are organized as "a seamless continuum" (Aboagye, 2015). Whereas Aboagye considers pre-service Teacher Education as courses taken by the teacher- trainee before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher Mireku (2005) as cited in Adentwi (2005) regards pre- service Teacher Education as any type of formal preparation for the teaching profession which one is required to undergo before he or she is certified as a teacher and accorded a qualified teacher status.

The two authors agree that induction as a form of Teacher Education is where more-experienced teachers groom newly-trained teachers to become professionally efficient. This grooming period which aims at confirming the newly-trained teacher takes between one to two years (Mireku, 1999 as cited in Adentwi, 2005). According to Aboagye, in-service as a form of Teacher Education is a continuing professional development process for practicing teachers. At present the Colleges of Education, the University of Cape Coast and University of Education, Winneba are all engaged in both pre-service Teacher Education and in-service teacher education. The induction form of Teacher Education is provided by the district education directorates for teachers at the pre-tertiary level of education (Mireku, 1999, as cited in Adentwi, 2005).

Thus as stated above, the three forms of teacher education exist in a continuum; for, having acquired an initial Teacher Education and confirmed

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through induction, the same teacher can upgrade himself or herself professionally even up to the Master's and doctoral levels of Teacher Education.

Purposes and Importance of Teacher Education

An Inter-Governmental Conference on teacher education held in Paris by UNESCO (1988) stated the global purposes of teacher education as:

1. Develop in each student teacher general education of academic and professional nature, as well as personal culture (philosophy of life) and the ability to teach and educate others.
2. Develop in the teacher-trainee the awareness of the democratic principles which underlie good human relations at both micro and macro levels and a sense of responsibility.
3. Develop in the teacher-trainee a sense of initiative, creativity and capability of adapting to rapid social and technological changes as well as the capability of interpreting changes to pupils by continuing his own personal education throughout his professional life.

The New Structure and Content of Education for Ghana (1974, p. 93) reveals that the purposes of teacher education are to be realized through objectives such as giving teacher-trainees a sound basis in the content of the courses at the levels at which they will be teaching, giving teachers sound professional skills that will enable them guide children to learn, inculcating in teacher-trainees the qualities of leadership; the type of leadership that creates favorable conditions in which children learn with pleasure and ease, prove themselves acceptable to the community and enables them to integrate the school with the community.

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The objectives/purposes of teacher education in Ghana are based on that of UNESCO (1988). The College of Education Act (2012) has relevant portions that spell out what the colleges are expected to do. Among them, are:

a) To train teacher-trainees to acquire necessary professional and academic competences for teaching in pre-tertiary institutions.
b) Build the professional and academic capacities of serving teachers through regular continuing education,
c) Foster links with relevant institutions and community (stakeholders of education) in order to ensure the holistic training of teachers and,
d) Expose teacher-trainees to experiences that promote critical thinking and problem-solving (pp 4 , 5).

To achieve these aims/objectives, the Act enjoins Colleges of Education to make sure Students' Representative Councils (SRCs) are set up and made functional. The implication is that as a major stakeholder group, students' involvement in decision-making in the colleges will ultimately expose them to real situations that will help them acquire skills such as problem-solving, creativity, innovation, and the development of their civic competences (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; Fielding, 2011). Thus, teacher education, and Colleges of Education are both together relevant for this study because they give the context to it.

The importance and relevance of Teacher Education is that the quality of a nation's schools at whatever level cannot be better than the caliber of teachers employed in its classrooms or lecture theatres. According to Anamuah-Mensah (2002), it is well known that the quality of any nation

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depends upon the quality of education it offers, and the quality of education given is also determined by the quality of teachers who teach.

Through effective teacher education, teachers become equipped to create the necessary environment within which learners are encouraged and supported to learn. It also provides an orientation for the building of interpersonal skills that help them cope with their pupils and other stakeholders of education (Adentwi, 2005). Edelstein (2011) feels strongly that such laudable expectations will not be realized, if teacher-trainees while at college are not treated as adults collaborating with other adults in their college community. Through such collaboration, students develop their socio-moral resources – resources which enable them to act autonomously, creatively, and constructively and also interact successfully in heterogeneous groups and participate in action.

Legal Framework and Policy Context of Teacher Education in Ghana

In Ghana, basic education forms the foundation upon which young people who do not continue to higher education develop work related skills (GES, 2013; Oduro, 2000). Thus, teacher education is relevant to the success of the provision of basic education. University of Cape Coast Alumni Association (2012) indicates that basic education is where a nation is built, and that teachers are the builders. Though my study is not situated at the basic level, the relevance here is that the teachers for our basic schools in Ghana are made at the Colleges of Education which is the context of the study.

The college context has its own ecology, and to understand its complexities one must explore the different layers that constitute it. A complete description of the colleges' practices and ideologies is beyond the

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scope of this study. Nevertheless, in order to understand SRC's perspectives on their college decision-making process and the context of their participation, it is vital to understand the reason for its existence in the Colleges of Education, and the role(s) the SRCs play in the overall governance of their colleges.

The legal framework of Teacher Education and the policy focus of the Harmonized statutes for Colleges of Education commit the colleges to see to it that SRCs are set up in their various Colleges (Statute 38 pp. 28-29). The document set out the following provisions:

a) Name

   The body shall be known as the Students' Representative Council of the college hereafter referred to as the SRC.

b) Composition

   As prescribed in the SRC Constitution of the College.

c) Quorum

   As prescribed in the SRC Constitution of the College.

d) Functions

The SRC shall be the official representative of the students of the College and shall be responsible for:

i. Promoting the general welfare and interest of students, coordinating the social, cultural, intellectual and recreational activities of the students of the College.

ii. Presenting the views of students to the appropriate bodies for consideration.

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iii. Establishing links and maintaining cordial relationships with students of other Colleges and other tertiary institutions within and outside Ghana.

iv. Nominating students' representatives to serve on appropriate College Committees.

v. Promoting cordial relationship among all Sections of the college community and maintaining good relationship with past students of the college.

vi. Publishing records of students' activities.

vii. The SRC may appeal to the Principal of the College, the Students' Affairs Officer and ultimately to the Council, whose definition shall be final.

Similarly, the Colleges of Education Act (2012, Act 847) provides that

1) Each College of Education shall have a Students' Representative Council

2) The Students' Representative Council is responsible for representing students who are admitted and registered to study at the Colleges of Education.

3) A constitution of Students' Representative Council shall

   i. be drawn up by the students subject to the approval of the Academic Board and

   ii. conform to this Act, the statutes of the college of education and any other rules, regulations, directives and edicts dully issued by the college of education.

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4) A constitution or a governing instrument drawn up by the Students' Representative Council must be consistent with Statutes of the college.

Furthermore, the Colleges of Education Act (2012) states, "the rights of the Ghanaian, including the youth, as enshrined in the 1992 constitution of Ghana, and any treaty/convention, related to the youth to which Ghana is signatory, shall be respected and upheld by all stakeholders" (p. 9).

The implication is that adult members must try to recognize teacher-trainees as people who have vested interests in the community they form a part Blasé and Blasé (1994) and thus treat them as humans with rights–to be treated as adults. One unique way of treating students as humans with rights indicated by empirical studies is engaging them in decision-making (Bates, 2006; Mitra; 2006; Rudduck & Fielding, 2011). The emphasis is on equity, equality and justice.

It is noted that the existence of SRCs at the Colleges of Education has a legal backing. Therefore, if college administrators provide the environment within which they can play their assigned roles, then democratic principles could be up-held; and that is one way social justice manifests itself.

Social Justice

Social Justice generally "refers to the idea of creating a society or an institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being'' Bates, (2006, p. 6) . It is contextualized in this study to refer to the many experiences where students as young adults were treated fairly or unfairly—as violating their rights as individuals.

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According to Rawls (1972), social justice is "the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people of every level of society.'' (p, 3) Furthermore, he gives the tenets of social justice as: human rights, equality, and life and dignity of the human person. The principal idea is justice (Rawls, 2005).

Fraser (2008) defines justice as 'parity of participation'. She explains that according to this radical–democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth, justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. Thus, overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction. By institutionalised obstacles, Fraser, refers to structures that deny access to opportunities that people need to interact with others as peers; institutionalised hierarchies of cultural value (Fraser, 2008); Tikly and Barrett (2011) that may deny them the requisite standing; and, exclusion from the community that is entitled to make justice claims on one another.

Social justice theory posits that all societies have a basic structure of social, economic and political institutions, both formal and informal. These structures are built to ensure justice. Justice prevails when there is agreement by the people who are subject to the social arrangement in a society.

Social justice fosters rationality; a rationality that does not repudiate the views of others especially subordinates who are the historically marginalised groups in the African context which includes for example, women, orphans and children. Furthermore, it fosters an appreciation of the place of individuals as citizens within their own communities, states and

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world. Thus, social justice presupposes a firm commitment to rationality, autonomy, democracy, justice and equity (Rawls, 1972, 2005; Nussbaum, 2006; Fraser, 2008; Sen, 2009); Polat (2010). According to Nussbaum (2006); Fraser (2008); Tikly and Barrett (2011) women, children, orphans and widows have all along in the history of African been sidelined when it comes to decision-making where the voice of individuals needs to be heard. They refer to such as "historically marginalized" in their own communities, states or world where they are found. In my work, reference have been made to the fact that the youth have been historically marginalised in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Mncube, 2008; Tshabangu, 2006) and in Ghana such marginalization have been carried on by the use of statements such as: abofra bo nwa, ommo akyekyede (a child cracks snails not tortoise); obaa ton nyaandewa; onnton atuduro (a woman sells garden eggs not gun powder). This has been shown clearly from the quotes of participants of my study.

Social justice theory has the following dimensions: distributional, re-distributional, relational, and recognition (Rawls, 1972; Gewirtz, Ball & Rowe, 1995; Bates, 2006; Fraser, 2008; Sen, 2009; Polat, 2010; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). The distributional dimension of social justice refers to the way in which goods/services are distributed in a society. The emphasis is on fairness. The subject matter of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine distribution of advantages from social co-operation Gewirtz et al. (1995). The re-distributional dimension of social justice is concerned with the issue of redressing undeserved inequalities–in wealth

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opportunity, access to attendance to meetings and expression of views (i.e. the right to be heard) as well as deprivation i.e. denials (Rawls, 1972).

The general principle of distributive and redistributive justice is easily understandable especially in education where gross inequalities are observed and documented (Starkey, 1991; Kozol, 1991; Griffith, 1998; McPherson, 2000; Van Wyk, 2005; Tshabangu, 2006; Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Thus, the emphasis is on advocating for the equalisation of resources available to all.

The relational dimension of social justice deals with procedural rights. It is concerned with ordering social relations according to formal and informal rules that govern the way in which members of a society treat each other at both micro and macro levels. This dimension of social justice is 'holistic, non-atomistic; for, it is concerned with the nature of the interconnections between individuals in a society rather than focusing on an individual' (Mncube, 2008, p. 76).

The recognition dimension of social justice concerns issues which are more cultural than economic or political. It means first identifying and then acknowledging the claims of historically marginalised groups Nussbaum (2006); Fraser (1997); Tikly and Barrett (2011) to seek their welfare. Participatory justice includes the rights of individuals and groups to have their voices heard in debates and to actively participate in decision making. It focuses upon the need for opportunities to be provided for individuals and groups to be consulted and be actively involved in discussions which relate to their social welfare (Tikly & Dachi, 2009). According to Fraser (2008), this is a pre-requisite for realising issues of redistribution and recognition. Social justice theory proposes adequate mechanisms used to regulate social

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arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all (Mncube, 2008). Marshall (2004) believes that as far as social justice is concerned, there should be vision of multicultural democracy that goes beyond mere tolerance. He thinks that there should be acceptance and recognition by all in a community as being equal.

Social justice theory further emphasizes that communication between individuals in a community becomes meaningful only when there is a positive horizontal relationship as against vertical relationship. Furthermore, it calls for freedom to build a personal life which is believed to be the only universalistic principle that does not impose one form of social organization and cultural practices. Thus, it demands respect for the freedom of all individuals and therefore a rejection of exclusion. Therefore, according to Touraine (2006), democratic theory and social justice theory call for ‘‘freedom of equality of all which is not by appeal to a social order, a tradition or the requirements of public order’’ (p. 167).

Obviously, the theory of social justice demands that the only possible basis for an institutional order that will allow students as subordinates and the school governing bodies to live together with their differences is a fundamental respect for the autonomy of the individual (Sen, 1992; 1999; Nussbaum, 2000; Bates, 2006). Thus Touraine (2000), states emphatically: “... that all individuals have a right to freedom and equality, and that these are limits that cannot be transgressed by any government or any code of law. These limits relate to cultural and political rights such as freedom of expression’’ (p, 168). Both principles of democracy and social justice argue that society–both at the micro and macro levels-has a moral responsibility to

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ensure equity. Thus, it is understood that the moral basis of organizations and the school in particular, must then be a defence of the individual rights, freedom and equality, cultural rights and the development of those capabilities through which individuals can create ‘‘their selves’’ and contribute to the wider society.

This study contends that the principles advocated by the theory of social justice, cannot be established in any organization including the school that practices exclusion in any form, nor in any organization that fails to provide the basis for communication between individuals pursuing diverse and defensible ways of life. Thus, the principles of social justice challenge structures built upon the so-called neutrality of objective reality and acknowledge that the systems we have in place represent and, subsequently, reproduce the dominant culture and values in society. It is therefore required that power, knowledge, and resources are shared equitably.

Social justice as a theory puts emphasis on equality–the rights of humans which are non-negotiable. The rights espoused by social justice theory are endorsed by the United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights, which stated, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and right” (United Nations, 1948).

These principles are relevant to the field of education; for according to Connell (1994), cited in Bates (2006), “no one should imagine that change in the interest of ...the marginalized, the unheard, the suppressed—those whose voices are not given attention—can be conflict-free” (p. 144). Thus, the principles espoused by the theory of social justice and endorsed by the Youth Policy (2010), emphasize that students as future leaders of their communities

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must be involved in decision-making at all levels to ensure their future development.

Democracy in Education

Democratic theory of education and its resultant practices has its roots in the writings of Dewey (1859-1952) as cited in Blasé and Blasé (1994). Dewey's educational philosophy was founded on a commitment to democratic education. According to him, students should be free to explore and test all ideas and values. Children, like adults, should learn how to structure their lives and develop self-discipline. He believed that students should participate in shaping their education. The need for greater democracy–the fair and equal treatment of everyone in an organization and their right to take part in making decisions in education-is supported by a great deal of literature both nationally and internationally (Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978; Asare Bediako, 1990; UNDP, 1993, 1994, 1995; UNICEF, 1995; Badu, 1994; Harber & Davies, 1997; Ankomah & Pepra- Mensah, 2006; Tshabangu, 2006; Mncube, 2008).

Even though various communities define democracy differently and thus the term democracy is highly contested Mncube (2008) a common thread is accepted; namely, the equal treatment of all in a polity in respect of their right to take part in making decisions (Harber & Davies, 1997). Emphasizing the need for the practice of democracy in schools Carter et al. (2003) suggest that some values such as democracy, tolerance and responsibility, grow only with experience of them. Therefore, schools need to practice what they seek to promote. Davies (2002) argues that a democratic theory of education is concerned with the process of "double democratization'' of both education and society. By this, it is suggested that without the democratic development

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of a society, a more democratic system of education cannot be promoted. The converse is true. Without a more democratic system of education, the development of a democratic society is unlikely to occur. The belief is that the school itself must be organized along democratic lines, taking into consideration that democracy is best learned in a democratic setting in which participation is encouraged, freedom of expression and a sense of justice and fairness prevails and democratic approaches function which allow the nurturing of qualities such as participation, innovation, cooperation, autonomy and initiative in learners and staff Starke (1991) cited in Mncube (2008).

According to Edelstein (2011), democratic self-regulation and projects in schools serve the development of social competences; that is, the socio-moral resources required for democratic deliberation and decision-making, conflict resolution, responsible cooperation and participation. Democratic school cultures generate democratic habits among members, enabling them to participate responsibly in democratic institutions as adults. Griffith (1998) is of the opinion that at best, school life should seek to foster tolerance, right to participation, empowerment, and respect for human dignity and individual views. Thus, Aristotle Harber (1995) thinks that individuals within a polity must have their habits formed for that society in order for them to accept the beneficial rules of their own society. This calls for training, and one way of training the habits of students for society is through their participation in their school decision-making processes.

Accordingly, Dewey (1859 – 1952) considered ‘authoritarian schools as disservice to the practice of democracy, for students should participate in shaping their education; and that not only should school be a preparation for

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democracy, but also it should be a democracy' Sadker and Sadker (2000, p. 307). It must be noted that a democratic school is not a luxury. Learning democracy is a serious business of learning for life and as such, it must be a central goal of education in school. Commenting on the lack of practicing democracy, Crouch (as cited in Edelstein, 2011) gives an analysis of what he calls 'post-democracy' as:

1. The erosion of trust in governmental institutions;
2. The decay of the basic regulatory principles of equality, justice and fairness that are essential to democratic political empowerment,
3. Loss of transparency that is followed by a loss of motivation to act politically.
4. Increasing divide between 'rulers' and the 'ruled' linked with unequal distribution of educational opportunities, as the result of the absence of practising democracy in schools (p. 128).

Democratic governance of schools demands participation of all stakeholders in policy making. The implication for schools and the educational process is clear: schools must cultivate the 'competences' that empower students to interact peacefully and successfully and live a good and productive life in a community of equals. Schools must be dedicated and committed to democratic governance and a democratic school culture. In fact, 'learning democracy', as indicated in the writings of Dewey (1859-1952) as cited in Blasé and Blasé (1994) is not a single task with a well-defined outcome. Rather Rawls (as cited in Edelstein, 2011) states that it consists of a variety of different, yet interconnected tasks: the first is 'learning about democracy' in order to become a knowing and conscious democratic actor in future situations

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of social and political choice and decision. The second is 'learning through democracy' by participating in a democratic school community, and thus acquire sustainable democratic habits and thirdly, 'learning for democracy' including the construction and ongoing development of democratic forms of life, based on cooperation and participation in local (micro), national and transnational (macro) contexts (Edelstein, 2011).

According to Yates and Youniss (as cited in Edelstein, 2011) the processes of learning about democracy; learning through democracy and learning for democracy, are all rooted in dispositions, skills and convictions that individuals must acquire. These are grounded in an individual's social competences. They must be cultivated; for, without them, there will be no perspective taking, no participation, cooperation, responsibility for others. They are skills of social action which are prerequisites of democracy. Thus, the practice of democracy in schools demands that schools work towards turning formal membership in an institution into active and motivated participation in a community, a shared sense of recognition and responsibility arising from experience of belonging to a community of purpose which in turn will transform the 'rule-bound life' of an institution into a democratic school culture characterized by reciprocal recognition, the self-efficacy of motivated actors, and the responsibility shared by all members (Althof & Stadelmann, 2009). Edelstein (2011) observes that the democratic cultures in schools are: acceptance, self-efficacy and responsibility which Sen (2009) referred to as 'triad' and 'capabilities'. And these, according to him, are the 'socio-moral resources' needed by students. It is the acquisition of these resources that will enable students to learn about democracy, learn through democracy, and learn

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for democracy. Thus, students acquire these resources as they engage in participation in decision-making, in policy making.

Empirical studies show that democratic practices enhance students' motivation and performance; generate a sense of belonging and empowerment (McPherson, 1997; Bates, 2004; Ankomah & Pepra-Mensah, 2006). Accordingly Edelstein (2011) states:

> Nothing will contribute more to the stability of democratic ways of life and institutions than the commitment of the young generation rooted in the experience of active participation and empowerment (p. 135).

Students' Voice

The term "students' voice" is used to describe the many ways in which the youth might have the opportunity to participate in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of their peers (Goodwillie, 1993; Levin, 2000); Fielding (as cited in Mitra, 2006).

Mitra, (2006) believes that through student voice opportunities, students can work with their teachers and administrators to co-create the path of reform. This process will enable youth to meet their developmental needs and will strengthen student ownership of the change process. Good teachers and administrators do not reject what students see and feel but rather work with what is presently seen and felt (i.e. listening to their voice) to build a stronger position for each student. To do this effectively requires the creation and maintenance of a trusting relationship. Thus, Blasé and Blasé (1994) indicate that 'half-hearted or tacit repudiation of students' right to participate in decision-making is a problem. It is a loss of trust; and, when trust level is

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low, group members will be evasive, dishonest and inconsiderate in their work essential to the effective operation of a school'(p. 19). The only way students' rights are not repudiated by those in authority is being considerate, which calls for empathy. Brooks (as cited in Mitra, 2006) indicates that one of the most vital skills for a teacher to possess is empathy. Translated in the school arena, empathy is the capacity of teachers/administrators to place themselves inside the shoes of their students and to see the world through the students' eyes.

It is only when such orientation takes place that students' voice will be heard; conscious efforts will be made and opportunities offered or created for students to talk freely. When this happens, it means the school has worked towards turning formal membership in an institution where students belong into active and motivated participation in a community. With their voice listened to, students take responsibility for the common good and the welfare of others by turning to a social problem. They work solutions by responding to challenges in their own environment. They start to develop and articulate political and analytic interests; become sensitive to the structural problems of their own school – the ownership which they have taken. Mitra (2006) argues that when students are moved from the position of being heard to collaborating with them, they are seen as exerting a leadership role and think strategically about school change. They become innovative by developing many successful student-focused and teacher-focused initiatives aimed at improving their school climate.

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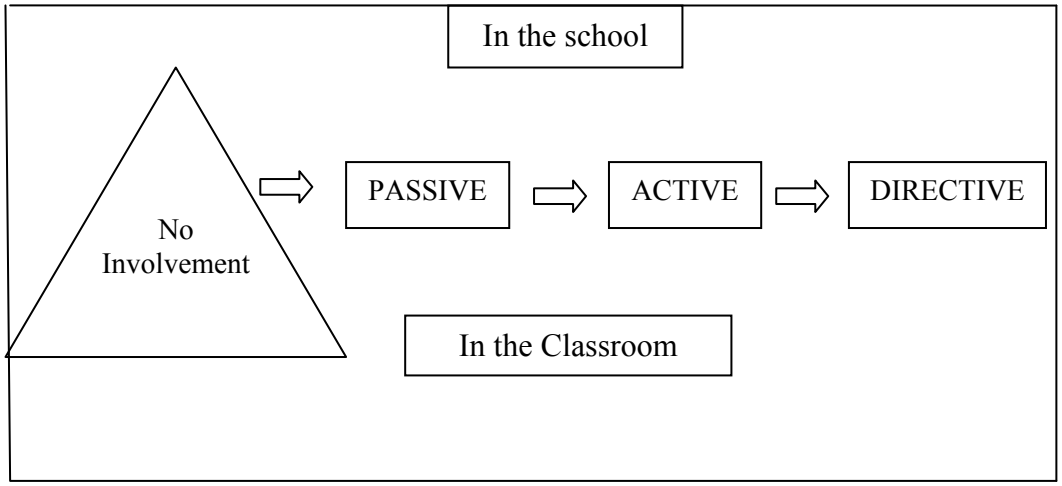
Typologies of Students' Voice

Students' Voice Continuum

Student voice has been described by various typologies. Lee and Zimmerman (1999) described student voice along a three-point continuum from passive (information source) to active (participant) to directive (designer). In the passive continuum, students are involved by using them as important sources of information, collecting data through surveys or focus group with students. Here, students play an important but fundamentally passive role. Towards a more active role, students become participants in a school improvement effort, influencing the process through the conduct of active research. At the directive stage, students not only influence the process of school improvements but also help create the process by becoming partners in its design.

The continuum is not intended to suggest that all schools need to have students involved at the directive end, but rather to point out the different ways in which students can be involved. The continuum of students' involvement in decision making is shown in Figure 1 as developed by Lee (1999).



Source: Developed by: Lee (1999)

Figure 1: Students' Voice Continuum

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From the Figure above, students are not at all involved; they are somewhat involved (passive), they are actively engaged (active) or they are engaged as co-partners in the decision making process (directive). However, Lee is not emphatic as to which point of her continuum the youth should be involved in decision making.

Spectrum of Student Involvement

Fielding's (2001) spectrum of student involvement in school-based research follows a similar trajectory, from least to greatest: student as data source, student as active respondent, student as co-researcher, and student as researcher.

1. Students as data source is where students might provide information through student opinion survey for adults to use as part of their decision making;
2. Students as active respondents who respond to invitations to join with discussions with adults;
3. Students as co-researchers who support staff to take a lead research role. Here, teachers engage students as partners in learning in order to deepen understanding and learning
4. Students as researchers or joint authors engaging in a joint decision-making with staff. This involves intergenerational learning as lived democracy where there is a shared responsibility between staff and students to pursue a common good. This is where students themselves identify issues they see as important in their daily experiences of schooling and with the support of staff, in facilitating and enabling roles, gather data, make meaning together and put forward subsequent

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recommendations for change shared with their fellow students, with staff and with the governing body of the school. Here, the location of power, perspective and energising dynamic rests with students themselves. Fielding's observation indicates that the structures that support agency have a greater impact on participating students.

Ladder of Young People's Participation

Similarly, Hart's (1992) "ladder of young people's participation" offers a typology of youth participation in decision-making that ranges from tokenism and manipulation, or non-participation, to projects that are young person-oriented but still require shared decision making with adults.

1) Manipulation. This happens where adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people. This rung of the ladder reflects adultism.
2) Decoration happens when young people are used to help a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people. This rung of the ladder also reflects adultism
3) Tokenism. This rung of participation is where young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact, have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. Similarly, this rung of the ladder reflects adultism.
4) Assigned but informed. This is where young people are assigned some specific roles and informed about how and why they are being involved.
5) Consulted and informed. This rung of student participation happens when young people give advice on projects or programs designed and

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run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.

6) At the 6th rung of young people's participation, projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people. However, adults make the final decision.
7) At the 'young people-initiated and directed' of youth participation, young people initiate and direct a project or program. Adults are involved only in a supportive role.
8) Hart refers to his highest form of young people participation in decision-making as 'young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults'. This happens when projects or programs are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults.

The summary is that in the progressive ladder of Hart, decision making ranges from manipulation which indicates the least of involvement to shared decision making which is the highest. Hart (1992) like Lee and Zimmerman (1999) did not suggest the ideal level of participation but rather outlined the various stages or levels of decision making.

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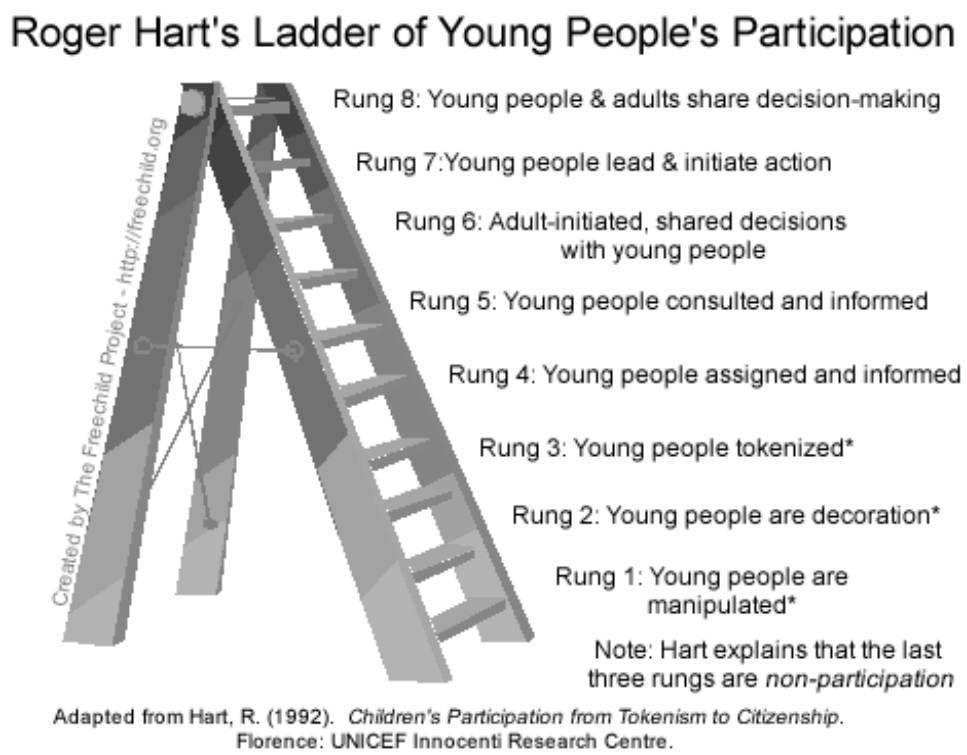

Figure 2: Hart's Ladder of Participation

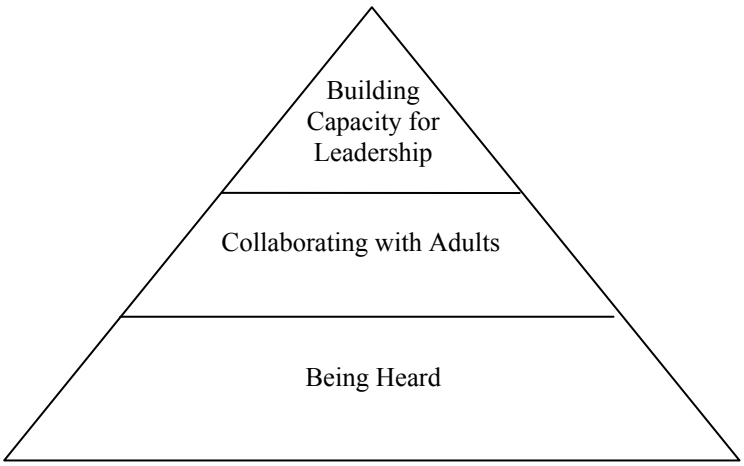

Figure 3: Pyramid of Students V

Source: Prevention Researcher, vol. 13(1), (2006).

Mitra's (2006) pyramid of student voice illustrates youth development opportunities possible as student voice is increased in a school. It begins at the bottom with the most basic form of student voice-- being heard. At this level school personnel listen to students to learn about their experiences in school.

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"Collaborating with adults" – the next level, describes instances in which students work with adults to make changes in their school. The final (and smallest level) – "Building capacity for leadership" includes an explicit focus on enabling youth to share in the leadership of the student voice initiative (Mitra, 2006).

Being Heard

Listening to students is the most common form of student voice Mitra (2006). By this means, adults seek students' perspectives and then interpret the meaning of the data Costello, Toles, Spielberger, and Wynn (2000) cited in Mitra (2006). The question is: should students do their own interpretation of their perspectives on issues or others should interpret for them using their own perspectives? Who attaches meaning to an experience? Is it the individual who experienced a phenomenon or an outsider? Thus, this study observes that barriers such as culture, or power relations should be removed in order for youth collaboration with adults to be possible, effective and successful.

Collaborating with Adults

In order to satisfy the many goals of positive youth development, youth need to participate more deeply than simply "being heard". Students need opportunities to influence issues that matter to them and to engage in actively solving problems. They also need to develop closer and more intimate connections with adults and with peers (Mitra, 2006). Through such collaboration, students as youth develop their 'socio-moral' resources – (competences), which is the ability to act autonomously, use the tools of symbolic action (language, numbers, information technology, both constructively and reflectively) and also interact successfully in heterogeneous

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groups and participate in action (Edelstein, 2011). Through partnering with adults youth will notice a growing understanding between teachers and themselves, and adults will come to the stark realization that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate.

Building Capacity for Youth Leadership

Sergiovanni (as cited in Blasé & Blasé, 1994) asserts that "the heart of the school as a moral community is its covenant of shared values …" (p. 108). The shared values according to Sergiovanni (1990), provide a basis for determining a school's moral values. Thus, students always hold in high esteem the schools that train them. They desire to have a voice of what goes on in their school; that is, they seek ways to make the school a better place for all (Ankomah & Pepra-Mensah, 2006; Mitra, 2006). Painfully, students find themselves inhibited by a meeting structure–an administrative structure of their school-- that does not allow the practice of 'building capacity for youth leadership in order to have a share in the values of their school (Ankomah & Pepra-Mensah, 2006; Tshabangu, 2006; Fielding, 2011). Leadership is a shared–value. The creation of students' leadership positions is important; for, youth need opportunities to practice and to assume leadership roles in preparation for future adult responsibilities (Mitra, 2006).

When students' voice is given ear by teachers and administrators, it will be observed that school personnel can learn about student experiences and discover ways to improve schools. In that case, students develop the sense that their opinion counts. Thus, adults need to respect youth opinion, value it, as a way of promoting in them a sense of belonging and acceptance. The

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importance of learning from student voice stems from the belief that students themselves are often neglected sources of useful information. Listening to students most importantly, reminds teachers and administrators that students are mature, innovative, and creative and thus can contribute positively to the successful governance of their school (Pryor et al., 2005; Tshabangu, 2006).

Obviously, student voice at its base level of "being heard" is simple and easier to practice. There are indeed difficulties of enabling youth leadership; for, empirical data show that gathering data from students is decidedly simpler than determining how to embolden youth to assume the leadership of an initiative that seeks to change a school Mitra (2005). However, solely listening to students does not present youth with opportunities to collaborate with adults or to develop leadership skills. The greater the involvement of youth in student voice initiatives and the more that young people have the opportunity to assume leadership roles in these activities, the greater the rewards in terms of youth development and overall growth (Mitra, 2006).

Making room for student voice through active participation, where students will not only attend supposed meetings but also to shape the agenda of the meetings posses challenges. Students face definite limits in terms of the amount of power and authority that they can assume. Nevertheless, school personnel must strive to cultivate youth leadership. They can do this by switching roles to become supporters and educators in the interaction and work to build a tone of trust among adults and students Edelstein (2011) for as Blasé and Blasé (1994) put it, 'when subordinate participation (empowerment) is absent... trust is low, and when trust level is low, group members will be

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evasive, dishonest and inconsiderate in their work essential to the effective operation of a school' (p. 19). Thus, increasing student voice requires adults to work in partnership with youth conscientiously and continuously to develop patterns of interaction that align with the values of equitable relations (National Youth Policy, 2010; Edelstein, 2011).

Mitra (2005) argues that when adults do not intentionally keep a focus on group process, the youth and adults often fall back into traditional teacher-student roles. The payoff of such challenging work: taking student voice to the highest (i.e. building capacity for leadership) outweighs the difficulties; for within these processes, can be a marked increase in opportunities for young people to learn and to grow (Pryor et al., 2005; Mitra, 2006). Should not schools practice the values they want their students to imbibe? Thus, it is observed that before we can have an educated democracy we must make every effort to offer our democracy an education that is likely to make it one.

Cockburn (as cited in Mncube, 2008) reinforces the concept of student voice in participation in school decision-making by his observation that learners voice is effective when they attend the supposed meetings (i.e. 'being heard'), but is more effective when learners actively take part in shaping the agenda of those meetings (i.e. collaborating with adults). Thus, in his view, adults in the school environment must make every possible effort to engage students at that level. I have been more elaborate on Mitra's (2006) Pyramid of Students voice because I found it to be the one that underpins my study.

The questions that can be raised in looking at these typologies are: what is the interpretation of the extent to which these types of student participation tend to occur? What is the explicit discussion of the relationship

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between the opportunities offered as well as the youth development opportunities available to them? Questions such as these presuppose that there are inherent barriers between adults and the youth as regards genuine discourse. I found out that socio-cultural beliefs are one of the barriers to genuine discourse.

Socio - Cultural Beliefs as Factors that Militate against Students' Voice in Participation in Decision-making

Various studies have shown that student agitations on school campuses are the result of the non-involvement of students who form a major stakeholder group in education in decisions the implementation of which affect them (Martin & Holt, 2002; Sithole, 1995; Tshabangu, 2006; Ankomah & Pepra-Mensah, 2006; Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978). Martian and Holt did their in south-east London. Hey used qualitative research design in interpretative study. They found among other things that culture/tradition prevented young adult in high school setting from genuine participation in their schools decision-making process. Sithole did his study in post-apartheid South-Africa. He used qualitative methodology in interpretative study. He also found that tradition was a major factor that prevented young adult to play their assigned roles in the school settings.

Tshabangu also did his work in Zimbabwe high schools and used qualitative methodology in interpretative research. He found that, authoritarian rule in Zimbabwean schools rendered young adults voiceless and passive. Ankomah and Pepra-Mensah did their work in five Training Colleges now Colleges of Education in the Eastern region of Ghana. They used quantitative mode of investigation to find out factors that militated against students' voice.

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They found that intimidation, authoritarian nature of administering schools prevented students to freely voice out their opinions about matters that were of interest to them. Asiedu-Akrofi did his work in Kenya. He also used the quantitative mode. He noted 'participation in school administration today represents a period of great promise in our society with strong democratic aspirations' (p. 150). Unfortunately, he observed that adult members in Africa see the child as an exhibit; only to be seen but not heard. The findings of the studies referred to above, have special relevance to my work because I wanted to find out students perspectives on decision-making in the context of Ghanaian Colleges of Education.

It has also been demonstrated in such studies that adults' failure or unpreparedness to engage students in fruitful and genuine exchange of ideas, is from the socio-cultural belief– a social construction Rich (1980) of "tokenism" – the belief that, the child is only to be seen but not heard in any meaningful way.

Writing on typologies of student voice in the governance of schools, Hart (as cited in Mitra, 2006) observed that a ladder of young people's participation offers a typology of youth participation that ranges from tokenism and manipulation, or non-participation. Mitra (2006) argues that at this level of student involvement, adults listen to the views of the youth but surprisingly, interpret what is listened to by adults through adult spectacles. What is implied in this is that adults believe the youth are incapable of making any meaningful contribution to discourse. Such a belief has shaped the models of educational administration and governance in Africa and Ghana in particular (Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978; Sithole, 1998; Ankomah & Pepra-Mensah,

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2006; Mncube, 2008). Mncube did his work in post-apartheid South-Africa. He used qualitative research design in interpretative studies and underpinned his work on two theories: democratic theory and social justice. He found that as a result of culture/tradition adult members of the four schools (two urban and two rural) that he used, adult members stereotyped the youth as immature, irresponsible, and destructive. Because of this, adult members did not want the youth to be part of the school Governing Boards by way of participation in the decision-making process. The literature shows that such socio-cultural belief or 'social construction' Marias (2005), have helped to perpetuate and entrench the models of school administration and governance.

Strong advocates for youth voice have consistently interrogated this socio-cultural-ascribed roles based on the crucial intersection of tokenism and adultism (Marias, 2005). Such advocates have sought to provide the youth with a more robust approach to seek equal access to opportunities as far as shaping the agenda of school decision-making is concerned (Sithole, 1995; Marias, 2005; Cockburn (as cited in Mncube, 2008; Tshabangu, 2006; Edelstien, 2011). Rich (1980) argues that the 'education historically offered to girls has kept women in a state of ignorant collusion with patriarchal power structures' (p. 240). Adult educators have consistently over the years tutored the youth into accepting the status quo–to accept whatever is given without question. The youth have thus been educated into passivity (Carter, Harber & Serf, 2003; Mitra, 2006; Tshabangu, 2006).

Thus, this study contends that schools and colleges must seek to use education as a liberating force by educating the youth to be critical thinkers, innovative and creative. In reality, educational equity in such a patriarchal

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society means educating; that is, shepherding the youth into a cultural mode of accepting the beliefs handed down from generations as a legacy (Tshabangu, 2006).

Although purporting to offer an avenue to students to air their views as far as decision-making processes are concerned, schools did not and have not necessarily empowered the youth to leadership roles to challenge the status quo. Marias (2005) and Mitra (2006) observed that assumptions on tokenism based on the belief that the child is only to be seen but not heard in any meaningful way, construct and fix inflexible categories of roles that have far-reaching consequences for the distribution of power. Thus, the youth stereotype holds that young people are ignorant, disruptive, destructive, emotional and impractical. The characteristics of adult stereotype are - logic, technical, visionary, proficiency, constructive and wisdom Lemos, (2010). One cannot exaggerate the extent to which the 'tokenism' practice of categorizing youth as irrational, uniformed and ignorant, emotional and impractical, and adults as logical, knowledgeable, well-informed and wise, have been culturally naturalized to justify the type of school governance that have taken place since independence. Have our schools been sites for the perpetuation of such socio-culturally constructed beliefs? Thus, Pryor et al. (2005), observe that 'children speaking out and negotiating with adults has been problematic in Ghana. There is a fine line between what is acceptable and not acceptable from a cultural stand point' (p. 75).

In studies carried out in South Africa and Zimbabwe, Sithole (1995); Martin and Holt (2000); Mncube (2005, 2008); Tshabangu (2006), it has been observed that adult members of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) think that

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students, who should be part of the school decision-making process, are immature, too critical, ignorant, uniformed and irrational in matters of school governance. However, these authors argue that 'the most important form of citizenship education is that which is active, responsible and critical of institutional arrangements' (Garratt & Piper, 2002). Thus, they disagree with the notion that the youth are immature, critical, and uniformed.

The adults in the studies cited above, wanted and advocated an education that would continue to make the youth passive. The youth, to them, should accept what is given them without question. If even their voices (views) are to be heard, it should be a token-- just being heard. And when even their voices are heard, the interpretation of what is heard must be done by adults through adult spectacles (Mitra, 2006). But Twine (1994) cited in Mitra (2006) states that in citizenship education, "We are concerned with what kinds of persons we are able to be and the kinds of persons we might be. What kinds of opportunities and constraints confront people in terms of current institutional arrangements?" (p. 12).

If the youth are considered citizens and not citizens-to-be, then, responsible citizenship will concern itself with social relationships of people as well as the relationships between people and the institutional arrangements in place. Thus, the interdependence of self and society is the focal point of citizenship education since "individuals cannot abstract themselves from their natural and social bonds and still understand themselves" (Mitra, 2006, p.10). Hence, for the youth to be responsible, opportunities must be created for them to participate actively, debate passionately and appreciate critically the institutions that exist including those within the school, which affect them on a

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daily basis. Pryor et al. (2005) corroborate this notion by observing that 'if an ideal is one of a participating democracy, then children should learn at school to question, to speak out, and to debate' (p. 78). They did their work in three basic schools in Ghana. They used qualitative methodology in interpretative research. They found out that culture prevented these young children from expressing themselves freely with the adult members of their schools. Thus, they ask: 'To what extent are the social relations of a school council possible within an authoritarian field such as a Ghanaian basic school where the expectation of both children and adult is likely to be adult direction and children's compliance? It is true that children speaking out and negotiating with adults is problematic in Ghana. They observed that "there is a fine line between what is acceptable from a cultural standpoint" (p. 75). Their observation is a strong point for advocates for the voice of students in a cultural environment where there seems to be a demarcation for what children can say and where they can say what they want to say. Thus, educators within the school setting should socialize learners into active namers of the world and not let others name the world for them. Tshabangu (2006) argues that adoption of rationality is actually a moral decision by society, for its rejection– total surrender to irrationality or blind obedience to other's decision– invites all the brutalities of totalitarian regime.

It is no secret that Africa has a catalogued history of brutal regimes that brought and still bring untold suffering to its people. From current world rankings on democracy, Zimbabwe, for example, ranks among the worst nations, World Audit (as cited in Tshabangu, 2006). Rationality must be promoted among students; they must be offered the opportunity to learn to

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empathise (to walk in someone's shoes). The one way suggested by studies on social construction as militating against student participation in decision-making towards democratizing education, is their non-engagement in active participation in decisions which stem from the belief that students are immature. Tshabangu (2006) states that as they (students) actively participate and debate issues, they may come to appreciate the challenges and constraints that face different players in decision-making process. Beyond the decision-making process is action and that is where empowerment and self-esteem are crucial (Bailey, 2000).

Thus, if we want our youth to grow into responsible adults, then, we must not continue to use our schools to educate them to accept the socio-cultural beliefs that they can only be seen but not heard. Responsible citizenship will take a risk and allow students opportunities to take a lead and act. When adults do not intentionally focus on group process; that is, engaging the youth in collaborative ventures, the youth and adults often fall back into traditional teacher-student roles.

Students' Participation in Decision-making

It has been noted above that participation in decision-making at all levels of education the world over and Ghana in particular, has become a permanent feature in the educational system. From the basic to the tertiary levels, participation in decision-making has led to the practice of institutionalised form of democracy in especially our tertiary institutions. This healthy experience has promoted interesting and healthy awareness of students on current issues in the educational front (Kyei-Badu, 2010). Administrators of schools as well as teachers and policy makers of our educational structure

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need to understand the point articulated above; for, as Musaazi (as cited in Kyei-Badu, 2010) points out 'an understanding of the decision-making process is a 'sine qua non' for all administrators because the school, like all formal organisations, is basically a decision-making structure; for, the task of deciding what to do or not to do pervades the entire administrative organisation' (p. 75).

Meaning of Decision-making

One of the major responsibilities that school administrators shoulder is decision-making. At all levels of their endeavour, decisions are made in order to solve problems and effect the achievement of set goals and objectives of their schools or colleges. The Commonwealth Secretariat (1993) notes that, 'decisions need to be made to avert crisis. Decision-making and problem-solving cannot be divorced from one another. They go hand-in-hand because both are of fundamental importance in all aspects of school management and administration' (p. 51).

Decision-making has been defined in various ways. Dortey et al. (2006) state that decision-making is an act of choice by which an executive selects one particular course of action from among possible alternatives for the attainment of a desired end or as a solution to a specific problem. It implies the selection from alternatives – policies, procedures or otherwise. From the point of view of these authors, decision-making could be a conscious or unconscious attempt at making a choice out of competing alternatives. The Commonwealth Secretariat (1993) defines decision-making as ''the process of identifying and selecting a course of action to be taken to solve a problem; a process through which human, material and financial resources of an organisation are allocated

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or committed towards the achievement of intended goals and objectives, a process through which information, ideas, objectives and knowledge are brought together for action'' (p. 51).

From this, it can be argued that if students are involved in decision-making, information, ideas, knowledge and perspectives from them could be harnessed together with adult governors of schools for the achievement of set goals. It has been observed that involving subordinates in decision-making has a positive outcome. Gorton (1980) states the rationale as the following:

i. It increases the number of different viewpoints and ideas which might be relevant to the decision being made;
ii. It may improve the school morale by showing the individuals involved that the administrator values their opinions; which may give them greater feeling of satisfaction;
iii. It makes better utilisation of the available expertise and problem-solving skills which exist within the school community;
iv. It can aid acceptance and implementation of decision because the people who are involved are more likely to understand the decision and be more committed to its success;
v. It is consistent with democratic principles of our society, which hold that those who are affected by public institutions such as the school should have some voice in how they are run (p. 273).

If Gorton's views are plausible, then, it can be strongly suggested that there is an appreciable advantage to be gained when the stakeholders of a school are involved in the decision-making process; especially, when the decision concerns the relevant public–stakeholders (Ankomah & Pepra-

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Mensah, 2006; Pepra-Mensah, 2000). Students' participation in decision-making can be traced to the works or 'experiments' of Badley (1890); Dent, (1920s); and Bloom (as cited in Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). The three founders established schools where they wanted true community of students who are genuinely involved in decisions rather than just being heard. Dent (1920) the founder of Bedales' school, thought it was important that members feel that they have a share in the government and organisation of its life. The three pioneers – Badley (1890s), Dent (1920s) and Bloom (1940s) had something in common:

i. They were passionately committed to democratic possibilities;
ii. Tied to the first, they believed the school to be a community of shared-values;
iii. As a community they believed students as stakeholders of education, should share in the governance and administration of the school;
iv. Students should be autonomous;
v. Spaces should be provided for students to enable them develop their own identities and interests (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 221).

Bedales had a founding philosophy: 'freedom, trust and responsibility'. This is corroborated by Blasé and Blasé's (1994) position that subordinates, especially, students in a school setting desire much participation in decision-making to feel a sense of worth, freedom, trust and responsibility. When the trust level is low, group members become evasive, and inconsiderate in their communications.

In their participation in decision-making, students had a role in the organisation of the school; they participated in the monitoring of their own

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progress, and some choice in learning activities. Bedales' vision thus highlighted tolerance, breadth in curriculum and a focus on the whole person. According to Rowan (as cited in Rudduck & Fielding, 2006) wanted to make children participants in their own schooling, rather than just recipients; he wanted to free them from sitting like little models. He believed that young people had a personal interest in their upbringing, something to contribute to its problems, and a point of view that we should treat with deference.

Thus, it is observed that Dent's move was very innovative because he believed that young people had to be given space to make decisions and to work out and develop their own identities. Therefore, Dent created structures that enabled students to participate in decisions to the extent of working on their own extended projects. The outcome was positive. Students developed poise, self confidence and skills for their future lives.

These laudable outcomes, Dent attributed to the opportunity for young people to exercise their choice in a framework of responsibility and trust. According to him, trustful relationships create the opportunities for adult and youth to work in partnership.

The school, St George-in-the-East-was founded by Bloom (1940). The distinctiveness of his work rested on: his clear view of how human beings grow and flourish as persons, his commitment to an education based on the beliefs in (i) above and his capacity to develop his aspirations in the realities of everyday encounters.

He took the view that a consciously democratic community could not be formed gradually by the removal of one taboo after another (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). Consequently, Bloom's school began without regimentation,

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corporal punishment, and competition. Bloom let young people make choices through participation in decision-making by way of negotiated curriculum – about what, how, when and with whom they learned. Structures were put in place to facilitate participation. For example, a Teacher Panel, Student Panel, and a Joint Panel were formed. The Student Panel met every week – with power to set up committees to manage particular tasks or ventures. The Joint Panel met every month and a Whole School Council met a few days after a Joint Panel. What is very common to the three schools as historic models of democratic practice in school as far as participation in decision-making is concerned, is they all had a commitment to the idea of community as something that can support the development of individual identities, personal autonomy and choice while at the same time highlighting the importance of mutual respect, trust and reciprocity.

Through participation in decision-making, students had spaces opened for them where they could explore and express their views, both as individuals and as representatives of the student group. Thus, this study contends that the school environment must be very conducive for the practice of democracy; for it is within such an environment that students can acquire democratic skills. In other words, democracy is not something to be taught; it is rather experienced.

Through participation in decision-making, students 'learn about democracy'; 'learn through democracy', and 'learn for democracy'. The works or experiences of Badley (1890s), Dent (1920s) and Bloom (1940s) have influenced the quest for student participation in decision-making in schools – in Europe, the Americas and other parts of the world, Rudduck & Fielding, (2006). Therefore as stated by Oakley (as cited in Rudduck & Fielding, 2006)

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educational institutions worldwide have official guidelines that suggest that democracy in education is primarily about preparing students for their role as future citizens; however, the guidelines should address what matters to students in their lives in school now: getting involved in all that goes on in their school; especially, participation in decision-making. Oakley (1994) put it thus; 'we are often pre-occupied with young people's becoming, with their status as would-be adults – rather than with the here and now state of being' (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006, p. 224).

Sahin (2005) investigated the perceptions of Student Council Members (SRC) on their participation in decision-making in their school. He emphasised that consultation and participation in decision-making are an enactment, in the present, of democratic principles and are powerful allies in the task of redefining the status of young people in schools and shaping more democratic structures for learning. Thus, it is understood that students' participation in decision-making among other things, leads to the development of cooperative agency and individual identity. We live in a performance-driven climate. This study contends that school improvement which is geared towards quality assurance is probably the dominant justification for consultation and participation in decision-making, and that student participation in decision-making, offers them the opportunity to discover and affirm personal perspective and also to learn to cooperate and to negotiate. It is therefore important for students to learn to enter into a dialogue with others in order to transform practice (Sahin, 2005).

Korkut (2004) in a study found the benefits of students 'participation in the decision-making process as follows:

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1. It enhances the quality of the decisions made since the participants are knowledgeable about the practices in their fields;
2. It enables individuals in the organisation to change their behaviours and habits because of identification with the group.
3. The subordinate participants, for instance students, gain substantial amount of administrative experience, enhance their knowledge and quality to develop a shared sense of responsibility.
4. All these opportunities that cater for the realisation of the participants' full potential result in satisfaction on the part of the participant, which leads to more devotion to the organisation.

His observations corroborate Gorton's (1980) rationale for participation by subordinates. Gorton observed that when students develop a shared sense of responsibility, as a result of their involvement in decision-making, they throw their weight behind the implementation of decisions thus made. Sergiovanni (1994), refers to this as ''commitment density''. He states that "… highly successful, shared governance principals know it is not power over people and events that counts but, power over accomplishments and over the achievements of organisational purposes. They understand that their subordinates, especially, students need to be empowered to act … and given the necessary responsibility that releases their potential and makes their actions and decisions count' (Blasé & Blasé, 1994, p. 121). One major area of empowering students is their participation in decision-making. Thus, this study recognizes that participation in decision-making by students is linked to desirable outcomes for individual students as well as to positive contributions to the welfare of the campus community.

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Furthermore, students gain from experience, organisational, planning, managing and decision-making skills. They also gain skills of citizenship because individuals cannot abstract themselves from their natural and social bonds and still understand themselves; hence in citizenship, the emphasis is on what kind of persons we are able to be and the kinds of persons we might be. As students actively participate and debate issues, they may come to appreciate the challenges and constraints that face players in decision-making processes; for beyond the decision-making process is action and that is where empowerment and self-esteem are crucial (Bailey, 2000).

Being able to 'have a say' on things that matter to you is important but the implications of 'finding a voice' are greater; they engage the issues of personal identity. Through participation, students have been found to 'learn to live as part of a crowd' (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). In a collaborative project coordinated by Shultz and Cook-Sather (2001) Jessye (pseudonym), a student explains how important it is to find out ones identity at ones environment. It helps an individual to learn who he/she is and begins to understand who he/she wants to be (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). This emphasizes Heidegger's existential idea of being-in-the-world.

Through participation, students have sought to express in their own voices their perceptions and perspectives, feelings and insights about the school where they are found. Furthermore, through genuine collaborative discourse with adult governors of schools, students have sought to understand the nature of their agency and they want to find their own position on controversial issues rather than feel that their views are constructed out of exam-acceptable voices. Julia (as cited in Rudduck & Fielding, 2006)

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indicates she has seen so many people trapped by listening to the voices in their heads that are not their own. Thus, they reach the miserable point when their own voices are lost for good in the crowd. Furthermore, she observed that in student participation in decision-making, the issue of language is a complex issue and potentially divisive. Her observation was that discourses are about what can be said and thought but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. Language carries implicit messages about membership. Thus, Grace observed a student to say: 'I think they listen to some people, like the good ones, and if you're doing well they listen. It is true there is a problem – that is, participation assumes a degree of social confidence and linguistic competence that not all students have, or feel they have. This study contends that though deficiency in a certain language affects one's ability to communicate effectively, it must not be a reason for not engaging students in genuine participation because facility with certain language structures will lie dormant as long as they are not used.

Messages and Meanings Students' Participation or Non- Participation Conveys to them

Research that focuses on students' experiences, and messages their participation or non-participation send to them and meanings they draw from such experiences, are scanty in the literature of students' involvement in their school decision-making, particularly in Ghana. Nevertheless, a few exist Blasé and Blasé (1994); McPherson (2000); Tshabangu (2006); Mncube (2008); Pryor (2005); Rudduck and Fielding (2006); Kyei-Badu (2010) and Blasé and Blasé (1994) explored and evaluated what successful principals do in the process of empowering their subordinates; especially students. Through the

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sharing of responsibilities, giving students the opportunities to discuss and passionately debate issues, students drew meanings such as recognition and belonging, respect and self esteem. Thus, they argue that whatever factors, variables, and ambience are conducive for the growth, development, and self-regard of a school staff are precisely those that are crucial to obtaining the same consequences for students in a classroom. To focus on the latter and ignore or gloss over the former is an invitation to disillusionment.

An important message that is put across from their exploration is that principals who understand that to improve education wherever it is found, both teachers and especially students who form the major stakeholder group in education 'must experience the school as a place that provides innovative and dynamic opportunities for growth and development' (p. xix).

Another message and meaning students draw from their experience or participation is empowerment. As they share in governance through their participation in decision-making, they recognize they are valued and thus their opinions count. Thus, Blasé and Blasé (1994) are of the view that the empowerment of students has more to do with individual growth, deportment than with the ability to boss others. To them, empowerment is the ability to exercise one's craft confidently and to help shape the way a job is done. Empowerment becomes inevitable when students have so much to offer and are so sure about what they know that they can no longer be shut out of the policy-making process. One student from their study draws a message thus, 'I think the principal's willingness to give up some power shows a great deal of respect for both teachers and students. She brought the idea of shared governance to our school and she fully supports our shared governance' (p. 4).

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Furthermore, the study revealed that meanings and messages on trust are communicated. They describe that cooperative group work such as participation in decisions is essential to the effective operation of a school, and that such cooperation encompasses both trusting behaviour (openness and sharing) and trustworthy behaviour (the expression of acceptance, support, and cooperative intentions). Thus, the message conveyed is members in shared-governance schools recognize their interdependence and seek ways to their trusting relationships.

Rudduck and Fielding (2006) explored students' voice to find what meanings and messages their experience sent to them. First, the authors observed that through their experience of participation in decision-making, a clear message of paying lip service of neglect was communicated to students. They report a voice of a student to have said:

> While much public policy focuses upon the skill young people will need to enter and service in the labour market, less emphasis is accorded to the significance of encouraging them to find a voice and practice of cooperative agency which is indispensable to flourishing within a democratic civil society (p. 225).

The meaning drawn and the message communicated according to the two authors is that, adults intentionally do not encourage students' voice in order that the youth could remain passive and continue to accept the status quo. Thus, adults need to reflect on the contradictions and inconsistencies in their presentation of students' participation and voice. On one hand, the virtues of consultation and participation are endorsed while on the other hand,

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systems are sustained which reflect the very different values of what Ahiever et al. (2003) refer to as 'competitive individualism' – where students are categorized, compared to and judged against one another (p. 224). This study contends that being able to have a say on things that matter to people is important but the implications of finding a voice are greater; they engage the issues of personal identity.

Secondly, the authors observed that students' experience of the phenomenon of participation in decision-making sends a message of self-actualization in a school environment where the youth find out what they want to become in the future – a message and meaning which dovetails into identity. Jessye (pseudonym), a student in the study in question is reported to have said that students are engaged in a battle to find who they are in the school environment. This is because that is where who they are and what they do collide. School is where students attempt to learn who they are and begin to understand who they want to be. The only institution that can provide opportunities for all children and the youth to self-actualize is the school. No other system involves the entire young generation. This is a message of students speaking out loud for the search of self-hood.

Thus, this study emphasizes that through the participation in decision-making, students have sought to express in their own voices their perspectives, feelings and insights about school, so that they do not find themselves trapped by listening to voices in their heads that are not their own, Rudduck and Fielding (2006) to reach a miserable point where their own voices are lost for good. Indicating that their voices are lost, carries the clear message that they

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are ignored, or even suppressed in school, thus making it difficult to think as they would for themselves.

Finally, the authors observed that the message of 'power relations' is a feature that inhibits the opportunity for students to express themselves freely. They argue that it has always been the wish of students to sit down with their teachers and just let them know what exactly they think about their class. It could be good or bad; however, they just don't have the opportunity. Thus, this study contends that for student participation to be genuine, adults in the school environment must be prepared to see young people differently. A teacher in their study sums up the message by indicating that management puts more systems in place and rejuvenates old ones but there is nothing wrong with the systems that are already in place. It is adults' perception of the students that needs to be changed. Thus, it must be regarded as crucial for students' perceptions, perspectives, and recommendations of what goes on in their schools to be responded to, not merely treated as minor footnotes Rudduck and Fielding (2006) in our unaltered adult text.

Fielding (2011) conducted his work in the United Kingdom (UK) High School-a project which had the purpose of how to improve the quality of British High School. His design was qualitative to my work though conducted in a foreign context, is that in other for the "quality" of a school to be improved students must not remain at Mitra's (2006) pyramid of "being hear" – tokenism-but must be co researchers. In other words, adults must collaborate with students. Similarly, Rudduck and Fielding recommended the importance both for schools and the life of the nation that there must be a statutory

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requirement for schools to ensure that it is part of the entitlement of all students.

Obviously, there is the problem that participation assumes or agrees of social confidence of linguistic competence that not all students have, or feel they have. But should this lack be a reason for not engaging students in genuine participation? Facility with certain language structures will lie dormant as long as they are not used. Thus, the idea of inclusive citizenship requires recognition of different voices as well as fair distribution of resources which provides the condition for equal participation without dismissing other voices as irrelevant.

Mncube (2008) explored student voice in four schools in post-apartheid South Africa to find what messages their experience sent to them. It was clear to Mncube that one important message students' non-participation in the decision making process of their schools conveyed to them was adult stereotyping. Students' non-involvement in decision making conveyed the message that the adult members of their schools considered them immature, too critical, ignorant, uninformed, and irrational in matters of school governance. In summary, they were considered as irresponsible. Two students from the research site – one urban and the other rural – summed their message as follows:

> We are considered immature and irresponsible... Because of this, we are not offered the opportunity to discuss issues about our school with the adult members of the school board. We do not feel to be part of where we find ourselves. (p. 76)

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Another message the study revealed was mistrust. The students lived experience conveyed another message which is similar to that of Rudduck and Fielding (2006). Adult members intentionally keep students out of forums in order for them – the young – to remain passive and accept whatever is offered them without question.

McPherson (2000) and Tshabangu (2006) did their work on student voice in different years and locations: their findings are very similar. They found out that when students are involved in decisions that affect them, the message conveyed to them is, "we are recognised and that our opinions count". On the other hand, their non-involvement in decision- making conveys the message that "we are not trusted as young people, there is much suspicion from the adult world re-echoing the words of Mitra (2006) that people create descriptive and evaluative adjectives out of their own personal experience in the environment where they are located.

In the Ghanaian context Pryor et al. (2005) conducted a study on student councils at the basic level (Grades 1-9). The authors state that their report is concerned specifically with an unplanned outcome namely, the emergence of student councils in the participating schools. In other words, the focus of their study was not to explore meanings and messages student councils communicated to either the pupils or the schools' teachers and authorities. Nevertheless, a close look at their work reveals important messages that are relevant to this study which is situated at college level.

First, there is the message of responsibility. At Oyeara (pseudonym)- one of the three basic schools where the study was carried out, it is said that 'some of their duties such as organizing supervision where a teacher did not

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turn up, and finding matters which "are not in sight" Onyɛ, (pseudonym) has been taken over by the council' (p. 73). The clear message sent to both principal and teachers is that pupils at that level can shoulder responsibility provided they are given the chance.

Secondly, there is the message that children at that level, know and can stand up for their rights. The authors observed that the councils were a major means of providing a student voice and their promotion of democracy. The practice of democracy is about respect for human rights. Thus, they agree that the practice of democratic principles promoted in children self-discipline, and a chance to air their views, to know and stand up for their rights. What probably inhibits is an intimidating atmosphere.

Thirdly, there is the message of initiative. The authors report that the establishment of school councils and the activities played by students enhance the acquisition of the skills of active participation, which led to accommodated qualities such as public spiritedness. The message drawn is even children at that level can take initiative, and execute what they plan to do. Thus, Woayeyie Council had organized a children's collection of money for a teacher whose mother had died. Tied to this is the message that children know and understand the environment within which they operate, since in the Ghanaian cultural context 'funeral donations are very highly regarded' (p. 76). This message of children's initiative and alertness reinforces the view of Tshabangu (2006) who observed that oftentimes those in leadership positions are starved of ideas. The point is that 'children are a source for a wealth of ideas if properly nurtured and encouraged to participate, as evidenced in the Madagascar case where 90 students from schools presented an Action Plan to

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the National Assembly UNICEF (2004). Thus, this study contends that since students are the primary customers of education, educators cannot easily dismiss them out of hand if schools are to be quality-conscious organizations.

Finally, Kyei-Badu (2010) the second empirical study on the Ghanaian scene did his study in one of the Colleges of Education. Though the study's focus was not on students' voice, a critical look at the findings suggests that clear messages were communicated to students from their lived experiences. One clear message that students genuine involvement in decision- making sent to them was acceptance which leads to commitment. A student in the study referred to above was observed to have said:

> "I feel accepted in my school. That means I am allowed to air my views during meetings. Such experience gives me a feeling of acceptance and that makes me committed and focused." (p. 96)

The message reinforces Sergiovanni (1994) work on Better Schools that when students or subordinates are engaged genuinely in decision- making, a large commitment base is created for the implementation of decisions. Sergiovanni referred to this as "commitment density".

Another message that was communicated to students as a result of their genuine involvement in decision making was respect. A student in that study was found to have said: "I am respected in my school... It gives me joy and always go about happy (boosting morale)." (p. 125). On the other hand, students' non-participation in the decisions that affect them conveyed to them the message of mistrust, loss of self-esteem and the feeling of irresponsibility. As students' views are continually brushed aside, they end up with the

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message that as young people they cannot be trusted with responsibilities. One student commented on this feeling as follows: "how I wish I could be trusted with responsibilities... This will make me feel that I am accepted and in the long-run I will grow and become a responsible adult" (p. 128)

Therefore, if a school decides to have a Students' Representative Council, teachers and administrators should be prepared to broker an honest two-way relationship, and students should be encouraged; not seeing each other as competitors but partners in an education process. Thus, Freire et al. (2010) argue that banking education which regards teachers as 'the haves' and students as 'have not', resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers (p. 64).

Concerning meanings, researchers have long indicated that human beings assign meanings to the experiences they go through in the contexts where they are found (Tshabangu, 2006; Mncube, 2008; McPherson, 2001; Edelstien, 2011; Greenfield, 2004). According to Tshabangu (2006) and Greenfield (2004), when students are treated fairly as adults in collaborative efforts through their participation in decision-making they react positively to such recognition and draw the conclusion that their 'opinions count'. However, if they are not genuinely involved in the decision-making process of their school, they draw such meanings as – lack of recognition, mistrust and suspicion. Thus, people create descriptive and evaluative adjectives out of their own personal experiences in the environments where they are located (Mitra, 2006).

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Research suggests that the presence of meanings and motivational messages carried by the way students are treated with special reference to the involvement or non-involvement in their school decision-making process, should be considered by administrators of schools and especially colleges where the students are very politically active (Mitra, 2006; Bates, 2005). Students' behavior is influenced by how they are treated in relation to their recognition as adults. Studies show that where students have been denied the opportunity of involvement in decision-making, they have become apathetic, disillusioned, and militant towards their superiors (McPherson, 2001).

This study acknowledges that student involvement in decision-making at college level can either be a token; that is, just at the level of being heard; collaborating with adults, or at a highest level of building capacity for leadership which includes an explicit focus on enabling students to share in leadership. Thus, focusing on the dimensions of students' engagement in their school decision-making process the aim is to explore how the meanings that participation in decision-making communicate to students may reflect violations of students' rights and their outcomes in light of participative democracy and social justice.

Emerging Issues from the Literature

A number of issues have emerged from the review of related literature: First, the review has established that students' participation in school decision-making should be a genuine part of college life, for their genuine participation has greater benefits. Apart from making them innovative and creative, it creates a congenial environment for teaching and learning and ultimately helps the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. Their non-

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involvement on the other hand, reveals a gross violation of their right as humans, and which invariably leads to students using militant means to address power imbalance.

Despite the positive outcome of students participation in school decision-making process, limited knowledge exists about how students at college level experience and interpret their life as students in collaborative efforts with their adult counterparts.

Also established from social justice theory is the fact that equality-horizontal in relationships must be recognized between students and adults, in order to prevent gross violations of the right of students. Besides these, literature has established that it is through involvement in decision making students acquire skills for their future lives.

Furthermore, the review of literature has established that much research information continues to be documented about students' participation in decision-making and the outcomes; especially, their academic performance, self- actualization and empowerment.

Nevertheless, not much research information exists about meanings communicated to students about their genuine involvement or absence of it which reflects the practice of paternalism on college campuses. Against the backdrop of issues emerging from literature, this study contends that in the context of Teacher Education situated at the college of education, meanings communicated to students through their lived experience as well as messages their experiences send to them may reveal gross violations of their rights as humans.

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Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed related literature regarding the research context, concepts, theories and empirical studies that set out the point of departure for this study. The evidence laid out in this chapter demonstrated not only the gap in knowledge, but also the need to explore the lived experiences of student governors to ensure that the meaning communicated to students from their lived experiences are not grossed over. The chapter has demonstrated that engaging students genuinely in collaborative efforts empowers them and helps them to find themselves and thus develop their self-hood.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This chapter seeks to discuss and justify the philosophical underpinnings of the study, the research design, the research strategy, and methods for data collection. Of particular interest is how the design of the study has guided the consideration of the scope of this study, the choice of research sites and the practicalities of the study.

Research Paradigm

The formulation of the research design for this study and the data collection methods that were employed were informed by a close look as well as a critical consideration of the assumptions underlying two over-arching research perspectives: Positivism and anti–positivism. This was considered necessary because Creswell (2009) indicates that researchers need to think through the philosophical worldview assumptions they bring to their study and that those worldviews largely shape our understanding of research. As indicated by Cobbold (2015), I faced the hard decision choosing the appropriate process of inquiry to investigate a clearly defined research problem. Different philosophical orientations have their particular perspectives with each perspective representing 'different epistemological position ; that is, claims about what knowledge is, how we know it, what values go into it, how we write about it, and the processes for studying it' (Cobbold, 2015, p. 46).

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Knowledge claims are generally made by qualitative researchers with intent to clarify the structure of research and the methodological choices they make. According to Edlund (2011); Lee (2010); Mertens (2005); Creswell (2003); Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the knowledge claims made by researchers are sometimes referred to as research paradigms, or methodologies-a set of beliefs or knowledge assumptions about how research evidence might be made, understood, patterned, or compiled; for, a researcher's beliefs about what counts as knowledge influences how it is studied or found Horrocks (2010). In this study, I have chosen to go by Creswell (2009).

Researchers have for past decades engaged themselves in a long-standing debate as to how knowledge can be found and as a result determine the best way to conduct research in the field of social science (Hesse-Biber, 2006). The main point of the debate is the relative value of two research paradigms that are fundamentally different in their approach to research; namely, positivism and anti-positivism or interpretivism. The logical positivists–John Locke, David Hume and others in that school of thought,-developed this approach to social science research. This approach uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical statements. In view of this, there is the insistence on objective inquiry based on variables that are measurable and provable (Silverman, 2005). A major implication of positivism is a researcher's detachment from the research context including participants, and the need to put forth hypotheses for subsequent verification. Thus, according to Mertens (2005), positivism shares its philosophical foundations with the quantitative methodology.

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Anti–positivism which lends itself to interpretive research approach, posits that human behaviour is not governed by general laws and characterised by underlying regularities. Thus, a search for understanding the social world must be taken in context.

I therefore, chose constructivism, as shown in Figure 4 which is interpretive for this study. Figure 4 is a summary of the research design used for the study. It shows the context of the study, the philosophical paradigm (i.e. constructivism), the specific strategy for the study (hermeneutic phenomenological) the specific data collection and analysis (observation, individual interviews and focus group discussion); and finally, the research outcome (emerging themes). Mertens (2005) holds the view that in interpretive studies, the focus especially, is on how people interpret their experiences; how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. Hutch (2002) described the constructivist paradigm as being distinguished by an ontology in which universal realities are unknowable and where multiple realities can be constructed based on individual vantage points. The social world is complex in terms of what constitutes reality, and therefore what is taken as reality is non-existent in any concrete sense. Reality is the product of the subjective and inter-subjective experience of individuals according to Lee (2010); Edlund (2011). The main point of view of constructivism is that truth is subjective and reality is multiple. Furthermore, it focuses on the holistic perspective of persons and their environment. Constructivism is associated more with methodological approaches that make room for research participants to be co-researchers.

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Thus, constructivism shares its philosophical foundations with qualitative research approach (Mertens, 2005; Creswell, 2009; Edlund, 2011).

A Positivist's belief which posits that objects of experience are atomic, independent events is rejected by constructivism. Proponents of constructivism contend that the concept is central to the notion of reductionism, and being reductionistic, its intent is to reduce phenomena into small discreet set of ideas to test, and make generalizations from a finite set of events to make future predictions. As a paradigm, constructivism uses qualitative and naturalistic approaches to understand inductively and holistically, human experience in settings that are context-specific Archer (2004) avoiding predetermined formulation of premature testing of hypothesis. Thus, the goal of this research on students' participation in school decision-making process under the phenomenological ideology is not geared towards the creation of generalizations.

The goal of this qualitative study, as indicated above, was to understand a human phenomenon and students' experiences of phenomena in a setting that is context-specific. As indicated by Ajjawi and Higgs (2007); Mertens (2005) this goal dovetails with the philosophical assumptions, strategies and intentions of constructivist research paradigm which focuses mainly on seeking to interpret the social world. Being interpretive, it uses an investigative approach and leans on interpretive understanding to understand the meanings of participants' experiences and not to predict their behaviour (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Thus, constructivism does not search for external causes of scientific laws but rather tries to understand a phenomenon.

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The constructivist paradigm posits that meanings in whatever form, are constructed in very unique ways by humans. The construction of meanings however, depends on their context and personal frames of reference as humans engage or interact with the world being interpreted (Archer, 2004). Accordingly Lee (2010), thinks that this interaction based on personal frames of reference leads to the belief in multiple constructed realities where in research; findings emerge from the interactions of the researchers and the co-researchers in the course of the research. This result in subjectivity which is valued; having the understanding that total objectivity cannot be achieved by humans in any endeavour because they are situated in a reality constructed by subjective experiences (Archer, 2004). Thus, constructivism, as a paradigm is value-bound because of the nature of questions asked, the values held by the researcher, and by the way the researcher interprets and generalizes observations.

I understood that choosing the constructivist paradigm in interpretive research calls for certain assumptions and perspectives. The lived experiences of students' participation or non-participation of their school decision-making process are cognitive processes; often indirect and subconscious and context–specific. Thus, the phenomenon of students' participation in school decision-making cannot maintain its essential and embedded features if reduced or measured as in quantitative research Ajjawi and Higgs (as cited in Agbevanu, 2015). Secondly, I believe the phenomenon under study is complex, demanding the use of multiple strategies and interpretations. Furthermore, the phenomenon is contextual in terms of the people involved, the educational situation and the actual setting. In qualitative research, what is useful, relevant

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and meaningful depends largely on the situation. I therefore contend that if lived experiences of 'student governors' in educational practice are isolated or measured as very specific and without a context, then the complexity, reality and meanings of lived experiences are ignored or brushed aside.

Again, the phenomenon of interest is situated and implicit. Constructivism as a research paradigm was thus deemed very appropriate for this study. The use of this paradigm enabled me to visualize how events or phenomenon are perceived differently from multiple perspectives and from across similar events. It thus, has the potential to generate new understandings of complex multi-dimensional human phenomenon, such as the one explored in this study–students' participation in school decision-making process. The study aimed at seeking for experiential knowledge embedded in the world of students' interactions, lived experiences, and meanings. The constructivist research paradigm was therefore suitable in exploring the phenomenon of being a part of a college governance structure. It enabled the researcher and students as co-researchers to construct and interpret versions of reality together, noting that universal truth cannot exist because of the presence, or the reality of multiple contextual perspectives and subjectivity of human voice (Agbevanu, 2015; Ajjawi, 2007).

Finally, the realities of being part of school governance through participation in decision-making cannot in any way be labelled as objective because the voices of researcher and participants are biased as well as seated in different cultural experiences and identities (Creswell, 2009; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Thus, the choice of the constructivist paradigm was because this aspect of student's social world is difficult to explore using positivists'

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paradigm but not a matter of its relative superiority over any other research paradigms. By the use of my chosen paradigm, I was ***enabled to conduct my study*** in a specific context where participants for the study were found. Most importantly, it enabled me as researcher and participants to construct and interpret reality together; each of us looking at reality from our 'vantage points'.

Research Design

This study addressed the overarching research question: What are the perspectives of students on the nature and extent of their involvement in the decision-making process in their colleges? In line with the exploratory nature of the research questions, a qualitative research design was considered as one of the appropriate strategies for the study. Research design is a plan and procedure for research that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009).

In qualitative research, meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world. Reality is not single, but multiple; not fixed, but changeable; not universal, but context specific. Qualitative research seeks to look at and understand people's constructions and interpretations of their own world and experiences at a particular context. Phenomenon is explained and interpreted in the context. "Natural settings", therefore, serve as primary source of data. It uses inductive methodology and avoids a priori formulations of premature testing of hypothesis. Thus, it is concerned with the process of arriving at outcomes.

I selected qualitative research design for this study because of the nature of the research problem, my personal experiences as a researcher and

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the audience for the study (Creswell, 2009). My understanding is that qualitative research offers a systematic and subjective approach to describe the lived experiences of people, give them meaning and present a holistic understanding of a phenomenon which in the context of this study, is what it means to be part of the governance of a college through participation in the decision- making process. Lived experiences in human science studies, gather hermeneutic importance as researchers collect them by giving memory to them while through mediations, conversations, daydreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts researchers assign meaning to the phenomenon of lived life according to van Manen (1990).

I considered qualitative research to be very appropriate because with its increased degree of flexibility, I could modify or change portions of the work when the need arose. Again, I was able to avoid the reliance on predetermined assumptions that researchers hold. Thus, I was enabled to focus on the meanings of issues that were crucial to participants.

Even though by the use of qualitative research, I was able to do those things referred to above, I realised that I was constrained by time. It was time consuming and also very expensive in respect of both data collection and analysis. Furthermore, I realised that my use of a relatively small number of participants was another limitation. In conclusion, my use of qualitative research and its design was not because it is superior to any other mode of investigation but because I considered it to be more suitable and appropriate to my study.

This study aimed at understanding the lived experiences of student leaders (SRC) who are part of their school governance by the use of text-based

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method. The aim of this qualitative research was to explore and promote better understanding of the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problem or condition.

Empirical studies on students, who are part of the governance of their colleges in respect of their lived experiences, meanings and interpretations within the Colleges of Education in Ghana, are lacking. This research was therefore, conducted to listen to the voice of students in order to build an understanding based on their lived experiences. Again, the research sought to gain more insight into the students' participation in decision making process in a specific context so as to make it easier for students to articulate in their own words, their feelings and their thoughts. The study was exploratory because of the lack of evidence on the topic or the population being explored in this particular context.

Research Strategy

This research explored the lived experiences of students' participation in decision-making to understand the meanings communicated to students at college level. It therefore lent itself to hermeneutic phenomenological research. Hermeneutic phenomenology is described as a human science which studies the uniqueness of each human being. It is further described as the study of experience together with its meanings (van Manen, 1990). Thus, the works of van Manen on Hermeneutic phenomenology was considered ideal for this study. As a strategy of inquiry, hermeneutic phenomenology "aims at producing rich textual descriptions of the experience of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals that are able to connect with the experiences of all of us collectively" Smith (as cited in Ajjawi, 2007, p. 87). Smith believes that

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a deeper understanding of meaning of students' participation can be sought only after an identification of the messages their lived experience in decision making conveys to them.

The goal of the research strategy used in this study was to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon being explored in a particular context. I believe that by using this research strategy, it is not possible to ignore my experiences related to the phenomenon under study because personal awareness is very intrinsic to phenomenological research. Knowing as what it means to be is of paramount consideration.

The implication of hermeneutic phenomenology for this study is grounded in the notion that to understand the life world of students participating in their school decision-making process, there is the need to explore the stories students tell of their experiences, often with the assistance of some specific hermeneutic or method of interpretation (Laverty, 2003). Furthermore, in life world research, there is the absence of procedures in the traditional scientific sense that can empirically verify, seize and hold fast phenomena (Groenewald, as cited in Agbevanu, 2015).

For this study, the foundation of hermeneutic phenomenological research is self-reflection Ajjawi (2007), where data is interpreted using hermeneutic circle that consists of reading, reflective writing, and interpretation. The research strategy used for this study was considered appropriate for practical educational work and educational research. It enabled me to do an in-depth exploration of student leaders' experiences with further abstraction and interpretation based on my theoretical and personal knowledge.

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Again, the strategy helped me to hold particular standpoints and understandings with regards to what I know and think about students' participation in school decision-making in different settings, without conceiving that this prior knowledge was of any great significance. Finally, the strategy enabled research participants to tell their stories about participation in their school decision-making in the context of Ghanaian Colleges of Education. One main disadvantage of this strategy is its acceptance, and incorporation of subjectivity. Nevertheless, in as much as human experience is itself subjective, the disadvantage in no way affected objectivity.

Research Methods

Description and selection of the research setting

The Research Site

The study was conducted in two municipalities in Ghana. The municipality in the Eastern region is one of 26 administrative districts in the region and ***bordered*** to the east by the Lake Volta, to the north by Brong-Ahafo region and Ashanti region, to the west by Ashanti region and to the south by Central region and Greater Accra region. The college was established by one of the missionary bodies in the country in 1947. It is among the 38 government -sponsored Colleges of Education. The population of the college 2011/2012 academic year was 895. The demographic makeup of the college consisted of 479 males and 416 females. In this study, this College is referred to as College B.

The municipal area where the college is located has been identified as one of the municipalities in Ghana where missionary activities flourished

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during the pre-colonial days. The evidence is shown by the number of mission schools scattered around Antwi, (1992). Subsistence farming, fishing and trading are the major economic activities. The choice of this research setting was based on the limited knowledge about the phenomenon in the municipality and the fact that the college has one of the most viable SRCs PRINCOF news, (2010)

College A was the site in the Brong Ahafo region which is also located in a municipality. It is one of the 19 administrative districts in the region. The region is ***bordered*** to the north by the Black Volta River and to the east by the lake Volta and to the south by the Ashanti, Eastern and Western regions. The college in this area was established by the colonial government in 1953. ***The population of the College during the (2011/2012 academic year) was 945***. The demographic makeup of the college consisted of 500 males and 445 females.

The municipality is identified as one of the areas where the colonial administration focused to give formal education in its attempt to bring formal education to the people of the then Northern Territories. Farming and trading are the major economic activities. As in the site at the Eastern region, limited knowledge about the phenomenon and a viable SRC were the two factors that led to the choice of the setting. The context of this phenomenological study lies in the perspectives of 12 SRC student leaders, who had been engaged in their colleges' decision making process.

In selecting the research sites for the study, purposive ***sampling*** strategy was employed. This strategy seeks to identify a population of interest and develop a systematic way of selecting cases that are not based on

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advanced knowledge of how the outcomes would appear (Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The strategy was purposive because the study was intended to explore only two colleges. The purpose of using this strategy was to increase credibility, but not to foster representativeness (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

There were 3 and 6 Colleges of Education in the Brong Ahafo and Eastern regions respectively at the time of the research. Within this research setting, I decided to explore the participation of the SRCs in their college decision-making process in two colleges - one in each of the regions. I decided to choose one that is faith-based and the other which is not.

This decision to select the two was to create balance. In addition, the decision to use the two colleges was informed by the common features of all Colleges of Education pursuing the same education programmes and engaging students in the decision-making process of the colleges through their SRCs.

Gaining Access to the Research Sites

In this research, gaining entry to the research sites was, according to Patton (2002), "a matter of establishing trust and rapport" (pp. 310). So to gain access to the research setting, I obtained an introductory letter from the Director of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast to enable me obtain permission from the gatekeepers to the research sites. With an introductory ***letter (Appendix I),*** approval letters from the Director, Teacher Education and the Regional Directors of Education (Eastern and Brong Ahafo), I gained access to the colleges. I made three visits to the colleges.

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The first of the visits was to see the college principals and introduce myself to them and also tell the purpose of my visit. College B was visited on September 13, September 20, and September 30, 2012, and College A, on November 18, 28, and December 4, 2012. The second visit to College B was done in September 20, 2012 to negotiate to see the executive members of the SRC. The Pilot study had shown that SRC members who had been part of their College decision-making process would be the best to be used because of their lived experience. Such students were part of those who were "out" practicing the competences learnt at school. The Colleges of Education practice what is popularly referred to as IN-IN-OUT. The first two years of Teacher-Trainees are spent on campus to go through the content of their syllabi. The third year is spent outside– on the field to practice what had been learnt during the first two years of their 3-year programme of study. During the second visit I was taken round to see those officers of SRC who were not too far from their colleges. Thus, it became necessary to visit the third time to see all the participants and discuss the purpose of meeting them and also to establish trust and rapport with the potential participants. I did the same with college A on the dates stated above.

Research Participants and their Selection

Identifying the research participants

The research participants comprised twelve executive members of the Students' Representative Council–The president, secretary, treasurer, vice-president, the men/women organizers, and the organizing secretary. They were part of third year students who were 'OUT' teaching. They were student leaders who ***were expected to have considerable experiential*** knowledge

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about their college decision-making process. ***The research participants had similar characteristics based on school location, position, educational objectives and programmes, and were therefore homogenous.*** The major difference between the two colleges is that one is faith-based and the other is not.

In identifying the research participants, I decided on only "individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can share their lived experiences" (Creswell, 2013. p. 150) as well as those willing to volunteer. This was reinforced by information from my pilot study. During the pilot study, I used students who were in the second year of their 3-year program of study. I observed that it would be better to use students who were in the third year because they would have experienced two years of student life at college. With this decision in mind, those students who had been directly involved with their college decision-making process and could provide needed data were selected. I also considered participants' experiential knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation and participants' ability to articulate their lived experiences.

The decision to use the participants mentioned above was because they have been part of their school governance through their participation in decision-making, their experiences are shaped by such participation. Empirical studies also suggest that involving students in their school decision-making develop in them civic competences (Edelstien, 2011; Bates, 2006; Ruddock, 2010). In particular, students are daily subjected to the educational process, and thus may contribute constructively to the search for solutions (Ruddock & Fielding, 2006). They are equally capable of communicating how their

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participation or non-participation in their school decision-making, shape their experiences for informed decision-making purposes.

Selection Criteria and Strategies

In this study, the research participants needed to meet certain criteria in order to be included in the research. First, the participant should have been part of the governance of their school through participation in the decision-making process. Second, the participant should spend not less than two years in the selected college. Third, the participant should be in the 'OUT' segment of the College IN-IN-OUT programme. I decided that a minimum of two years was long enough and desirable for participants to experience their college decision-making process. However, I excluded for example other Student leaders who had not spent a full year of being part of their school governance.

In recruiting the research participants who met the criteria for selection, I used purposeful sampling. I was interested in students who were directly involved in participating in their college decision-making process to develop rich description and interpretation of the students' participation in decision making process in a particular context (van Manen, 1990). This approach was considered appropriate because it gives a detailed picture of a particular phenomenon; for example, students' participation in decision-making–students who belong to the same system of education or have the same characteristics (Patton, 2012; Robson, 2002). This sampling strategy was considered suitable because the study was intended to include information–rich cases Creswell et al. (2007). The strategy was also consistent with constructive/interpretive research paradigm adopted in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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The reason for employing purposive sampling strategy was to choose the sample units that have particular features, which would enable detailed exploration and understanding of the phenomenon of being a part of school governance through participation in decision-making (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I chose participants who not only experienced the students' participation in decision making process but also willing to volunteer. Finally the study sought to identify significant common patterns and to yield detailed accounts of each participant's experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Number of Participants

By the use of purposive sampling, I recruited a small sample because as an interpretive research, the focus was on the participant's own sufficient understanding of the phenomenon. I tried as much as possible to have a gender balance in light of the theory of social justice but I was constrained by the composition of the SRCs in the chosen colleges. I therefore, included the females–the secretary and vice-president, and the women organizer of colleges B and A respectively. So out of a total of 12 participants, the composition was 4 males and two females from College B and 5 males and 1 female from College A making a total of 9 males and 3 females. Literature on previous hermeneutic phenomenological research suggested sampling anywhere between 2 and 12 participants. Therefore, the decision on sample size was to collect extensive details about each site and individuals for understanding (Creswell, 2013).

van Manen (1990) is of the opinion that hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with developing a sophisticated understanding of an experience through the examination of the essence of the experiential meanings as lived in

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everyday existence. In phenomenology, the sample size is less important than the richness as well as the depth of the information obtained from participants (Creswell, 2003; Hatch, 2002; Mirriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). So to enhance the understanding of participants' "lived experiences" Moustakas (1994, p. 55), I selected participants who experienced the phenomenon and volunteered to be part of the study. I was convinced that the 12 participants would support in-depth data collection, offer the possibility for saturation and understanding to be achieved (Hatch, 2002; Mirriam, 2002). Being mindful of the construct of data saturation, I gathered and analyzed the qualitative data from the 12 participants, and only withdrew from the research sites once the state of saturation was reached.

Ethical Conduct of the Research

Like any other researcher, I grappled with some ethical issues prior to and during the conduct of the study especially because my research had to do with humans beings Figure 4 (p. 130). In this study, I addressed ethical issues such as gaining access to research sites, obtaining informed consent and maintenance of confidentiality of participants, and dealing with power relations. Informed by Patton (2002), I gained entry to the research sites by obtaining an introductory letter from the Director of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast to enable me obtain permission from the gatekeepers to the research sites. With an introductory *letter (Appendix I),* approval letters from the Director, Teacher Education and the Regional Directors of Education (Eastern and Brong Ahafo), I gained access to the colleges to build trust and rapport between the Principals of the Colleges.

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A key principle for constructing ethical research is that of voluntarism by the participants when engaging with research. Voluntarism is manifested by participants in giving their informed and explicit consent, free from coercion ESRC (2005). Gaining informed consent is problematic, not least because of what might be construed by the term. Reasonably, informed consent by participants means they have understood sufficiently the purposes, processes and intended outcomes of the research to be able to give their reasoned judgement to participate (Briggs & Coleman, 2007).

Four constituent elements of informed consent were considered in this study: disclosure (providing adequate information), comprehension (understanding of information), competence (ability of participants to make a rational decision), and voluntariness (no coercion). I provided all participants with information sheets detailing the aims and purpose of the research process. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and were aware they could withdraw from this research at any time without any negative repercussions. Thus, with this understanding I obtained written consent from each participant prior to the commencement of data collection.

At the beginning of each interview session, I reminded participants about the research purpose and gave assurance of their anonymity and confidentiality concerning their involvement in the study. Participants were asked to choose their own pseudonyms. Again in order to protect participants and their colleges, I referred to the two sites as College A and College B. Thus, all contextual details that would reveal the identity of

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participants and their colleges were removed in the course of writing this research report. Also I assured them that in accordance with the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board's (UCCIRB) ethical guidelines for research with humans, participants' data would be kept for 5 years after which they would be destroyed.

Another ethical issue addressed was unequal power relations that existed between the participants and I. Generational gap always creates a problem and it is observed that age and academic status naturally creates a problem. I solved this problem of bridging the gap between myself and the participants by paying a number of visits to the participants at school prior to the data collection to promote a friendly bond between participants and myself. I also tried as much as possible to identify myself with the college's sub-culture or micro culture by the use of what Silverman, (2005) refers to as 'impression management'; that is, not presenting oneself to others (especially subordinates) as one who is 'highly placed'. I therefore dressed in such a way that made me look like any of their masters or non-teaching staff.

Another aspect of the unequal power relations was how I could make the participants view me as an independent researcher without linking me to the Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast. The Institute of Education UCC is the monitoring organization appointed by Teacher Education (TED) to oversee the running and certification of the Teacher Trainees. The mere mention of Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, UCC raised suspicion in the minds that I had come to collect views from them on behalf of the Institute of Education. They felt

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threatened and uneasy. The question that puzzled me was what strategies I could employ to gain access to and win the confidence of the participants without linking me to the Institute of Education.

In dealing with this problem, I arranged with the coordinator of the PhD program to write a letter that emphasized that I was not collecting any information on behalf of UCC but for the sole purpose of the thesis. Thus, I made sure my research did not interfere with their physical, social or mental welfare.

Role and Beliefs of the Researcher

I was the main instrument for the collection and analysis of data in this constructivist/interpretive study with the intent of understanding subjective experiences, and personal meanings. I assumed an emic (insider) position Edlund (2011). In this study, data collection and analysis processes were managed to make sure issues required are covered to the expected depth without any bias so that accounts narrated are not influenced. Also participants were helped to follow their role in data collection. Thus, throughout the research process, I tried to position myself as a facilitator to lead participants to express themselves freely about their experiences, and opinions.

My interest in students' participation in decision making process developed during the time I was a tutor in one of the Teacher Training Colleges in Ghana. At the Masters level of study, I wrote on the factors that inhibit student participation in some colleges in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Presently, I am a PhD candidate pursuing the developed interest in student participation in college decision-making process with emphasis on their perspectives – voice. Thus, in this study, I brought some practical experience,

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having requisite knowledge and understanding of the chosen topic and context of the study.

As my experiences as a former vice-principal of a Training College (now college of Education), and a former Head of Department of one of the private Universities in Ghana continue to motivate me in the students' participation in decision making process, I believe that students' genuine participation in their college decision-making process contributes immensely to the creation of a conducive environment for the teaching–learning enterprise. Also, I believe that the genuine participation of students in their college or school decision-making process provides them with the socio-moral resources or skills for their future; and they also come to appreciate some of the problems that school administrators go through. Finally, their genuine participation in decision-making goes a long way to build their sense of belonging and thus makes them supportive of their schools' agenda.

Nevertheless, I held that some, if not all of my valuable experiences, could have negative impact and thus blur or influence my decision concerning research design and interpretation of findings. Thus, in order to make my assumptions and theoretical orientation for this study clear from the outset, I tried to remain committed to ongoing critical self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues and supervisors. In addition, I tried to address my subjectivity in order to strengthen credibility of the research by taking different procedural safeguards including triangulation of data sources and methods.

Establishing Trustworthiness of the Research

In qualitative research, rigour and credibility are appropriate criteria for establishing trustworthiness of research findings. One cannot

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be divorced from the other (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). When the process of research is rigorous then research findings are accepted as credible (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2005). In this research, a number of strategies were employed to establish trustworthiness. First, I made sure there was congruence between the adopted worldview and methods chosen. This was done to ensure a certain degree of coherence of the epistemological perspective throughout the research process. Thus, multiple constructions and interpretations of lived experiences of students' participation in decision-making were made to be consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the chosen paradigm (Marias, 2005; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007).

Secondly, member-checking as a strategy was used to establish trustworthiness Mertens (2005). Mertens indicates that member-checking is an ongoing consultation with participants to test the balance between the findings that are developed. This research involved the participants in the research process and I was determined to portray their intended meanings in developing overall themes. In view of this, I clarified each participant's responses on the students' participation in decision making process. This was done during data collection through probes. Also, I asked participants to review their own transcripts to check how well the ongoing data analysis reflected their lived experiences by giving each participant their transcripts.

Another strategy of trustworthiness employed in this study was triangulation of data sources, unit analysis, methods and theoretical perspectives that involves the use of multiple forms of evidence to support

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and better describe findings Lee (2010). In this study, I collected data from twelve participants who were principal officers of the SRC of their respective colleges constituting different sources and unit of analysis. The study further used observation, individual interviews, and focus group discussion to capture the lived experiences of students who are part of their college governance. Furthermore, the study relied on multiple theories to better conceptualise, explore, and understand the students' participation in decision making process. This strategy enhanced the depth and richness of the data, reduced systematic bias in the data, and thus ensured trustworthiness (Lee, 2010; Edlund, 2011).

Again this research employed thick description to strengthen the findings. Thick description is understood as a detailed description and interpretation of aspects of the research context and process that go beyond simply reporting details of the study (Groenewald, 2004). Noticeably, it is a way qualitative researchers think about data interpretation and reporting. Thus, in this study, I attempted to provide a detailed account of my research context, process, and outcome taking into consideration the components of thick description. I tried to add something more to participants' words for them to be considered a contribution to research; for, ensuring that the voices of both the participants and the researchers are evident in the text also enhances authenticity of research (Creswell, 2009).

Finally, prolonged engagement on the field was employed. This was a strategy to build and sustain rapport with participants and settings in a way that fosters an accurate description of a phenomenon of interest

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(Ajjawi, 2005; Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). In order to achieve these outcomes, I stayed on the field for a period of four (4) months, with six visits to each site and participants to collect data. During this period, I established rapport with participants and gained their trust and confidence. This gave participants the comfort and freedom to discuss their lived experiences.

Implementing the Research Design

Methodical Structure of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research

I followed van Manen's (1990) six methodical steps in this hermeneutic phenomenological research to explore the lived experiences of student leaders who were part of their school governance. van Manen noted that in human science, researching lived experience is a "dynamic interplay among six research activities" (p. 30). It is indicated that his six methodical steps should not be used as a prescription for the pursuit of hermeneutic phenomenological research. Thus, he described his methodical steps as suggestion to "animate inventiveness and stimulate insight" (p. 30). The six methodical activities are briefly contextualised in the following paragraphs.

The first step is turning to a phenomenon of deep interest and thus commits us to the world. My desire to explore the students' participation in decision making process started when I was a tutor at one of the Teacher Training Colleges in the Eastern Region of Ghana. As forming the backdrop of the research problem, I became interested in the meanings communicated to students by way of their non-participation of their college decision-making process. That observation of their lived–experience granted me the opportunity to enter their world of reality. This influenced the formulation of the research question. van Manen (1990) indicates that "the best way to enter a person's

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lifeworld is to participate in it" (p. 69). Thus, to understand the phenomenon of interest, I went to the source of the phenomenon and entered the lives of students who experienced the phenomenon.

The second methodical step is investigating an experience as it is lived rather than as it is conceptualized. The source of phenomenological research is lifeworld. Therefore, the only way to understand the phenomenon being studied was to enter the lifeworld of those who experienced the phenomenon. As indicated above, the best way to enter an individual's lifeworld is to participate in it (van Manen, 1990).

Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon being studied is the third step of conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research. The true reflection on an experience is to thoughtfully reflect and grasp the features that render a particular experience its special significance (van Manen, 1990). What is central to the interpretation of a phenomenon is how to find a way to articulate the essence of students participating in their school decision-making process. It requires a deep reflection of the language of the text which also involves a careful process of detailed reading of all text data, in order to find the words used by participants to capture the essence of their experiences. It is to ensure that the essential structure of participants' descriptions is explicit. Thus, to recognise the essential structure, three reading approaches toward uncovering thematic aspects of a phenomenon have been suggested. They are the holistic or sententious approach; the selective or highlighting approach and the detailed or line by line approach which I used for this research.

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The fourth step is describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. van Manen (1990) believes that hermeneutic phenomenological research is basically a writing activity. He believed that through writing we can measure the depth of things as well as come to sense our own depth. Through the process of writing, I drew closer to the phenomenon by writing about participants' experiences, as well as reflecting on my own experiences. As I wrote about this phenomenon, I brought understanding and interpretation together in a common frame of reference in order for participants' feelings, attitudes and thoughts to be made clear to the reader.

The fifth methodical step is maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon. It is easy to wander aimlessly in the activity of researching lived experience (van Manen, 1990). The research focus or question directing the research can be obscured. In order to prevent this, I maintained a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon by carefully remaining sensitive to the research question: 'What is it like being part of school governance through participatory decision-making.' When emerging themes provided some insight, participants' transcripts were re-examined to make sure emerging interpretation was supported by data. I was determined to produce text that brings out textual themes that throw into relief the students' participation in decision making process.

The last methodical step is balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. According to van Manen (1990), this activity has a close connection with the fourth and fifth activities. This activity helps to understand how individual participants' account contributes to the

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development of a holistic picture of the students' participation in decision making process. To determine an essential integrated structure of the phenomenon, I looked at the end and the beginning with the past and the future. Thus, I constantly examined the phenomenon of students' participation in decision-making by moving between the parts and whole. This activity is likened to the hermeneutic circle of Bontekoe (1996) and Gadamer (1989). I immersed myself in the hermeneutic circle of considering parts and whole of participants' data throughout the reflexive and interpretive process of the research.

Pilot Study

Prior to the submission of my research proposal for approval, I conducted a pilot study. Following the requirements set up by the University of Cape Coast on research with humans, I submitted to the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board (UCCIRB) an information sheet (Appendix A) on May 28, 2012 for ethical approval. This was done to make sure this research with humans was ethical before embarking upon the pilot study.

The pilot study was conducted in one College of Education in the Eastern Region of Ghana. On June 2, I obtained informed consent from participants chosen to be part of the pilot study after having obtained permission from the Principal of the College. Six participants being principal officers of the college's Students' Representative Council (SRC) took part. The questions for the individual interviews were open-ended, written and structured in order to encourage participants to be focussed on first, their entire experience in that setting, second, graphic details of the phenomenon

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and finally, reflection on the meaning their lived experience hold for them (Scidman, 2006).

The purpose of the pilot study was to expose me as a novice researcher (in qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument for data collection) to the intricacies of qualitative research spanning from the choice of paradigm, specific design for the work, methods for data collection and analysis and the development of emerging themes. The pilot study helped me to do away with unnecessary questions and to achieve the goals set for the study (Marias, 2005). Focus group discussion was also used to identify the construction and meanings that come from a social dimension of discourse, and also to resolve some of the potential challenges associated with designing qualitative research design with emphasis on methods of data collection. For example, the interview protocol was based on the following main areas.

1. Experiences about the students' participation in decision making process:

   (a) Experiences of how students found their college decision-making process to be.

   (b) Experiences of non-genuine participation.
2. Experiences on the extent of their participation, and
3. Meanings drawn from their experiences.

These main areas were considered relevant because my intention was to find out the meanings communicated to students through their lived experiences. Above all, the pilot study helped me to improve upon my interview skills, especially in facilitating a focus group discussion. Secondly,

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the experience exposed some data collection and analysis opportunities and challenges, which helped in the design and conduct of the main study.

Finally, the pilot study helped in forming my critical ideas about how to develop themes. From the pilot study I was informed to add observation as one of the methods for data collection.

Data Collection Procedure

This section is a description of how I collected verbal text using multiple methods of observation, conversational interviews and focus group discussion. After having secured approval from the Director-Teacher Education Division (TED) and informed consent from the gatekeepers of the research sites, the potential participants were informed and invited to participate in the study. The careful selection of participants was based on the criteria discussed earlier. The date, venue, and time for data collection were agreed upon by the principals and the participants. Informed by Welply (2010) I made sure the interviews did not disrupt the school time table; that is, not to use participants' time-on-task in collecting data.

Observation of the Research Sites

Observation was one of the methods used for data collection in this study Figure 4 (p. 130). I considered it necessary to observe the sites for the phenomenon of study to look for some physical signs of the operation of the SRC; for example, to find out if there were SRC secretariats or such convenient places where students held their meetings. I observed the sites so I would be able to describe in detail the research setting. This began on November 3, 2012 after access to the study sites had been granted.

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I started by looking closely at places provided for the SRCs to hold their meetings, and Halls for male and female students. I recorded my observation using field notes (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007) that showed the details of the characteristics of the research settings, along with my own thoughts, insights, and reflections as they came up. I considered field notes as a type of personal journal that was very important to me as a qualitative researcher. The in-depth descriptive notes were recorded in field notes to keep track of the research process, description of places, things and events, reflections on data, and patterns. The provision of such details helped to bring out the context as well as the quality of participant information (text) which combined to shape multiple data sources into clearly-stated, meaningful, and integrated research findings. The use of observation allowed me to step back and constantly reflect on the meaning of the 'situations' I observed (Lemos, 2010).

Hermeneutic interviews

My purpose was to capture the experiential descriptions of students' participation in decision making. Thus, I collected data from individual hermeneutic interviews with each participant. Hermeneutic phenomenological interview was used Figure 4 (p. 130) to develop a conversational relation with participants about their individual perspectives on their college decision making process as well as meanings their lived experiences had for them. It allowed me as a researcher and the participants to engage in reflection and meaning-making of their participation in decision making. It also helped me to explore and gather experiential narrative material that served as a source for developing a

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richer and deeper understanding of the human phenomenon-students' participation in decision-making.

I started the interview sessions on November 5, 2012 engaging all participants of college A. With the exception of the president of the SRC who was interviewed in an office located in the school library, the rest were interviewed at a Guest House I had arranged for the purpose. Looking at the sensitive nature of the study it was considered that moving participants away from their school premises would remove the fear of being found out and thus be able to freely express themselves. At college B the first participant to be interviewed was the SRC president. He was interviewed on a veranda of one of the classroom blocks located in a woodlot. The rest were interviewed at a Guest House about a kilometre away from the college campus. The Guest House was deemed to be more convenient; for, it saved participants from making a long journey from their respective schools to the college campus. They also felt secured in the Guest House.

I assumed an active listening role by maintaining eye contact with participants as much as possible. After asking participants general questions, I encouraged them to tell their individual stories about their participation in their colleges' decision making process. I employed three techniques in the conduct of the interview. The first technique was funnelling, where I began with general opening questions and narrowed down. The second technique was storytelling, where I encouraged each participant to tell his or her story concerning their experience with college

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decision making. The third technique was probing, where I elicited further points of clarification from the interviewee.

Applying the three techniques, I used an interview guide-a list of questions I planned to explore during each interview Edlund (2011) to elicit responses from each participant. In view of this, participants were asked to describe in greater detail specific incidents that illustrated their lived experiences. These included such instances as their relationships with their college authorities in terms of making vital decisions in areas like feeding, payment of utility bills, disciplinary issues, and others that bothered on students general and general welfare-weekly activities on entertainment, worship and gender.

The interview was semi-structured and had some preset questions, but allowed open ended answers. This was done in order to reap the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews. At the start of each interview session, I reiterated my interest, purpose of the research, what I hoped to do with the data, and the participants' right to withdraw at any time from the study. I followed this by asking the participants to sign a written consent form. I continued to establish trust and build rapport for participants to feel comfortable. Thus, I asked some general demographic questions and questions relating to their past and the reasons for vying for the positions in the SRCs of their colleges. My role as researcher during the interview was to keep myself and the participants oriented to the phenomenon at hand. I did this by focusing on the lived experiences of each participant (Seidman, 2006).

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Furthermore, the interview focused on finding out whether their lived experiences communicated to them any meanings and messages; bearing in mind whether the meanings could reflect injustice and violation of students' rights. Apart from providing data on participants' lived experiences, messages and meanings of the phenomenon, the interview guide enabled me to get narratives of participants instantly ensuring that similar information was obtained from other participants. I had the freedom to explore within the predetermined enquiry areas since there was no room for predetermined responses. I made good use of limited interview time doing systematic and comprehensive interviewing while keeping interactions focused.

I used both an audio and video digital recorders in recording the interviews. Whereas the digital audio recorder captured voice, the video recorder was used to capture the nuance and gestures of participants to help in obtaining hidden messages conveyed only by voice by comparison. The video recorder was operated by my research assistant who was introduced to participants at the initial stages of the interview process. As indicated above, I asked for permission from participants for both the presence of a research assistant and the videoing of the interview process. The use of recorders in an interview is crucial because its use is grounded in the understanding that it can capture data in more faithful manner, and make it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview process. On the average each interview lasted 50 minutes.

At the end of each interview session, I showed appreciation to the participant for their time and insights. Thereafter, I uploaded both the

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audio-recorded and video-recorded interviews on my personal laptop. With the help of my research assistant, a verbatim transcription of the recorded interviews was made. The transcripts were saved in folders created for each participant.

Focus Group Discussion

I used focus group discussion Figure 4 (p. 130) because I wanted to document the perspectives of participants on their school decision-making. Again, I believe that responses in a focus group discussion are typically spoken, open- ended, relatively broad and qualitative. They have more depth, nuances and variety and give room for non-verbal communication and interaction to be observed. I therefore deemed focus group as a means of getting me closer to what the participant are really thinking and feeling through their responses. Thus, it enabled me as researcher to construct a social reality that contextualize with data collected and created in a situation of interaction that comes to everyday life situations where 'meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world' (Archer, 2004, p. 213; Flick, 2002).

The focus group discussions were held between 18th and 20th February, 2013. Looking at the locations of my study sites and the sensitive nature of the students' participation in decision making process, I considered it prudent to conduct the focus group discussion on a neutral ground; that is, move participants from their various college environments. The belief was that it would make them feel safe and more comfortable to give in-depth information about their lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). The two groups which comprised six participants from College A and four

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participants from College B, agreed with my suggestion to have the discussion at the Valley View University, Techiman Campus where I knew accommodating ten participants would not be a problem because I am a lecture in that university. My wish to use all twelve participants was constrained. Two participants-a male and a female- of College B could not join their colleagues as a result of sickness and funeral respectively.

I made prior arrangements for accommodation for the ten participants and my research assistant at the University Guest house which included feeding. I personally drove the four participants from the Eastern region to the Techiman campus. The six participants from College B however, came with an arranged driver. I made contacts with the university authorities to clear ethical issues.

The focus group discussion started at 10.00 am on February 20, 2013. Participants sat in a horse-shoe setting to ensure they were relaxed and to enable all to see one another without any hindrance. As usual my research assistant was introduced to participants and asked for their permission to audio as well as video record the discussion. The discussion began with self introduction of participants to create rapport between them.

I outlined the ground rules guiding the discussion, the main issues to be considered and encouraged them to contribute to the discussion as well as follow procedures. For example, a question or topic would be introduced to be answered or addressed by all; each participant would be required to share his or her perspectives (experiences) about the question or topic; each participant was expected to wait for another to finish; they

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were to be as descriptive as possible illustrating the experiences being shared. The last of the issues discussed was about asking participants to share with group members the meanings and messages that the experiences of their participation in the colleges' decision making communicated to them individually.

The questions discussed were the same questions used for the individual interviews. The interview protocol was thus semi-structured but made room for open-ended responses. As in the individual interviews, I used both audio and video recorders to collect and keep the data. The discussions were conversational and smooth though at some points one or two of them seemed to dominate. However, I tried as much as possible to maintain my facilitative role in order to ensure the smooth flow of ideas.

At the end of the discussion, I loaded the data onto my personal laptop to do a verbatim transcription later. I had a little 'get-together' late in the evening with all the interviewees. To ensure participants' safety I drove them back to their respective places the following day.

Data Analysis and Management

As shown in Figure 4 (p. 130) data analysis and collection of data went on simultaneously in this study Paton (2002) with interpretive methodology in view. I used hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis strategy Ajjawi, (2005) in this qualitative research. The focus on qualitative data analysis is to reduce a large amount of textual data into meaningful concepts while identifying themes and categories in the data. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming that data into chunks (Boeij, 2010). My goal with the analysis was to develop a

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deeper understanding of the lived experiences of students participating in their college decision making process. The aim of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis strategies was to make clear meaning, structure and essence if a students' participation in decision making process as well as transform collected data into findings. Throughout, data analysis was back and forth, thus allowing my ideas as researcher to develop through the process of reading and re-reading of textual data. As I read through data to make sense of them, my ideas continued to change as layers of different meanings unfolded through the reading of texts.

Furthermore, I continued reading, interacting with data in order to look for sub-themes, and themes through the act of coding. Boeije (2010) posits that all coding is employed to break up and segment data into simper general categories and at the same time to expand the data to formulate new questions and layers of interpretations. Coding of participants' textual data involved classifying them into the various categories based on areas of students' participation in decision-making considered in this research. Ultimately, the process of coding enabled me identify meaningful data and set the stage for interpretation. Throughout the process, I remained true to the traditions of phenomenological study by bracketing my personal beliefs and perspective to experience the other person's lived experience (van Manen, 1990; Groenewald, 2004).

The data analysis was thematic and hermeneutic applying reading, rereading and manual coding and also employing qualitative analysis software Nvivo to help isolate, reflect as well as interpret themes that emerged from data. I believe that the combination of both manual and computer assisted

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method is probable to yield best results. I used the software to organize and analyze the data, taking the emic perspectives of participants lived experience as understood through their own voices about their college decision-making processes. I could have used other software's; for example, Nudist. I did not use the nudist software because I was not familiar with it. The study thus employed the works of van Manen (1990) and Bontekoe (1996) and Gadamer (1989) in the analysis of data.

van Manen's (1990) thematic approach to data analysis was used. The thematic strategy is consistent with hermeneutic phenomenological approach. This refers "to the process of recovering the themes or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meaning and imagery of the work" van Manen (as cited in Agbevanu, 2015). Thus the approach was used to isolate systematically thematic statements through "the holistic or sententious approach; the selecting and highlighting approach and the detailed or line by line approach" (p. 122). van Manen based this approach on his six methodological steps which include choosing a research topic or interest, identifying the research purpose and framing the central research question. In view of this, I allowed participants to reflect on their experiences in order to develop the deeper meanings or themes of lived experience. According to van Manen phenomenological themes are structures of experience that can present a thick description of phenomena. Thus themes that emerge from the coding process should capture the phenomenological experience – transforming lived experience into a textual expression of its essence with the result that the effect of the text is clearly a reflexive, reliving and a reflective appropriation of that which is meaningful van Manen (as cited in Agbevanu, 2015).

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Again this study employed Gadamer (1989)'s hermeneutic strategy as well as Bontekoe's (1996) strategy of hermeneutic circle. Gadamer (1989) developed his own approach to the process of understanding. He held that hermeneutic experience of understanding is characterized by three metaphors: the fusion of horizons, the act of dialogue and the hermeneutic circle. Gadamer (1989) and Bontekoe stressed the importance of language in shaping both experience and interpretation. I drew heavily on Gadamer (1989)'s method of hermeneutic analysis by employing his three metaphors of understanding and interpretation.

Furthermore I used the strategy of reflexivity. Reflexivity was considered relevant because I was the primary 'instrument' of data collection and analysis (Silverman, 2005). As indicated above, I remained true to the tradition of phenomenology by bracketing my personal beliefs and perspectives. Thus, I tried to position myself in this report considering my biases, beliefs, values and those experiences I brought to bear on the study. Through reflexivity, I was enabled to state clearly my personal views about the students' participation in decision making process. Throughout the study reflexivity was on–going activity which includes self-critique and an openness, with the belief that this form of reflexivity has a strong personal nature with the clear understanding that we understand others by first understanding ourselves, for we all live in an interpreted world.

Thus, I kept myself open to data while embracing universal points of view. By way of re-thinking and reflecting and re–reflecting van Manen (1990), I was able to identify my personal, practical and research purpose, being convinced that my research topic was worth exploring. I attempted also

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to discuss how my personal experiences and understanding influenced and shaped my interpretation of the phenomenon. Understanding as noted by Gadamer and Bontekoe (1989) is derived from personal experience. Thus, prejudice or biases have special relevance in interpretation and therefore disposing them is not the best. According to Silverman (2005), disposing ones biases or prejudices is impracticable It is important that a researcher details his experience with the students' participation in decision making process and also be self–conscious about how these experiences may ultimately shape ones findings, conclusions as well as interpretations derived (Creswell, 2013).

In hermeneutic phenomenological study, writing and re-writing the research report is very vital because it allows others to understand, connect, learn, and take action van Manen (as cited in Agbevanu, 2015). To recapture the full essence of their experience, I needed to write and rewrite van Manen (1990) in order to encode the verbal text with the language of qualitative research. Again participant's voices were included in the report taking cognizance of the needs of audience. I included quotes in order to convey understanding that is more complex. The analysis and interpretation focused on the feedback of participants on their lived experiences that I identified in the study. Thus, the analysis yielded to a main finding rendered as: culture does not promote participative decision–making in light of participatory democracy and social justice. Participative democracy and social justice constituted the theoretical perspective of the study.

Summary Profile of Research Participants

In this section, I present the participants' profiles from the two research sites. The research participants were twelve in number being principal officers

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of their individual college's Student's Representative Council (SRC). They comprised three females and nine males within the age group of 23 – 29 years.

The Participants' profiles have been presented in the order in which they were interviewed. Table 1 presents the biographical description of the twelve participants in the order interviewed at their respective colleges. Participants' stories have been presented in the appendix.

Table 1-*Sample Distribution of College A*

Pseudonym	Age (Yrs)	Gender	Position	Yrs Spent in College
Asabek	24	M	SRC President	2
Denyo	28	M	Vice President	2
Opak	26	M	Secretary	2
Damenti	28	M	Org. Sec	2
Habib	25	M	Fin Sec	2
Bintu	24	F	Women's commissioner	2

Source: Field Data, Pepra-Mensah (2017)

Table 2-*Sample Distribution of College B*

Pseudonym	Age (Yrs)	Gender	Position	Yrs Spent in College
Fray	28	M	SRC President	2
Deku	25	F	Secretary	2
Sena	26	F	Vice President	2
Angem	23	M	Fin Sec	2
Aklo	23	M	Org. Sec	2
Badge	29	M	General Labour Prefect	2

Source: Field Data, Pepra-Mensah (2017)

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Asabek

Asabek was 28 years at the time of the interview. He had been the SRC President of College A and was now in the out segment of the IN-IN-OUT program of study. He had been the 'Boys Prefect' and the SRC secretary at the Junior and Senior High School respectively. At the time of the interview he was the secretary of the Teacher Trainees Association of Ghana (TTAG). He vied for the position of SRC president to bring his wealth of experience to lead his age group. He had been in the College for 2 years at the time of the interview. He was enthusiastic to be part of the study. He thus used the snowball technique to contact other officers of the college SRC he considered very relevant of the study. He was the first participant to be interviewed. Asabek, the SRC President of College A shared his experience honestly, though cautiously.

Opak

Opak was a 26 year old student at the time of the interview, very energetic and vivacious. He had been in the College for 2 years at the time of the interview. He served as the executive secretary to his college's SRC. He had joined the SRC to prepare himself for the future career – to be a politician. He said …"I really want to be a good politician … and I am using the training college as a preparation ground". He was very articulate in his answers to the interview questions. He spoke boldly about his experiences.

Denyo

Denyo was the third participant to be interviewed. He was 28 years old and the vice president of his college's SRC at the time of the interview. He had been in the College for 2 years at the time of the interview. Denyo spoke

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boldly during the interview and was very much concerned about his college's decision-making process. He showed signs of disappointment during the interview.

Damenti

Damenti was the fourth participant I interviewed in college A. He was 28 years old student leader holding the portfolio as men's commissioner at the time of the interview. He had been in the college for two years. Like his other colleagues, Damenti had served on various committees including entertainment, sports and food. He was very articulate.

Habib

Habib was the Financial Secretary of the SRC of his college. He was 25 years at the time of the interview and had been in the college for two years. He was the fifth person to be interviewed. He looked calm, reserved but showed himself to be very intelligent during the interview process. He gave very vivid descriptions of his experiences.

Bintu

Bintu, the women's commissioner of the SRC was the last participant to be interviewed at college A. She was 24 years old at the time of the interview, very vivacious and articulate throughout the interview. She had also spent two years in the college at the time of the interview. She had joined her colleges SRC with the hope of "bridging the gap between the administrators" and students of her college.

Fray

Fray was the SRC president of college B and the first participant to be interviewed. He was a 28 year old student recruited to be part of the study

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through the purposive sampling technique. He had been in the College for 2 years at the time of the interview. He had vied to become the SRC president of his college to help demonstrate that students as young people "have something to offer" to improve their own school.

Angem

The next participant to be interviewed was Angem. He was a 23 year old financial secretary of the SRC. He had been prefect both at JHS and SHS levels and therefore had joined the SRC of his college to share the experiences with his colleagues. During his first year, Angem had observed thoughtfully that his college SRC was 'not doing enough for students'. He had therefore joined the SRC to help carry 'students' voice' to college authorities.

Aklo

Aklo was the third participant I interviewed at college B. He was 23 years of age and the organizing secretary of the SRC at the time of the interview and had been in the college for 2 years. Aklo was very bold, vivacious and very articulate. He appeared to be an individual who had so many unanswered questions concerning how his college was governed.

Badge

Badge, the fourth participant I interviewed in college B, was 29 years old at the time of the interview. He was the labour prefect. He had also been in the school for 2 years and the oldest of the participants. His answers to questions showed that he had a very fair idea about democratic governance. He had served as the representative of all 'day students' when he was at the Senior High School and demonstrated during the interview that he had a fair idea about representation.

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Sena

Sena was 25 years old at the time of the interview. She had experienced the decision making process of her college as the vice president of her college's SRC. She was the fifth participant to be interviewed at college B. She had observed and drawn the conclusion that the prefects of her college did not address students' issues to the authorities of her college. She had therefore, joined the SRC in order to address this inertia.

Deku

Deku, a 25 year old female student and the executive secretary of the SRC, was the last participant I interviewed at college B. She had been a prefect at the SHS as well as the JHS levels and had done a one year secretarial course before coming to college. She therefore, vied for the position of executive secretary in order to help streamline documentation as well as the process of communication within the SRC itself and also between students and the administration. She was very vivid in her description of events.

Chapter Summary

The context of and insight into the research participants in this study is given above. I described both research sites based on my knowledge about the colleges. The twelve participants who took part in the study were introduced. Through verbal data, they shared their individual lived experiences about what it was like being part of school governance through participation in the decision making process in the context of two Ghanaian Colleges of Education. In light of this, participants' stories (see appendix C) provided a context in order to situate their understanding of the students' participation in

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decision making process. The theoretical underpinnings that framed the research process, the research design, the specific strategy that was used and the methods used to collect data were addressed. This part of the study report marks the beginning of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis by examining 'parts' of the phenomenon by looking at them in totality to form a holistic picture to provide meaning to the phenomenon. The next outlines the process of developing understanding of the students' participation in decision making process.

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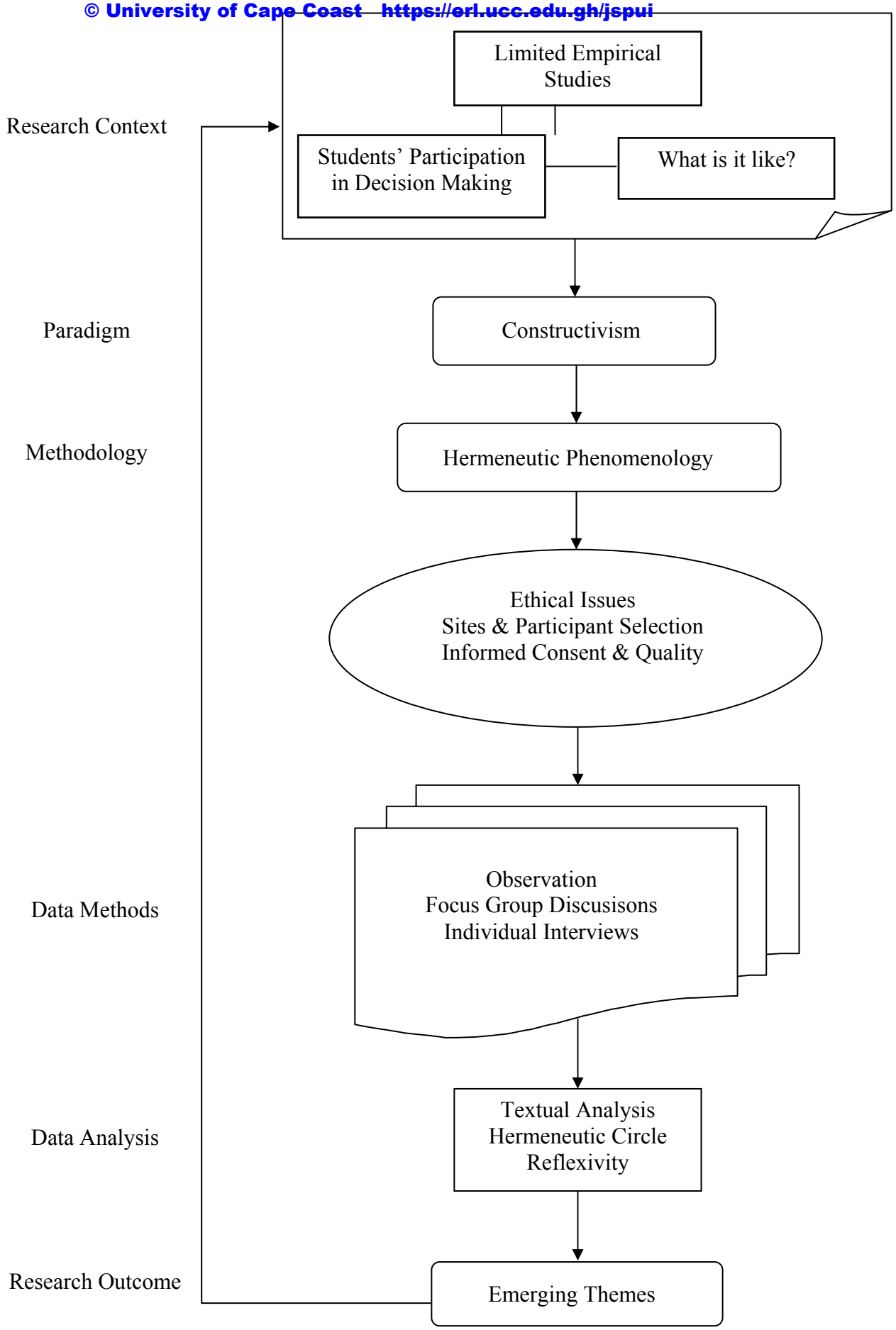

Figure 4: Summary of the Research Design

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter presents, interprets and discusses the themes that emerged from participants' stories and how each theme was ***expressed*** by participants. In presenting the themes, attention was paid to the discussion of the sub-themes that informed the main themes. In developing the themes, I used van Manen's thematic analysis strategy. His six methodical steps helped me to find the meaning units, interpretive concepts, themes and sub-themes. I also used the analysis strategy of Gadamer (1989) and Bontekoe (1996) on hermeneutic circle. My understanding of the students' participation in decision making process which has been presented here is an interpretation of verbal text from participants' descriptions of their lived experiences woven together with my own understanding. The focus therefore, is on the interpretation of the themes developed from participant stories.

Interpretation and Understanding of the Research Phenomenon

In phenomenological research, the emphasis is always on the meaning of the lived experience. The point of phenomenological research is to "borrow" other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience van Manen (as cited in Agbevanu, 2015).

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Thus, interpretation and understanding interacted much more closely in this study because to make something understandable is to open it up which implies a change in the understanding of that thing. The focus of interpretation is to throw into relief, what is already understood. In this study, I described and interpreted the experiential descriptions of students who are a part of the governance of their colleges as narrated by them. As a researcher, I was determined to immerse myself in the data and become part of it by specifically seeking to understand how lived experiences of participants shaped their meanings and their struggle for recognition as individuals with vested interests in the environment where they form a part (Blasé & Blasé, 994). The students' participation in decision making process gets clearer through the descriptions of participants who experienced it since we understand easily what we experience (van Manen, 1990). By way of interpretation and understanding, participants presented their lived experiences and meanings to themselves and the world as a whole.

Interpretation must be understood in two ways. The first is, to point to something and the second is to point out the meaning of something (van Manen, 1990). He argues that in the first sense of interpretation, we attempt or make a conscious effort not to read in some meaning, but to try to reveal what the thing we are pointing to is clearly is or what it points to. Thus, we attempt to interpret that which at some point, tries to hide or at the same time conceals itself. The second kind of interpretation comes to play when we interpret an interpretation; for, according to van Manen (1990) there is nothing like un-interpreted phenomena. This implies that anytime we interpret the meaning of

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something we actually interpret an interpretation van Manen (as cited in Ajjawi, 2005).

The results of the interpretation are a direct fusion of my horizon and that of the participants. In an attempt to interpret a phenomenon, Heidegger has stressed that there is the need to go back to the facts of existence in order to understand how an experience is lived; noting that there is nothing like an unincorporated fact. Therefore, we must try to remain grounded in our interpretation of matter; that is, things as they are in themselves.

Our view of hermeneutic understanding should not focus on re-experiencing another's experience. Rather, it must aim at grasping an individual's own possibilities for being in the world in certain twist. Thus, in interpreting a text, we try to come to the grip of understanding what is revealed by the text being interpreted with no preconceived ideas.

In social research, the focus is not to prove things right or wrong. The subjective approach used in this study makes it possible not only for others to reject, modify or re-construct the researcher's selection of texts used to arrive at findings, but also the order as well as the relationships that form the basis of the researcher's interpretation and its conclusions (Agbevanu, 2015). Thus, interpretations in this study are unfinished. They are provisional and incomplete Denzin (as cited in Ajjawi, 2005).

As a researcher, I tried to stand close to the lived experiences of participants in order to understand what it was like being a student-governor (Mncube, 2008). In effect, the meanings derived cannot be said to be separate from the meanings of participants. Similarly, my projections and perceptions were not separate from meanings of participants' narratives or stories. Thus,

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the interpretation presented in this study is my own meaning as researcher fused with the data from participants of the study. Nonetheless, participants' texts, nuances, inflections and gestures offered information that was essential about participants' lived experiences. It was from the textual information that as a researcher, I was enabled to enter the world of the participants and see myself as being part of them (Gianpaolo, 2006).

The final step of understanding the lived experiences of participants incorporated into this study involved the development of a composite description of overall qualities, core themes, and essences that permeated the experiences of the participants of the study. As a researcher I understand that a stronger element of interpretation is involved van Manen (1990) when description is mediated by expression. Gadamer (as cited in Ajjawi, 2005) makes a clear distinction between interpretation as pointing to something-one suited to the description of phenomena, and interpretation as pointing out the meaning hidden in something by imposing an external framework.

In this study, the understanding of the day-to-day experiences of student-governors, I have presented, is an interpretation of their conversational dialogues conducted with them as individuals and as a group. The process of understanding added a layer of abstraction which is consistent with hermeneutic interpretation, and presented themes that emerged from data (Agbevanu, 2015). Being exploratory by nature, the purpose of my research was not to make definite conclusions or create theories about participants' experiences. My goal was to provide readers with the rare opportunity to experience through words, lived experiences of twelve unique individuals; and also the analytic and interpretive process focused on identifying possible

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meanings related to the lived experiences of these student-governors. The outcome was that the synthesis of the accounts of participants' stories and my interpretations revealed one over-arching theme rendered as 'culture does not promote the practice of participatory democracy'. I have used 'participative' and 'participatory' interchangeably.

Developing the Overarching Theme

The overarching theme was developed from the four main themes which were informed by sub-themes. The sub-themes resulted from meaning units and interpretive concepts. As a result of fusing horizons of researcher and co-researchers, ideas that were parallel emerged. These were aggregated by employing the hermeneutic circle of moving from parts to the whole with each theme contributing to a deeper understanding of the students' participation in decision making process Agbevanu (2015) for they all constitute what it means to be a student-governor in an environment where there seems to be a demarcation for what children can say and where they can say what they want to say.

The table below presents the overarching theme, four main themes, and their associated sub-themes that developed from the interpretive concepts and meanings. The table is an illustration of how the overarching theme developed from the meaning units of participants by combining thematic and hermeneutic analysis of data.

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Table 3-*Meaning units, emerging themes and overarching themes supported by participants' quotes*

Participants	Meaning units	Sub-themes	Themes	Overarching themes
Asabek (college A)	As a student leader I'm not called to sit together... for any discussion...			
	Students are not offered opportunity to voice out their opinion	Not given voice	Decision-making process is authoritarian.	
	I attend meetings only to receive information.			
Denyo	As a student leader I am only an errand-boy			
	I attend meetings but there are no discussions.			
	As a student leader I can't give instructions.			
Fray	We are not recognised			
	I attend council meeting but I'm not treated as an adult member.	Not recognised as adult member.	Adult stereotyping.	
Angem	...The decision-making process is authoritarian...rights of students are violated.			
Sena	It seems there are two sets of rules/regulations in my college...one for males...the other for females. From the outside it looks as if am involved...I am called for meetings but no discussion takes place...	Decision-making process violates students' rights (injustice)	Students are both externally and internally excluded from decision-making	

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Participants	Meaning Units	Sub-Themes	Themes	Overarching Themes
Asabek	... I attend meetings but the way my principal and other adult members will look at you will deter you to dare to speak.	Token engagement	Students' involvement is just a token	Culture does not promote participatory democracy
Aklo (college B)	I attend meeting only to receive information... minus any genuine discussion.			

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Habib (college A)	Emotionally I become depressed... with a lot of self-esteem. ... I sometimes become an enemy to my colleagues...you will be left hanging...you can't go to the authorities...you can't go to your fellow students...	Split-personality	The level of involvement in decision-making leaves students in a state of schizophrenia.

Source: Field Data, Pepra-Mensah (2017)

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Explaining the Main Themes

The first main theme that emerged was: the decision-making process is authoritarian. This theme is related to how students were treated when it came to involving them in the decision-making process of their college. What the authorities of their school said was final as indicated by participants. The process of decision-making was so authoritarian that students felt intimidated. According to Dewey (as cited in Blasé & Blasé, 1994) authoritarian schools should be considered as disservice to the practice of participative democracy; for, students should participate in shaping their education, and that not only must school be a preparation for democracy, but also it should be a democracy (Sadker & Sadker, 2000). In this study, the way students were denied the opportunity to communicate their views and opinions during scheduled meetings (Habib, College A p. 142), the way students were intimidated during meetings (Sena, College B p. 144) and the way decisions were taken and slammed on students (Habib, College A p. 211), constituted the main and interrelated dimension of the reality of an authoritarian decision-making process as experienced by participants.

The second main theme that emerged from the study was: the decision making process portrays adult stereotyping. This theme is related to the mind-set of adult members who consider the youth as immature, irresponsible and irrational. The theme emphasizes that adults think about children through prejudiced lens which are coloured by traditional beliefs about children. As suggested by data, students were considered as children and therefore, were treated as such. Rich (1980) points out those adult educators have consistently over the years tutored the youth into accepting the status quo–to accept

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whatever is given them without question; they have been educated into passivity.

Thus, the focus of the theme is that schools or colleges must seek to use education as a liberating force by educating the youth to be critical thinkers, innovative and creative. This will work against the youth stereotype which holds that young people are ignorant, irrational, irresponsible, impractical, disruptive, destructive, and emotional and thus, erase from adults' minds that the characteristics of adult stereotype are logic, technical, visionary, proficiency, constructive and wisdom.

The third theme that emerged from the study was: students are both externally and internally excluded from the decision-making process of their school. This theme is from the fact that college authorities make decisions and call students to communicate the decision to them, and that from the outside it is portrayed that students are called for meetings which presupposes that a discussion and sharing of ideas, views or opinion have taken place.

Similarly, because no discussions or sharing of ideas take place in an atmosphere of give-and-take, students are internally also excluded. This theme is reinforced by Young (2000) who speaks of such types of exclusions; namely, external exclusion-where some individuals are kept out of the forums for debates or decision-making processes, and internal exclusion–where individuals are normally included in the group but are still excluded, for example, by the interaction privileges, language issues and participation of others who are dismissed as irrelevant.

The notion of this theme emerged from students' experiential descriptions of how they were treated when they were called for meetings. The

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mere glances from the adult members deterred them to dare to let their voice out in an attempt to share ideas with adults.

The fourth theme that developed from this study was: Students involvement in decision-making is just a token. As indicated by Mitra (2006), a 'ladder of young people's participation offers a typology of youth participation that ranges from tokenism and manipulation, or non-participation, to projects that are "young person-oriented" but still require shared decision-making with adults' (p. 207). At this level of token involvement, school personnel listen to students to learn about their experiences in school without empathy Mitra. This theme recognizes that students at college level are politically mature; they have concerns that need to be addressed and most importantly have explicit ideas about their school which adults will find difficult to replicate. Data show that students seem to challenge the status quo that wisdom is exclusively with the aged, drawing from the adults own point of view that in the legendary Kweku Ananse story of 'Ananse and the Wisdom Pot', it was his son-a youth-who showed the wisdom of how best his own father could execute the job on hand.

Interpreting the Main Themes

Theme 1: The decision-making process is authoritarian

Two sub-themes which dovetail into the main theme are presented below. The sub-themes related to the authoritarian nature of their college decision-making process. Thus, the two sub-themes relate to the experiential descriptions of participants' inability to engage college authorities in fruitful discussions about matters or issues that were of concern to them.

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Sub-theme 1:1: Not given voice. This sub-theme is in reference to participants' awareness that their college decision-making process did not offer them opportunities to speak out on issues or matters that bothered them. Empirical studies show that learners' voice is effective when they attend the supposed meetings, but is more effective when learners actively take part in shaping the agenda of those meetings by not just attending but being given the chance to make effective contribution in meetings (Cockburn, 2006). Participants from both research sites gave experiential descriptions of this sub-theme in their text, inflections, nuances and gestures from audio and video data to show how displeased they were. Students' voice is contextualised in this study to describe the many ways in which participants might have the opportunity to participate in their school decisions that will shape their lives and that of their peers. Participants described their experiences that depict the sub-theme of 'voicelessness' as follows:

> When it comes to decision-making, my involvement should not just be calling me to be in a meeting but to give me the opportunity to talk, express myself; whether it is stupid or what, let me express my opinion and decide on issues together … I would have wished authorities called me and other prefects … sit together to discuss issues in a free atmosphere where ideas are shared in mutual respect for all … but I didn't have such opportunity … I did not have a voice (Habib, College A).

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> Mostly it's like authorities have already taken the decisions before student leaders are called… we [students] are not given opportunity to articulate our views or share our opinions … We don't have a voice … (Sena, College B).

From the students' text, school authorities do not address students' grievances because they are not offered the opportunity of ideal participation. For if students go to authorities with a problem over and over again and the authorities fail to give them a hearing or fail to address it, they become worried. In an attempt to bargain for a better deal, their views are brushed off.

Participants' descriptions of their lived experiences tends towards the conclusion that college authorities do not offer students opportunities, by creating forums where students can debate, discuss, and express themselves freely.

Sub-theme 1.2: The Decision-making process reveals injustice. The sub-theme of injustice is used to bring or portray the notion of unfair treatment meted out to participants as a result of the nature of their college decision-making process. Thus, this sub-theme relates to how students felt in the face of the awareness that they were unfairly treated. This sub-theme is rooted in the theories of both participative democracy and social justice. Both theories emphasize fair treatment to all individuals in a polity. Furthermore, whereas democratic theory emphasizes equal opportunities for all, social justice theory focuses on the horizontal links in a community, seeking to restore power of proposal to all stakeholders in a polity; stressing on how unequal distribution of power and resources affects people's daily lives and how individuals can

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influence decision-making which affects them (Fraser, 2008; Osborne, 2006). Similarly, social justice is concerned with the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people of every level of society. Thus, the theory seeks to dismantle structures that deny access to opportunities that people need to interact with others as peers, (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). In the view of the student leaders, the decision making process of their colleges revealed injustice. Some participants explaining said:

> My understanding of justice is fair play or fair treatment. Students employ casual labourers... Students pay these labourers from students' dues. Why should school authorities determine how much should be paid the labourers without students being involved in the negotiations for payment?… The same leaders tell us 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. Since students were paying the piper [labourers] did we not have the right to call the tune by deciding how much the labourers should be paid? (Opak, College A).

> There's no justice concerning the decision-making arrangements of my college… We are intimidated… not given opportunity to articulate our views or share our opinions... How come students cannot decide who and where and which saloons to attend...? (Sena, College B).

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Interpretation of data portrays the message that students at college level are not treated fairly in the context of participative democracy and social justice. Thus, I share the views of Martin Luther King (Jnr) who indicates that the call for justice must be strong to show what is right; for, injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere (Anagwonye, 2010).

Theme 2: The decision-making process portrays adult stereotyping.

This theme relates to participants' awareness of how adults use tradition and culture to brand the youth and thus, isolate them from fruitful discussions with adults. It also relates to how the adult world is prejudiced against the youth, who are always considered as children in the minds of adults. By branding the youth, data suggested, the adult world by recourse to culture has stratified society into two worlds: the adult world and children's world. Data still suggest that adults can easily enter the child's world; however, the child cannot enter the world of adults without permission; and even where permission has been granted, the 'child' needs to 'tread softly' in the world of adults.

Sub-theme 2.1: Not being recognized as individuals who are mature enough to make any meaningful contribution to discourse.

This sub-theme is in reference to the many instances where students who are considered to be part of their college governance through their involvement in the decision-making process, were not recognized by adult members of their school as mature enough to make any meaningful contribution. Majority of participants interviewed, showed clearly that even though they had been elected as leaders according to the constitution of the SRC and approved by College Council, there was nothing like delegation of

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authority to them to the extent that even common dining sessions were conducted by tutors. This lack of recognition was embedded in specific situations and in the context of student leaders desiring to be recognised as adult members in a group who meet to discuss, debate, and express their views and arrive at decisions. It can therefore, not be considered as a contextual. Participants from both study sites expressed their experiences and sentiments as follows:

> I was a member of the College Electoral Board or Committee…One main function… is to vet aspiring student leaders... I happened to be a member of the vetting committee–a sub-committee of the Electoral Board… Only the masters on this committee could score aspirants … I could not... The question is why were students on the vetting committee not allowed to score, when all members had been taken through an orientation to that effect? Obviously, we are recognized as immature people who are incapable of doing anything better...without doubts we are not recognized as adult members… **(Damenti, College A).**
>
> As a college prefect I observed that even though I was called for meetings, I was not accorded the status of an equal member of a group at meeting… When I went to my first Governing Council Meeting the Teachers' Representative on the Council was asked a question… When he was about to answer he told the chairman "let this boy know that he is under the oath of secrecy before he

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> goes out". He was referring to me as "this boy"… The chairman agrees with the teacher and others like him that I am a 'boy' – a child… I attended meetings; but I was not recognized and treated as an equal... The aged always feel the young ones do not possess what adults consider as intelligence… As long as I am considered this way, I am in no way going to be genuinely involved in any fruitful discussion... (Fray, College B).

From data presented a conclusion can be drawn that students were treated the same way in the two colleges. Adult members did not recognize the youth– the students– as adults who are mature enough to share ideas in forums with adults. This sub-theme is rooted in the recognition dimension of social justice theory. The recognition dimension of social justice has concerns which are more cultural than economics or political. It means first, identifying and acknowledging the claims of historically [traditionally] marginalized groups (Tikly & Barrett, 2001). Thus, its focus is on a positive affirmation of the cultural practices of oppressed groups (Bates, 2006). Therefore, cultural justice involves a principle of recognition that seeks to redress cultural domination where others by virtue of age or position become hostile or intimidating, not recognizing others as of any value or showing disrespect to others to the extent that they are disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and, or in everyday life situations.

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Theme 3: Students are both externally and internally excluded in decision-making.

This theme encompasses such aspects as injustice and violation of human rights. Thus, against the background of participative democracy and social justice, the theme of external and internal exclusion dovetails into that of injustice and violation of human rights. The theme is firmly rooted in the theory of participative democracy and thus has special reference to constitutional rights of participation, especially, that of the youth which is addressed by the National Youth Policy (2010). This theme relates to participants' experiences of how their desire to be genuinely involved in decision-making was thwarted by adult members in ways that left participants with self-addressed questions.

Two sub-themes that inform this two main theme as portrayed by participants' information are presented below.

Sub-theme 3.1: The decision-making process violates students' rights.

This sub-theme, violation of students' rights is used to state clearly how students' rights were violated. The sub-theme is firmly rooted in the principle of democracy and social justice. The two theories emphasize respect for the rights of individuals in a society; stressing that each person possesses an inviolability which is founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Thus, the sub-theme relates to ways in which violation of participants' rights were manifested in their everyday lives as individuals in their college environment. It must be noted that democratic theory and theory of social justice cannot be divorced from one another,

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particularly when one deliberates on participation and representation. The sub-theme is informed by the following participants' quotes:

> As a student leader… I have the right to be involved in the decisions the implementation of which affect me and my colleagues but I'm not… I have the right to know… how students' feeding is calculated… what and what goes into our utility bills… and to know why the sale of teachers' hand-outs be sold with conditions attached but we are not told… We have the right for our views to be respected but no opportunity is offered for students to air their views knowing too well that even 'the fool is sometimes right '… students' rights – to be involved, to be heard, to know, respected to be treated fairly… are all violated (Sena, College B).

> The decision-making process of my school does not conform to human rights... My school has distinct groups – administration, staff (teaching and non-teaching) and students … if there is to be a decision all these should come on board; unfortunately, I am not part of whatever goes on … my right to be heard (express myself), my right to be respected… are all infringed upon… (Bintu, College A).

The messages conveyed by the text of participants, presented their daily experiences about how they were treated with reference to the decision-making process of their school. Experiences as related below such as: *'my rights were trampled upon…"*, *'don't I have the right to choose who should*

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style my hair?" don't students have the right to be part of negotiations to determine how much should be paid labourers who have been hired by students…?" are messages that converge on one issue – violation of rights. This theme is thus, firmly rooted in the relational dimension of social justice. This dimension of social justice is 'holistic, non-atomistic, for, it is concerned with the nature of the interconnections between individuals in the community where these are found rather than focusing on an individual. I wondered why college authorities denied participants such simple rights as permitting female students to attend salons of their choice. Perhaps there have been occasions where students have abused such permits to go to town?

Sub-theme 3:2: The decision-making process is gender-biased.

This sub-theme is very similar to the sub-theme 3.1 above. Whereas the former relates to violation of participants' rights in general, the latter has specific reference to females. The sub-theme articulates the sentiments of female students who felt their college had two sets of rules-one for female students and another for males. Unlike violation of rights, this theme is firmly rooted in both relational and recognition dimension of social justice. Female students would want to be recognized as students without being branded. Similarly, they want to be seen as connected socially with one another in a community and that the non-atomistic and holistic nature of their interconnections must be recognized as such without any conditions attached. This sub-theme is gleaned from the following participants' texts.

> Decisions are taken by my school that are not fair to gender … After 10:00 pm (Prep time), ladies cannot go out of their hostel; we are locked up. The males on the other hand, are

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> allowed to study into the night… The males are at liberty to go to town and visit any barbering shop of their choice … My school has two set of rules; one for males and another for females...?(Sena, College B).
>
> Our female hostels are a little far removed from the centre of the school… in a wooded place… The road is not lit… The SRC approached college authorities to do something about it… We were branded negatively… This treatment to female students has made some female tutors put up a cold attitude to the school authorities. Unknown to students these tutors have battled with the issue for long… The male students don't have this problem… (Habib, College A).

Participants use of expressions or questions such as *'why are male students allowed to visit barbering shops of their choice but females are not?' 'my school has two sets of rules and regulations – one set for males and another set for females'* reveal negative experience – that of not caring for the feelings of females. The message could be interpreted as sentiments that made participants feel bad or 'unconnected' to the whole Bates (2006). The interpreted meaning in a way reflects the psychological pain females have when they feel neglected or marginalized.

Theme 4: Students' involvement in decision-making is 'just a token'

One sub-theme that informed the main theme is tokenism. Tokenism is explained as just being heard. It is the level where school personnel listen to students just to learn about their experiences in school (Mitra, 2006). This is the most common form of students' voice; the means by which adults seek

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students' perspectives and then interpret the meaning themselves. Thus, the theme reflects participants' awareness of what prevented them from being genuinely involved in their school decision-making process and the impact their non-genuine involvement in decision-making had on them. However, it is noted through empirical studies that highly successful, shared-governance principals know it is not power over people and events that counts but, rather, power over accomplishments and over the achievement of organizational purposes. They understand that 'students need to be empowered to act- to be given the necessary responsibility that releases their potential and makes their actions and decisions count' Sergiovanni (as cited in Blasé & Blasé, 1994, p. 132).

Sub-theme 4.1: The level of involvement in decision-making leaves participants in a state of schizophrenia.

This sub-theme explores participants' battle for self-hood or identity. They are considered to be part of the governance of their school. However, they find through their everyday experiences, that they do not belong where it is believed they do. School is where they are– their world. And 'learning' is what they do (Edelstien, 2011). The two, coincide to make them what they are and want to be; because the only institution that can provide opportunities to cultivate democratic experience for the youth and thereby build their self-hood is the school. No system involves the entire young generation (Stromquist, 1997). Thus, participants' are aware through their daily experiences that being able to have a say on things that matter to people is important but the implications of finding a voice are greater; they engage the issues of personal identify. Based on participants' quotes below I am inclined to interpret that

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students' experience of the phenomenon of genuine participation send a message of self-actualization in a school environment where the youth find out what they want to become in the future–a message and meaning which dovetails into identity. The converse is true. The following participants' quotes reveal their struggle for identity.

> I feel disappointed… students feel disappointed… I was not genuinely involved in decision-making... My views were disregarded… students have a strong feeling that they do not belong in the small world where they find themselves (Aklo, College B).
>
> The level of my involvement… leaves me with a strong feeling of disillusionment – a split personality – you sometimes become an enemy to your own colleagues … so you will be left hanging; you can't go to the authorities, and you can't go to the side of students. **You find yourself living in two worlds and yet belong nowhere …** You feel bad… a feeling of betrayal… (Habib, College A).

When participants reflected on their lived experiences with reference to comments such as *'we chose you to be our leaders in order for you to carry our voice to college authorities thinking you could do something better'...'You betrayed us...'* that came from the larger student-body, the message drawn from such comments by participants convey an overall message that participants are battling for self-identity. They want to know where they belong. This psychological war leaves them with a split personality which I interpret as schizophrenia – living in two worlds and belonging in neither.

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Participants of both colleges had similar experience as far as their level of involvement in decision-making is concerned. They all experienced their respective college decision-making process as being authoritarian and as result violated the rights of individuals with widespread injustices and not being gender friendly. Even though college B could be said to practice some form of students' involvement in decision-making, participants' experience showed that their involvement was just a token. Thus, the sub-themes that informed the four main themes all dovetail and converge into one overarching theme: Culture does not promote the practice of participatory democracy.

The Overarching Theme: Culture does not promote the practice of participatory democracy

The analysis of data brought out one overarching theme from the four main themes which characterized the research students' participation in decision making process as 'culture does not promote the practice of participatory democracy'. As I dialogued with and reflected upon participants' textual data, nuances and inflections, I understood that the everyday experiences of participants with regards to the nature of the decision-making process of their school and the extent to which they were involved could be described or stated as: culture does not promote the practice of participatory democracy. It was a reality that participants became aware of as they battled to be genuinely involved in the decisions that were made in the environments where they were found. Thus, this awareness of the reality of not being involved genuinely in decisions refers to participants' actual experiences of the decision-making process of their colleges and the extent to which they

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were involved. As will be shown below, participants' quotes from both colleges reveal the truth as stated in the overarching theme. For example,

> Even if you meet the principal, what you're going to fight for will be in vain; it's like beating a dead horse… The decision had already been taken... This is based on culture. In the Ghanaian context children are supposed not to be heard… we were considered as children... children in our Ghanaian context should not talk when the elderly and mature people are talking. The elderly decide... (Opak, College A).

> Whereas students think and believe we are capable of performing creditably…; adults don't…Adults don't have confidence in the youth... Adults have a prejudiced belief that students can't do anything better...I think it's because of culture… My principal and other adult members are firmly entrenched in this cultural belief (Fray, College B).

The overarching theme that emerged from analysis and interpretive activities can be said to represent a unity that is intricate and which has brought together as well as explicated participants' college decision–making process. I must stress that all four themes and their sub-themes are important, for each dovetails into the other to bring about the overarching theme; thus contributing to the total understanding of the students' participation in decision making process. Therefore, I believe that the description and interpretation of the experiences of participants, the messages and meanings from the research sites throw into relief the influence traditional culture has on

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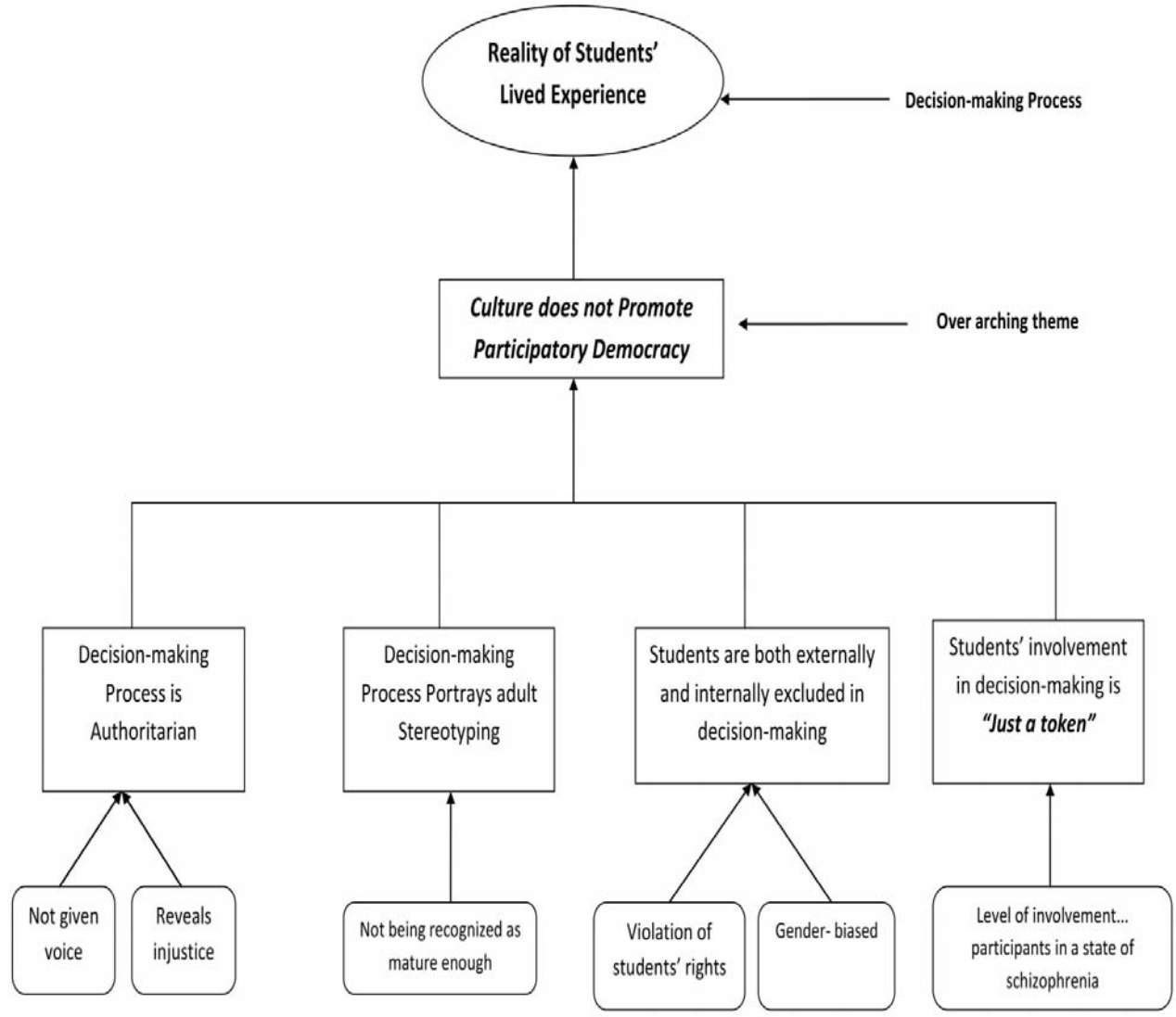
school administration and its resultant effect on subordinates; especially, students.



Source: Author's Construct (2017)

Figure 5: Themes Developed

Discussion of Research Findings

In this section I discuss the findings of the study from the two research sites based on the three research questions which guided the study. The discussions are based on the analysis as well as interpretations of the data set obtained from the two study sites.

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Context of Students' Representative Council (SRC)

The legal framework of Teacher Education and the policy focus of the Colleges of Education Act (2012) commit stakeholders of education to treat teacher trainees as individuals with rights by involving them genuinely in decision making at all levels of governance as endorsed by the National Youth Policy, (2010). Thus, the Colleges Education Act (2012) commits the Colleges of Education to the "setting up of SRCs at various campuses" (p. 11, 12) in order that student leaders can liaise between college authorities and the larger student-body. This representative principle is also endorsed by the Harmonised Statutes (2013) for the Colleges of Education. The clause which is relevant to this study states: "The SRC shall be the official representative of the students of the college and shall be responsible for ... nominating student representatives to serve on appropriate college committees ..." (p. 28, 29). It is against this background that the study sought to find answers to the research questions discussed below.

Discussion of Research Findings

Perspectives of students on the nature of their College decision-making process

Research question one focused on the description of lived experiences of student leaders who were a part of their school governance through participation in decision-making. Analysis and interpretation of data yielded the following themes that I consider answer the research question indicated above. The decision-making process is authoritarian; the decision-making process portrays adult stereotyping.

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Decision Making Process is Authoritarian

The first theme that emerged from the analysis of data is: the decision-making process is authoritarian. The description students gave revealed the authoritarian nature of the decision-making process of the colleges. The theme is corroborated by empirical studies. Dewey (as cited in Blasé & Blasé, 1994) considered 'authoritarian schools as disservice to the practice of democracy', to Dewey students should participate in shaping their education and that not only should school be a preparation for democracy, but also it should be a democracy (Sadker & Sadker, 2000, p. 307). Authoritarian school environments fail to live up to their moral responsibility of practicing democratic values of seeking to foster tolerance, the right to participate, empowerment as well as respect for human dignity and individual views (Mncube, 2008; Tshabangu, 2006). Student's participation that leads to the acquisition of socio-moral resources such as innovation, responsibility, creativity, critical thinking and empathy cannot be nurtured in an authoritarian environment (Waghid, 2005).

I share the views of Edelstein (2011) that it is not authoritarian school cultures but democratic school cultures that generate democratic habits among members, enabling them to participate responsibly in democratic institutions as adults. Thus, in the opinion of Griffith (1998 as cited in Mncube, 2008) school life should seek to foster tolerance, right to participation, empowerment, and respect for human dignity and individual views.

Authoritarian attitude if applied in the administration of a school as indicated in the theme under consideration, works against interdependence of self and society which is focal point of citizenship education; since according

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to Mitra (2006) "the interdependence of self and society is the vocal point of citizenship education; for, individuals cannot abstract themselves from their natural and social bond and still understand themselves" (p. 10). For the youth to be responsible, authoritarianism must give way so that opportunities could be created for them to participate in decisions actively, debate passionately and appreciate critically the institutions that exist including those within the school, which affect them on a daily basis.

Tshabangu (2006) reinforces this idea by stressing that it is irrational for a head of school to use authoritarian stance to intimidate subordinates including students. He believes that 'adoption of rationality is actually a moral decision that society has to make, for its rejection-total surrender to irrationality or blind obedience to other's decision invites all the brutalities of totalitarian regimes.

Furthermore, authoritarian attitudes if applied in the administration of schools, Mncube (2008) works against any democratic form of education. And without a more democratic system of education, the development of a democratic society is unlikely to occur. The school itself according to Starkey (as cited in Mncube, 2008), 'must be organized along democratic lines, taking into consideration that democracy is best learned in a democratic setting in which participation is encouraged, freedom of expression and a sense of justice and fairness prevails and democratic approaches function which allow the nurturing of qualities such as genuine participation, innovation, co-operation, autonomy and initiative in learners...' (p. 79). This is corroborated by Edelstein (2011) who indicated that not only are schools called upon to provide the socio-moral resources to develop the democratic habits that serve

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to maintain a democratic system of governance, but they are also called upon to design the kind of educational lifeworld that is conducive to the democratic empowerment of students who attend them; that is, schools are called upon to provide a democratic form of life.

Therefore, instead of being authoritarian in nature, schools must work towards turning formal membership in an intuition into active and motivated participation in a community that recognizes a shared sense of recognition and responsibility that arises from the experience of belonging to a community of purpose. This will ultimately transform the rule-bound life of an institution into a democratic school culture characterized by the reciprocal recognition, self-efficacy of motivated actors, and a responsibility shared by its members. According to Althof and Stadelmann (2009 as cited in Fielding, 2011), the principles that promote a democratic culture in schools are acceptance, self-efficacy and responsibility.

Decision Making Process Portrays Adult Stereotyping

The second theme that emerged from the analysis of data was decision-making process portrays adult stereotyping. As indicated above, the themes that emerged dovetailed into one another. This is from the fact that two theories that drove the research have common principles. Thus, another theme which also falls under research question one is adult stereotyping. It is noticed from participants' experiential descriptions that adult members have put the youth, who are considered as children into stereotypes because of the influence of culture. Participants' experiences help to conclude that students are branded as children by the adult world, and thus are stereotyped. This theme is corroborated by empirical studies. Marias (2005) has indicated that

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when students are not allowed full participation in decisions as a result of prejudice or branding where even what is heard from them are interpreted by adults through adult spectacles, it is implied that adults believe the youth are incapable of making any meaningful contribution to discourse. Such socio-cultural belief or social-construction has helped to perpetuate and entrench the models of school administration and governance.

Rich (1980) argues that historically the girl-child has been offered an education which has resulted in keeping 'women in a state of ignorant collusion with patriarchal structures' (p. 240). Adult educators have consistently over the years tutored the youth into accepting the status quo– to accept whatever is given without question. The youth have thus, been educated into passivity (Carter, Harber & Serfs, 2003; Mitra, 2006; Tshabangu, 2006). Pryor et al. (2005) observes that 'children speaking out and negotiating with adults has been problematic in Ghana. There is a fine line between what is acceptable and not acceptable from a cultural stand point' (p. 75).

Mncube (2008) also corroborates this by indicating in a study that adult members of a school board felt students should not be included in decision-making platforms because they are immature, inconsiderate and irresponsible. For these adult members, students should be kept out of forums where the youth deliberate with adults because they are immature. Data supports this branding or stereotyping from the use of cultural statements like: 'Akwadaa su mpanin su a yɛmma no bese we, and 'akwadaa bɔ nwa na ommo akyekyede3' (Literally translated as when a child begins to cry like an adult, he or she is given cola nuts to chew and a child's business is cracking snails

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but not the more dangerous business of cracking tortoise). This study contends that banking education resists dialogue; but problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable. Banking education treats student as children and objects of assistance, but problem- posing education makes them critical thinkers (Freire, 1970). In that case, children's value shall not be measured by their economic contributions to society; work productivity, not intrinsic worth, which defines their relationship with the adult world come to an end. It is only when such attitude is addressed that student empowerment shall become a reality. Thus, if we want our youth to grow into responsible adults, then, we must not continue to use our schools and colleges to educate them to accept adult stereotyping that brands them as being irresponsible, ignorant, destructive, disruptive, and immature, noting that nothing will contribute more to the stability of democratic ways of life and institutions than the commitment of the young generation rooted in the experience of active participation and empowerment (Edelstein, 2011).

Lemos (2010) observes that characteristics of adult stereotype are logic, technical visionary, proficiency, constructive and wisdom. He corroborates the theme on adult stereotyping by indicating that such categorisation 'have been culturally naturalized to justify the type of governance in our schools and colleges thus, making them sites for the perpetuation of such socio-culturally constructed beliefs. Good teachers and school administrators do not reject what students see and feel; but rather work with what is presently seen and felt to build a stronger position for each student. To do this effectively requires the creation and maintenance of a trusting relationship (Noddings, 2005). It can therefore, be said that the only

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possible basis for an institutional order that will allow students and school governing bodies to live together with their differences is a fundamental respect for autonomy of the individual– the student (Sen, 1992, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000) and a change of the perception that the adult world have towards the youth. It is important therefore to note that 'before you can have an educated democracy, you must offer your democracy an education that is likely to make it one' (Ruddock & Fielding, 2006, p. 223).

Extent of Students' Involvement in Decision-making in their Colleges

The second research question sought to find out the extent to which students were involved in decision-making in the two colleges. Analysis and interpretation of data also yielded the following themes that I considered as answering the research question indicated above:

1. Students are both externally and internally excluded in the decision making process.
2. Students' involvement in decision making is just a token

Students are Both Internally and Externally Excluded in the Decision-Making Process

The first theme that emerged from the second research question is: Students are both externally and internally excluded from decision-making process. Data analysis from the two research settings show that students are not only excluded internally from their college decision-making process but also they are externally excluded. It had been the wish of participants to 'bring a certain change' in the way their college SRC worked together with their Colleges' administration. They had thought before assumption of office as student leaders that their predecessors did not do their work well as

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representatives. To them 'students' voice was not carried' to authorities. It was when they became leaders that they realised the reason for the 'non-performance' of their predecessors.

Data further revealed that in majority of cases student leaders were called for meetings but surprisingly, what took place in the supposed meetings cannot be described as participative. These experiences as rendered above indicate that students from the two colleges were both externally and internally excluded from decision-making.

Their experience is corroborated by Young (2000) who observed in his study about such forms of exclusion. These are external exclusion where some individuals (in this study, students) are kept out of the forums for debates or decision-making processes, and internal exclusion where individuals are normally included in the group but are still excluded, for example, by the interaction privileges, language issues and participation of others who are dismissed as irrelevant.

It is very clear from data that these two forms of exclusion take place and therefore, students' rights are violated. One major reason for the existence of schools and colleges is the acculturation, enculturation and politicisation of students and in playing such role, schools must regard students as equals, which is one issue in which social justice manifests itself (Mitra, 2006).

This is reinforced by Cockburn who contends that students' voice is effective when they attend the proposed meetings, but is more effective when students actively take part in shaping the agenda of those meetings. Adult members should not intimidate the young ones by their intimidating looks during meetings. Cockburn (2006) therefore devised three forms of

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involvement: opportunity–where students are given opportunity to attend meetings; attendance–where students take up that opportunity; and engagement– where students not only attend, but are given the chance to make effective contributions in meetings.

It is true that making effective contributions in meetings call for the use of certain facilities; for example, language use. There is the problem that participation assumes or agrees with social confidence in linguistic confidence that not all students have, or feel they have. However, the question is should this deficiency be a reason for not engaging students in genuine participation? I think facility with certain language structures will lie dormant as long as they are not utilised.

I therefore, agree with Young (2000) in his observation that democratic norms mandate inclusion as a criterion of political legitimacy and participative democracy implies that all members of a polity are included equally in the decision-making process and as such, these decisions would be considered by all as legitimate. Democratic theory of education and the theory of social justice do not endorse any forms of exclusion of members of a polity' Haber (1997, p. 70). The study contends that being able to have a say on things that matter to people is important but the implications of finding a voice are greater; they involve the issues of personal identity.

Students' Involvement in Decision Making is Just a Token

The study found that students' involvement was below their expectations. All the participants of the two colleges indicated through their everyday experiences that their involvement was 'just a token'. As has been demonstrated by data, participants had experiential descriptions of the extent

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to which they were involved in decision-making and therefore cannot be considered as a contextual.

From students' experiential descriptions we can draw the conclusion that students were not genuinely involved in the decision-making process of both colleges. The theme– "token engagement or involvement"- is reinforced by empirical studies. Rudduck and Fielding (2008) posits that "it is only when students are not given the chance to express themselves in genuine exchanges with adults that students are "told" what to do; what to accept or not to accept. In such instances, students' opinion is never asked for and never matters" (p. 102). Too often, the assumption is made that students, considered as children, are unable to articulate themselves as far as what is inside their own minds is concerned; but it is observed that through partnering with adults students will notice a growing understanding between teachers and themselves, and adults will come to the stark realisation that "students posses unique knowledge about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate" (Mitra, 2006, p. 8).

This study contends that students are a source of wealth of ideas if properly nurtured and encouraged to participate, as evidenced in the Madagascar case where 90 students from schools presented an Action Plan to the National Assembly UNICEF (2004). Therefore, I believe that through student voice opportunities, students can work with their teachers and administrators to co-create the path of reform and change. Bates (2006) reinforces the theme of token engagement of students in their Colleges' decision-making in his study on typologies of student voice. He observed that a ladder of young peoples' participation in decision-making offers a typology of youth participation which ranges from tokenism and manipulation, or non-

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participation. At the level of token involvement, students' voice operates at 'being heard'. At this level, authorities just listen to students just to learn about their experiences at school. Thus, the study contends that student's involvement must move from just 'being heard' to collaborating with adults and hence to building capacity for youth leadership, because according to Sergiovanni (as cited in Blasé & Blasé, 1994) 'the heart of the school as a moral community in its covenant of shared values' (p. 108). Students desire to share in the values of the school community where they find themselves but are inhibited by a meeting structure– an administrative leadership structure– that does not allow the practice of building capacity for youth leadership age Listening to students most importantly, reminds teachers and administrators that students are mature, innovative, and creative and thus can contribute positively to the successful governance of their school (Pryor et al., 2005; Tshabangu, 2006).

This study emphasizes that 'banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable. When students are denied opportunities for involvement, their rights are violated and the goal of curricula designed to teach critical thinking is defeated. Stromquist argues that school curriculum has been designed to address critical thinking and problem solving, respect for diversity and education for citizenship, democracy and human rights. Should students in the process of being taught not be engaged in activities that will enable them display such skills? Genuine participation, not just being heard is one arena for student empowerment. Being engaged that way students will learn about democracy, learn through democracy and learn for democracy. By that way, they acquire the socio-

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moral resources that they need for their future lives. Therefore, educators and all stakeholders of education must take note that 'in many contexts and for a variety of reasons, the child is a compelling conception. Student voice initiatives as far as participation in decision-making is concerned, require that we review our notions of childhood' (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).

Meanings Students Make of their Involvement or Non-Involvement in their College Decision-Making Process in the Context of Participative Democracy and Social Justice

This research question was intended to understand the meanings communicated to participants through their lived experiences at college. The study found that meanings communicated to participants of the two colleges by way of their lived experiences and messages sent to them revealed that they live in an environment of two worlds but do not belong in any of them. Their rights are violated and thus are not treated as individuals with vested interest in a community where they form a part. The message is that they cannot develop to their fullest potential (self-actualization). They battle for self-hood or self-identity. They become disillusioned with split personalities.

Such experiences as described above left students with questions which seemed to be challenging the status quo. Questions like – 'what does it mean to be a member of College Council?' 'He refers to me as "that boy", does he not trust me or he considers me as immature?' 'Did we – Council Members – not go through the same orientation?' 'Isn't the same adults who say two heads are better than one?' 'It's a pity! When are students going to be treated as people with rights, with a voice to be heard?' came as a result of their experiences of non-involvement. These experiences are firmly rooted in

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the theories of participative democracy and social justice. They both stress equity and justice.

Thus, the clear message sent to students through their lived experiences can be summed up as: There are two worlds – that of adults and the other for children. Adults can enter freely the child's world, but the child cannot enter the adult world un-invited. This truth comes out clear when I consider sayings such as:

> "Abofra hunu ne nsa ho horo a ɔnne mpaninfo didi".
>
> (Literally, a child joins adults at table to eat together only when he/she has learned to wash his/her hands well).

The question is who determines whether the 'child's hand', has been washed well? From the experiential descriptions of participants lived experiences, it is the adults who determine whether or not the "Abofra" who in this study is the youth has washed his or her hands well. This reinforces the theme "adult stereotyping" where in the minds of adults the child, "is not mature" to do anything meaningful (Except from Damenti, College A).

Thus, Blasé and Blasé (1994); Stromquist (1997) corroborates this finding by indicating that when students are marginalized, they become disillusioned, their trust level becomes low and when trust level is low, they become inconsiderate and cannot gain control over their lives by knowing and claiming their rights at all levels of society, micro or macro. Rudduck and Fielding (2006), add that students' experience of non-participation in decision-making communicates the message that adults intentionally do not encourage students' voice in order that the youth could remain passive and continue to

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accept the status quo. Adults cannot continue to pay lip-service in their engagement with the youth.

It is important therefore, for adults to reflect on the contradictions and inconsistencies in their presentation of students' participation and voice. Adults cannot endorse virtues of consultation and participation and on the other, hand sustain systems which reflect the very different values of what Achiever et al. (2003) refer to as 'competitive individualism'- where students are categorized, compared to, and judged against one another (p. 224).

Messages such as initiative, acceptance, responsibility and innovation are communicated to students as a result of their genuine participation (Pryor et al., 2003; Kyei-Badu, 2010). On the other hand, messages such as lack of recognition, disrespect, irresponsible and disillusionment are communicated as a result of non-participation (Sergiovanni, 1994). Thus, educators must note that human beings assign meanings to the experiences they go through in the contexts where they are found (Edelstien, 2011; Mncube, 2008; Tshabangu, 2006).

When students are treated fairly as adults in collaborative efforts through their participation in decision-making they react positively to such recognition and draw the conclusion that their 'opinion count'. However, if they are not genuinely involved in the decision-making process of their school, they draw such meanings mistrust and suspicion. Thus, people create descriptive and evaluative adjectives out of their own personal experiences in the environments where they are located (Mitra, 2006).

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Culture Does not Promote Participatory Democracy

Thus far, the discussions of the four main themes all point to one overarching theme: culture does not promote participatory democracy. Data reveals that culture influenced the authoritarian nature of the decision making process. The same culture promotes adult stereotyping and deems students as children. The internal and external exclusion of students as well as their token engagement has been revealed by data as being the result of culture.

Pryor et al. (2005) observe that "it is important to take into account the culture found in the environment where Ghanaian schools operate... To what extent are the social relations of a school council possible within an authoritarian field such as a Ghanaian basic school where the expectation of both children and adult is likely to be adult direction and children's compliance?''(p. 75). They observe again 'that children speaking out and negotiating with adults has been problematic in Ghana. There is a fine line between what is acceptable from a cultural standpoint' (p. 75).

Rudduck and Fielding (2008) corroborates this finding by indicating that adult school governors have traditionally relegated young people "to a less significant realm than those who have reached 'adult life' and by so doing, they obscure both the richness of students' experience and their capacity to do more than schools routinely expect and allow" (p. 227). And Edem et al. (1979) indicate that applying democratic leadership styles in African schools is difficult because power relations in schools are largely authoritarian and bureaucratic. The authors describe the prevailing leadership in Nigeria by indicating that;

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> In theory, it is expected that most heads of Nigerian Schools will fall into categories like autocratic, democratic, or laissez-faire, but most heads tend to be authoritarian, if not altogether autocratic. To a certain extent, this tendency can be attributed to the traditional ways of life, in which the elders or the man in authority has the final say in all matters and must be obeyed (p. 37).

Thus, it must be noted that when adults do not intentionally focus on group process; that is, engaging the youth in collaborative ventures, the youth and adults often fall back into traditional teacher– student roles.

Chapter Summary

The main issues raised in this chapter are based on participant text, interpretation of themes that emerged was made. Informed by van Manen's (1990) six methodical steps, meaning units, interpretative concept, sub themes and themes emerged. Themes that emerged were explained and the main findings were appropriately discussed. Attention was paid to research context and the overarching theme that emerged was: culture dose not promote participative democracy.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents the overview of the study, summary of the research process, outlining the key findings of the study. Again, the chapter presents the implications and contribution of the research. Finally, the chapter gives recommendations, limitations of the study and suggestion for further research.

Summary of Research Process

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore the lived experiences of students who are part of their college governance in the context of Ghanaian Colleges of Education to understand how meanings communicated to them reveals injustice and violations of students' rights in light participative democracy and social justice. In order to achieve this purpose, I consciously formulated specific research questions which were derived from the following pivotal research question. 'What are the perspectives of students on the nature and extent of their involvement in the decision-making process of their colleges? The three research questions were:

1. What are the perspectives of students on their college decision-making process?
2. What is the extent of students' involvement in decision making in their Colleges?

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3. What meaning do students make of their involvement or non-involvement in their college decision-making in the context of participative democracy and social justice?

In order to address the research questions, I used constructivism in interpretive research as the paradigm to underpin the study. The assumption of this paradigm is that reality is not single, but multiple; not fixed but changeable; not universal but context- specific. Knowledge is understood as being the inter-subjective experience of people. Hermeneutic phenomenology, informed by the works of Heidegger (1962); Gadamer (1989); van Manen (1990); Bontekoe (1996) served as the strategy of inquiry used to explore the experiences of participants of the study. Observations, individual interviews and focus group discussions were employed as methods for data collection.

Principal Officers of SRCs of two Colleges of Education; a faith-based and the other non-faith based were used. The choice was purposive for students who were chosen because of their experience with their college decision-making process, and their willingness to participate.

Ethical approval was sought and consent was obtained before I collected audio and video texts from participants. Verbatim transcription was made and data was managed using Nvivo 7 software to isolate themes into categories relevant to the study. Analysis of data was done by the use of thematic technique of analysis and the hermeneutic circle.

Main Findings

One overarching theme that emerged from four main themes explicates how experience of students with the students' participation in decision making process communicated to participants the reality of social stratification of two

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worlds – one for adults and the other for children. Children find it difficult to break 'barriers' into the adult world; however, adults can enter the child's world even uninvited. As a result the meanings communicated showed violations of rights of students as well as injustices in the context of social justice. The overarching theme was 'culture does not promote the practice of participatory democracy' which emerged from the four main themes which are– decision-making process is authoritarian, decision-making process portrays adult stereotyping, students are both externally and internally excluded in the decision-making process, and students' involvement in decision-making is just a token. All these themes dovetail into one another to explicate participants' lived experiences, messages as well as meanings. Thus, they inform the research questions.

The main findings of the research were as follows:

1. Participants' descriptions of their experiential knowledge about the students' participation in decision making process were similar. In both colleges participants described their college decision-making process negatively, attributing the reason for such negative description to culture; hence the main finding being 'culture does not promote participatory democracy'. It is because of administrators' heavy reliance on culture that the decision-making process is described as being authoritarian. Because of culture, adults stereotype students as individuals who are incapable of making any meaningful contribution to discourse because they are considered immature, irrational, uninformed, and irresponsible ; they are thus excluded externally and internally from forums of debates to share ideas, and finally, by the

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influence of culture the best form of involvement is just 'a token'- just being heard.

2. Even though the observations dovetail into one main theme, for the purpose of this study, I reiterate that the second finding is that there is adult stereotyping. And as indicated above, adults hide behind culture to stereotype youth as irresponsible and ignorant, but adults as the custodians of wisdom and knowledge – wisdom is with the aged. So that when adults refer to the saying 'Tikrɔ nnkɔ agyina' - (Literally, two heads are better than one), the reference is that it is two heads of adults together that are better than one; not one head of an adult and that of a youth together. Therefore, the clear message is that adults play double standards, because when they are ready to cheat, they have a saying for that line of action and when they are ready to exonerate themselves they have yet another set of sayings.
3. The study found that authoritarian type of leadership comes from cultural influence – the more a leader relies on or is entrenched in cultural belief, the more he or she relies on authoritarian dictatorship as a form of leadership. This is consistent with Edem et al. (1979), Harber (1995), Pryor et al. (2005) and Tshabangu (2006) ideas on leadership styles in Africa.
4. The study established that young adults are totally both excluded externally and internally in forums for debates and discussions. There is so much intimidation. From the outside it looks as if students are involved but they are not. And this is consistent with Cockburn's (2006), and Young's (2000) ideas on engagement of students in

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decision-making in respect of what constitute the genuineness of involvement.

5. Meanings the phenomenon communicate to the participants from both colleges manifest inequality as far as engaging students in decisions is concerned. Students as youth are still considered as children. And still drawing or relying on culture they must only be heard without engaging them in any fruitful discussions.

As a researcher, I agree with the observation made by Rudduck and Fielding (2006) that school management "puts more systems in place; they rejuvenate old ones but there is nothing wrong with the systems that we already have. It is our perception of the students; that is what we've got to change" (p. 226).

It is important to emphasise that as long as adults continue to rely and operate through the lens of culture, the youth who shall be the adults of tomorrow shall never learn about democracy, learn through democracy and learn for democracy.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from this research. First, the study reinforces the argument that culture affects individuals in their daily operations; especially, particular styles of leadership are influenced greatly by culture. This has meaning for students as young adults who are daily affected by the style of leadership used by the school heads where these students are found. It is only when leaders become conscious of this affectation that school heads will make deliberate attempts 'to bracket' their peculiar spectacles or lens worn by them. The significance of this study is reinforced by the fact that

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participation in decision-making plays a central role in participants' lived experience in an environment where they are sidelined.

The second conclusion is a sequel to the first; each dovetailing into the other. The study contends that even though relevant literature abounds to serve as vehicle to understand and appreciate the relevance of student participation in decision-making; its relevance as far as equity, justice and social inclusion Rich (1980) at college level in Ghana, is limited by the fact that majority of research in this area has not dealt with the day-to-day experiences of students who are affected daily by what goes on in the schools where they are found. Thus, in the context of participative democracy and social justice, this study has demonstrated that meanings that are communicated to these young adults have relevance for understanding and appreciating the absence of recognition by adult educators. The voice of students that reveals this ***phenomenon*** of not being recognized has not received the grave attention in hermeneutic phenomenological studies. It is hoped that the findings of this study will add to the relevance of this corpus of literature in creating much more awareness about the reality of what goes on at the Colleges of Education.

Finally, this study using hermeneutic phenomenological research supports the idea that researching people's lived experiences is unique and that it introduces an approach in qualitative research methodology which according to van Manen (1990), is distinct from traditional approaches. The use of hermeneutic phenomenology is strongly suggested because the approach is rooted in people's experience in educational environments.

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Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this study have implications for policy and practice. From participants' lived experiences a reality is revealed concerning how young adults in their quest to be part of the college governance are handled– not offered opportunities to contribute their quota. The study, thus, provide education to decision makers, leaders and professionals– with on opportunity to reflect on the meaning drawn and its implication for good governance; that is, taking the youth through the 'token stage' of involvement to 'building capacity for youth leadership with the understanding that the youth are tomorrow's leaders. The knowledge of meanings the phenomenon communicates to students is necessary for educating authorities responsible for college level education to develop measures to address this adult stereotyping.

Secondly, as much as the National Youth Policy (2010) comes out clearly that the youth must be engaged in decision-making at all levels by all stakeholders, a stand which is endorsed by the 1992 constitution, educators can develop measures to address injustices and violations of students' rights.

Contribution of the Study

The study contributes to existing body of knowledge in this area. First, the main contribution of this study is that students' voice at college level in terms of being part of governance appears to be under researched. The study has given fresh insight to literature that token involvement as revealed by meanings communicated to students, manifest gross violations of their rights, and injustices. As a result, they are not encouraged or offered opportunities to

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develop their potentials for their future lives (Stromquist, 1997; Mitra, 2006; Bates, 2006).

Secondly, exploring the nature and meanings participation in decision-making plays in the everyday lives of students of college level is considered valuable. This study has contributed to existing knowledge to support Freire, (2000) and Mitra (2006) ideas that youth at college level are politically alert and possess a wealth of knowledge that can be tapped into. The study has, thus, opened for educators and stakeholders the reality of students' world at college level in light of participative democracy and social justice.

Recommendation for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings it is recommended that Council on Tertiary Education through the Directorate of Teacher Education takes measures to beef up supervision at College Education level to appraise the activities of the colleges in the area of involving students in decision-making.

Secondly, as revealed by the findings, culture plays a central role in providing the youth with opportunities for forums for debate. It is suggested as indicated by Amu (1970) that culture is beautiful; for, it gives the picture of 'unity in diversity; however, there are elements in culture that stand in the way of development. Conscious efforts must be taken to tackle such "elements" and 'remove' the negatives.

Democratizing education should aim at fostering democratic institutional management– a school management structure that encourages participative democracy. Thus, authorities must strive and make conscious efforts to give voice to students by presenting opportunities or forums where

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students can debate, discuss and express their views that are not only of interest to them but also of the general welfare of their school.

Since there is perhaps no more powerful way of transforming human society than changing how adults of today relate to children who are the adults of tomorrow, school heads, teachers, educators must thrive to change their attitudes of paternalism towards the children they handle and encourage critical thinking.

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APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of students on the nature of their College decision-making process?

Decision-making is vital for the success of every school. Due to its importance, schools have established some processes by which decision-making is carried out.

Interview Questions:

1. In which areas of school life do you think vital decisions have to be taken in your school?
2. Who do you think are actually involved in the decision-making process in these areas?
3. What process do you think is being followed in decision-making in your school?
4. Do you think the process adopted by your school is useful? If not, why not?
5. Considering the decision making arrangements in your school, would you say there is justice as far as decision making is concerned? Why do you say so?
6. Are there existing student or staff groups in your school which you think influence decision making? Why do you think so?
7. Do you think there is some external pressure on decision making in your school? Why do you think so?
8. Are there any conflicts between students or staff and students which occur due to decision taking? What is the nature of these conflicts if any?
9. Do you think there is sufficient delegation of authority to students in your school?

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Why do you say so?

10. Do you think the decision making process in your school conforms to human rights?

    Why do you say so?

11. Have there been some decisions taken by your school authorities which you think violate human rights?

    Why do you say so?

12. Have there been some decisions taken by your school which you think was not fair to one gender?

    Why do you say so?

13. Do you think that the decisions taken by your collage authorities consider the religious differences of students?

    Why do you think so?

Research Question 2: How do students want to be involved in the decision making process?

Interview Questions:

1. In which areas of decision-making do you think students are genuinely involved?
2. In which areas of decision-making do you think students are not genuinely involved?
3. How do you think students feel about their level of involvement in decision-making?
4. In which areas of school life are students not often satisfied about decisions taken?
5. What actions do students often take when such decisions are made and why?

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6. What impact do students think unfavourable decisions have on them?
7. What effects do you think students' involvement in decision-making have on their future lives?
8. Why do you think school authorities do not involve you in making some decisions?
9. How would you want to be involved in decision making?

Research Question 3: What meanings do students make of their involvement or non- involvement in their college decision-making process in the context of participative democracy and social justice?

Interview Questions:

1. What effects did your genuine participation in your Colleges decision making have on you?
2. What effects did your non-genuine participation in your Colleges decision making have on you?

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APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

My name is John Pepra-Mensah and I am a student at University of Cape Coast working on a doctorate degree. I have been granted permission from Teacher Education Division (TED) and the regional Director of Education (GES) and the principal of your college to elicit data from students at Mount Mary. I am requesting your assistance in providing data by allowing me to interview you. The topic of my study is: ‘‘Democratising Education: the issue of social justice and students’ voice”. The purpose of this study is to describe through students experiences as they engage in participation in school decision-making process. Through a qualitative analysis, this study seeks to share students perceptions as they identify factors that impact their sense of ownership of their school, that build trust , that help create congenial environment for the teaching-learning process and that which help prepare them for a productive future life, as adult citizens, factors that exclude them from meaningful participation in decision-making.

Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. Reporting of results in this study will not indentify individual participants, school or district. Your opinion is needed and valued. Students are a major stakeholder group. Without you there is no school. To provide your perspective, I would like to interview you and ask a number of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview. I will write notes as you are audio as well as video recorded. The audio/video recording will assist me in transcribing your responses. Your responses will be anonymous, held strictly confidential and will be used for the research study. I

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look forward to the opportunity of interviewing and sharing results of the study with you.

Please feel free to contact me.

Email: pepramensah@yahoo.com

Phone No. 0246434567

Thank you in advance for your time and contribution to this study.

John Pepra-Mensah

Doctoral Student

UCC.

Participant's Response

I have read the above description of the research study. I have been informed of the benefits involved and that all my questions will be answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I give my consent.

Name of participant……

Signature of participant……

Date…….

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APPENDIX C

EXCERPTS FROM PARTICIPANTS' TRANSCRIPTS

Osabek's Text

The principal, selected tutors, who represent the authorities of the college, make decisions in my college.

Students serve on these committees...so students are part of the decision-making process... [Involvement].

[But] the process adopted by my college for decision-making is not useful.

Students who are the major stake-holder group are not given the opportunity to voice out their opinion about issues... I describe the process... as authoritarian … [not given voice]

I am the SRC President … I serve on the College Council by virtue of my position … **Students' inputs, views or opinions are not sought for in matters that concern students … I attend council meeting only to present a case minus any involvement in discussion as a full member …*[not genuinely involved-self-aware]***

***There is injustice in the decision-making process of my college*. I'm not recognized...I am the SRC president but I cannot give any instructions to my fellow students...the reason is** that there is nothing like delegation of authority because I am not recognized as an adult who can behave in any responsible way... ***[not recognized*]**

Because the decision-making process is authoritarian the rights of students were often violated... *[violation of rights]*

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In most cases the female students are discriminated against... I think this is unfair... [not being fair-injustice]

Even where I have been called to I attend a meeting, **I found that the so-called *decisions to be arrived at have already been made before I was called as a student leader …*** [*not being involved]*

For example, the SRC hired casual labourers … Surprisingly the school administration decides how much they should be paid...

A meeting was scheduled between college authorities and student leaders … we were mandated to pay the casual labourers the Figure proposed by the authorities *[imposition of decision-element of control]*.

I don't think this was a meeting where people met to discuss issues and come out with acceptable decision. ***Decisions are imposed; and that is the main reason … I describe the decision – making process of my school as authoritarian [voiceless-no deliberation]***

Masters are employed to teach in the college **…**There is a private College of Education … not too far from our school. About 70% of our masters teach there...**When it is official time for our teachers to teach, they are nowhere … Students approached the vice principal and complained … A meeting was scheduled … A day before the scheduled meeting, it was postponed … Teachers concerned had met the vice principal on the issue…without students. The communiqué that came out of that meeting read thus.**

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'Henceforth tutors shall be engaging students for normal classroom interactions at odd times; students are therefore to take note and comply'. Was this justifiable? [injustice-challenging the status quo]

I am called to attend meetings but … I am given or handed down the decisions which have already been made...indicating that I am not recognized as a member of the group in attendance...

[not recognized –self-aware; violation of rights]

In February, 2011 College Council met... I had been given an invitation... [involvement]... On the agenda I was billed to present students' project …I was elated as I walked towards the Council Chamber…**The meeting started…The principal gave the overview of what he had planned for the academic year…I was called to make my presentation. In brief the SRC was requesting for a piece of land to put up an SRC Secretariat...After the presentation the chairperson gave a few remarks and asked the principal: 'do you have a piece of land for your student?' The principal answered in affirmation…'Prefect, see the principal … you are excused' … The principal added 'you are being asked to leave' I stood up and left very much confused … filled with feelings of disbelief, disappointment, anger and betrayal.**

[Intimidation/violation of rights/injustice]

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As I went away I asked 'where do I belong and what does it mean to be a member of a college council…' [absence of recognition-challenging the status quo]

Indeed my right to be treated as an equal and respected member of council was violated**. The point is I was not just invited as a student leader … I was invited … like any other member of council… [violation of rights/not treated as equal].**

... Students are not genuinely involved**. I have never experienced any genuine involvement in decision making**…**My engagement was just a token. [absence of deliberation].**

There has not been any occasion where I, as college prefect, have been called to discuss any issue with college administration on behalf of students…I have never done that, it has never happened [not accepted as being **part of a group/ absence of recognition]**

The message my experience communicates to me as a result of my non-genuine involvement in decision – making, is: **Psychologically, I become disoriented, disillusioned, demoralized and thus lose my self – worth … [loss of self-identity].**

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Another message my experience communicates to me is that **I am not recognized as an individual with any interests in the community where I belong; and that I have no rights [not recognized as an individual with rights]**

The one main reason why students were not genuinely involved on decision-making was that we were considered as children...*and in the Ghanaian culture students do not discuss issues with adults...adults decide for them...they accept what they are given without question****.[cultural colouring]****...*

Opak's Text

"I really want to be a good politician … and I am using the Training College as a preparation ground"...

Most of the decisions in the college come from the college principal and some people who work close with him… [absence of students' involvement].

...the process of decision – making being followed can best be described as a dictatorship. The authorities say it and it is final…[absence of students' involvement]

In as much as the decisions are made without the involvement of students, I do not think [the process followed] is useful.

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My understanding of justice is fair play or fair treatment…there is injustice...students employ casual labourers…students pay these labourers from students dues [not given fair treatment]**.**

Why should…**school authorities determine how much should be paid the labourers without students being involved in the negotiations for payment? The same leaders tell us 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' [violation of rights -challenging the status quo].**

Since students were paying the piper (labourers) did we[students] not have the right to call the tune by deciding how much the labourers should be paid or at least, by being involved in the negotiation process? [injustice and violation of rights-challenging the status quo].

It is a pity; I don't really know when students are going to be treated as people with rights; with a voice to be heard!

The principal called us (student leaders) for a meeting...we were only given the reason for the meeting...there was nothing like discussion... [not genuinely involved-challenging the status quo]

In the micro situation we have both the majority and the minority

... The voices of both are heard...opposing views are tolerated and respected...I think this is the practice of democracy...**but in my college this is not the case**

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because the voices of all groups are not heard; especially, that of students who form the majority... [voicelessness- violation of rights].

We are often invited by the principal for it to look from the outside we [student leaders] go to have discussions with college authorities...nothing like that happened...Student leaders never had discussions with the authorities of my school **[absence of discussion-challenging the status quo].**

...by calling us to a meeting ...he wanted us and others to think that he did not take decisions alone... portraying a meeting has taken place.

...when the principal met the whole school he said: 'I called your leaders...and told them...' [element of control]

The 'calling' connotes a meeting and therefore a discussion... [absence of deliberation].

There was unfairness to gender. Females are always discriminated against [unfair treatment to gender].

There were always unfairness and injustice in the decision-making process of my College...because **the process of decision-making did not involve all stake- holder groups** [absence of students' voice-inequality]

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Once I observed our bath house facility had a broken tap causing the whole bath – house to be flooded … I rushed to the Senior Hall Master and told him about it. 'I am coming! I am coming!' he shouted at me. He said this absent-mindedly [absence of recognition].

I knew he was not prepared … so I repeated, 'Sir, the room is over flooding'…'So what should I do; should I go and mop it up?'

The point of interest is that if the Senior Hall Master recognized me as a leader, he could have asked me to do that which he could not do at that present moment…[not recognized as a leader].

I was a student leader but I did not have the authority to give instructions to other students…because the college administration does not consider me or any other student leader as people with the ability to do anything on its behalf... Will it not be a fair treatment to involve students in the preparation of menu for students' meal?' **[no delegation of authority ; not recognized]**

There is so much of intimidation in my college... Even if you meet the principal, what you are going to fight for will be in vain; it's like beating a dead horse. **Decisions are already taken so what you are going to say will not add or subtract anything… [lack of opportunity- voicelessness]**

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This stance of my principal is based on culture. ***More often the adult members of my college showed this belief with such sayings as: Akwadaa bo nwa; ommo akyekyedee (literally, a child cracks snails which is easier but not the dangerous and relatively difficult task of cracking tortoise).[cultural colouring].***

At best the extent of my involvement in the decision-making process of my college can be described as just being heard; there was never a deliberation [no opportunity for genuine engagement-voicelessness]

I *felt that maybe they [college authorities] saw us [student leaders] as very young...students after all," I have learnt that maturity is not necessarily determined by age. I take consolation from the legendary 'Ananse and the wisdom pot' that it was his own son who brought him to the realization that what we refer to as 'wisdom' does not reside in the head of a single person – adult or young … it gives me the message that people's views, irrespective of where they are coming from must be tolerated and respected if the practice of democracy is to be practiced and sustained.(n/b. Use the italicized portion for discussion and comments).*

A clear message communicated to me by my experience is that people's views irrespective of where they are coming from must be tolerated and respected.

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Denyo's Text

From my experience, most of the decisions were taken by college authorities through the committee system. Students served on these committees [involvement]

When you meet the decision makers, you won't be able to air your views on those issues that matter to you as a student. You are there and everything is imposed… [intimidation, and ...violation of rights]

Honestly, as a student leader, I was not genuinely involved in the decisions that were taken. This was the general atmosphere: 'I was just an errand boy.'[not genuinely involved]

You will try to find out why but my principal will say 'I am only sending you. Go and deliver the information… I was just an errand boy'.

As a student leader I was often called for meetings, but **there wasn't anything like fair play (justice) in the decision-making process [absence of fairness-injustice]**

When you go to the decision makers you won't be able to air your views on those matters that matter to you as a student [intimidation-element of control]

The school authorities do not believe that as a student leader I'm capable of doing anything with respite [prejudice]

All decisions are imposed on us; we do not attend meetings to discuss anything [voicelessness]

They see me and other student leaders as irresponsible; they are prejudiced against us. We are regarded as children ...and therefore the

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result is as a student leader I cannot be entrusted with responsibilities [prejudiced-challenging the status quo]

The decision-making process in my college does not conform to human rights...The rights of students were often violated-the right to be listened to, to be recognized and respected) and most often the decisions were gender-biased.

In the majority of instances students' rights are infringed upon and most often the decisions were gender biased [violation of rights-injustice]

I think school authorities have their particular interest in certain things; they think if we (students) should be genuinely involved, we are going to know the root of everything... being transparent will bring out issues that would let students talk about…

We are considered as children by the school authorities and in the African context, children have no say when elders are talking. At best, decisions have to be made for them. My principal is firmly entrenched in this cultural belief [cultural colouring/ prejudice- challenging the status quo]

I have never been genuinely involved in the decision-Making process of my college… [self-aware]...

There is the belief in our African culture about children… the elderly decide for children. They do not matter in anything. **We are considered as children and as long as we are considered as children, there is no way we shall be genuinely involved in any decisions that are made in my school [cultural colouring- challenging the status quo]**

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Students (representing the younger generation) are/ **cheated and treated unfairly in the name of culture …we/I feel disappointed by the elderly… We end up disrespecting rightly constituted authority…the trust we have for authority is eroded and the larger student body lose trust in their own student leadership… [Self-aware]...** because they feel their leaders have betrayed them.

Our college authorities… cling to culture… They are controlled by the fear that they would be exposed… [challenging the status quo]

The SRC decided and purchased a PA System for my college. **The System was not accepted by my college principal when it was presented. His reason was that he asked students to purchase a Generator rather [element of control- intimidation]**

There was no time authorities met me as a student leader or any of my colleagues to discuss matters of interest in an atmosphere of give-and-take [absence of genuine involvement...**I was not genuinely involved in the decision-making process of my college... [not genuinely involved]**

They [authorities] wouldn't call us to sit ...together and say: 'we want this, what do you say as students?' Any time we insisted to know what was happening concerning for example our feeding fee **we were simply told: 'if you wish to continue your education...pay or the exit gate is there...' Such intimidating instances [language] give my college administration out as being authoritarian as well as a dictatorship [element of control-intimidation]**

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If I had been involved genuinely, I would have been exposed to some practical ways of life. I would have been exposed to some of the difficulties administrators go through and as a result appreciate their efforts; for it is said – 'uneasy lies the head that wears the crown'.

My involvement in the decision-making process of my college as far as my experience is concerned can be described as just a token [not genuinely involved]

Damenti's Text

Decisions are solely made by the college's administration [absence of students' involvement]

The process followed is authoritarian 'a- one-way-affair'. The principal with some selected few always make the decisions……. It is thus not useful [challenging the status quo]

We are in the democratic era [self-aware]

In the macro situation, everybody is crying for the practice of the principles of democracy.

Whatever goes on in terms of democracy in governing the whole nation (macro) should reflect in the school (micro) situation… The absence of this would be injustice; the violation of human rights…And this is what happens in my college...[injustice and violation of rights-challenging the status quo]

One major reason why there is injustice and violation of students' rights is that students are considered as children; and [***I*n] the Ghanaian or African context; children are generally not given the opportunity to express**

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themselves. They are scarcely considered as having any rights. [prejudiced by culture]

They [children] should not be part of what is for the consumption of the elderly... They [authorities] protect their interest. Students will know too much if they are allowed to be part of decision-making

There was no time the SRC as a body met college authorities to discuss and

took a decision on any issue…[absence of involvement]

As a representative on some committees, I was often called…but no discussions took place... Something happens; the administration sits, makes decision and then calls… and informs us as student leaders to tell our colleagues. **[Thus] what happened in such meetings was informational [not recognized as people to share ideas with.**

We learn for life outside the four walls of the school. My non-involvement communicated to me that our leaders were not ready to prepare us as youth to take their place. (for their future lives). There is nothing like a succession plan in their minds. Their thinking at best is 'here and now'…My involvement in decision making would have exposed me to democratic principles for it is rightly said, 'we learn from doing'.

I was not given the chance to express myself in terms of decision making…[voicelessness]

I was not in any way treated as an equal…always considered a child…It meant as a child…I'm thought incapable of doing anything meaningful…**I'm considered worthless, underrated and disrespected…Is it only elders or**

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people in authority who need to be respected…? [cultural colouring – challenging the status quo]

Students as the major stake-holder group in the college are not involved in the process of decision-making...Inasmuch as students who form part of the stake-holders are not part of the decision-making process, we cannot say there is justice...[injustice]

The decision-making process of my college does not conform to human rights for the simple reason that it is authoritarian-the authorities say it and is final; students have no say [voicelessness- violation of the rights of students]

There is nothing like delegation of authority to me as a student leader... The reason is I'm not recognized as a mature person capable of doing anything better...[prejudice-absence of recognition]

In the minds of the college authorities I'm still a child...and in the African context should not exchange ideas with the elderly or mature people. [prejudice]

As a leader I am not genuinely involved in all the areas of decision-making...The few instances that I was invited...I was scarcely given the opportunity to express my views...students are members of a committee but we attend meeting as observers...[token engagement]

My school's decision-making process does not have any form of justice...there is no fairness because I was not given the chance to express my views... [absence of justice]

I was not given the chance to express my opinion...**I was not treated as an equal...capable of doing anything meaningful... [absence of recognition]**

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We were called for meetings; yes...**we were there [in the meetings] as observers...we were handed the decisions that had already been taken. [token engagement]**

The extent of my involvement in decision-making can best be described as just being heard or a token engagement because there were no discussions or deliberations... [not genuinely involved].

As student leaders we were called for meetings to make it appear before the larger student-body that we [student leaders] as their representatives hold discussions with college authorities and therefore endorse every decision that is made... [appearance, misrepresentation]

In fact, nothing like discussions take place; a typical example that pitched the larger student-body against student leadership... [**misrepresentation**]

Habib's Text

Decisions are made in all the sectors of the school… Mostly, the decisions… are made by the principal together with a few selected masters.

The decision-making process of the college is controlled by the masters and the administration…though these sectors have students' representatives who serve on committees with these masters [involvement]

I describe the process of decision- making being followed…as authoritarian. [voicelessness]

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…**When it comes to decision making,** my involvement should not just be calling me to be in a meeting but to be offered the opportunity to participate fully with any form of intimidation.

The decision-making process practised by my college was not useful because of the fact that students who are the major stake-holder group are not genuinely involved in decision-making [not genuinely involved]

The major stake-holder group [students] are not given the opportunity to be part of the decisions that are made in the college so **there is no fairness or justice in the decision-making process of my college [injustice]**

Our masters do not come to teach us at the official times scheduled...They will be teaching somewhere...We seek for redress by meeting college authorities...students are denied...a decision is made without students' involvement and slammed on us...**Students are treated as people who have no rights, no feelings to express [violation of rights]**

I wished I was given...the opportunity to talk, express myself...whether it is stupid or what, let me express my opinion and decide on issues together…I would have wished authorities called me and other prefects, sit together to discuss in a free atmosphere where ideas are shared in mutual respect for all... but that is not the case; **as student leaders we are not given the opportunity to meet with the adult members of the college to deliberate on issues...we are silenced...**[voicelessness]

Even though I've been selected as a student leader, I cannot give instructions to other students...even dining sessions masters are always present to conduct...**there is nothing like delegation of authority to student leaders... we are not recognized as leaders among our peers. [not recognized]**

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We hired labourers to be paid from SRC coffers but the surprising experience about it is the question: 'who determines how much the labourers are paid?' we tried as student leaders to meet with authorities to discuss the modalities...we were denied the opportunity...college authorities finally determined how much the hired labourers should be paid...

Is it true 'he who pays the piper calls the tune?' By my experience, this is applicable to the elderly alone… not to children…We were considered as such [violation of rights-challenging the status quo]

...Students had a problem...We were seeking audience in order for the problem to be thrashed. But what did we see? A decision was taken and slammed on us. This was because we were considered as children with no voice to be heard **[cultural colouring]. Children do not have a common platform with elders when it comes to decision-making. [injustice)-challenging the status quo]**

On many occasions and instances decisions were taken that were not fair to females...often their rights as students in the same college were infringed upon [injustice]

College authorities often called student leaders to meet with us...I observed that it was to portray to the outside world that students were part of the decision-making process...**by my experience, my involvement...was just a token [absence of genuine involvement]**

There is a strong feeling of disillusionment, a split personality. [disillusion] You sometimes become an enemy to your colleagues… **You will be left hanging… You can't go to the administration and you can't go to**

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the students. You find yourself living in two worlds and yet belonging in neither of them; so you feel bad… [loss of self-hood]

I ended up with the message that the elderly play double standards; they cannot be trusted…

They paint a picture that the youth are immature…[prejudice]

As a result, my involvement in the decision-making process of my college was not a genuine one. **From the outside it looked like students were involved; but in the inside we were not [betrayal]**

The rights of students were often violated by the decision-making process of my college...

As a result there were injustices here and there...

The decision-making process was not gender friendly...The females were often discriminated against...

Bintu's Text

Decisions are made by the college's principal together with some selected tutors**. Though students serve on the various committees that make the decisions, they are not involved... [non-involvement]**

Thus, the process being followed can best be described as authoritarian or a dictatorship. Such a process can't be useful since **all groups of people in the college including students are not brought on board for informed decisions to be made... [voicelessness] .**I believe you have to involve all those people in order to achieve whatever [organisation's goal] you want to achieve.

The decision-making process as far as I have observed, does not delegate authority to students...We [student leaders] were used as 'errand boys'.

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Decisions were made by college authorities and the decisions ...made were communicated to the larger student-body through us as leaders. [not recognized- challenging the status quo]

As a student leader I am not involved in the decisions that are made...The authorities have their reasons...The truth is that we students are considered as immature...in the Ghanaian context children have no voice...The adult members of my college often used proverbs such as: Agoro beye de a efiri anopa tutuutu; and yebesi wo so a anka yehyee wo ma [Literally translated as the joyous nature of an ensemble is determined by how it began; and if an individual is going to be given a second round of a sharing of drink –usually, palm wine- it is determined by first whether ones cup-calabash-was initially filled to the brim or not; respectively] to drive this message of non-recognition to us.

The decision-making process of my college does not conform to human rights...I am not part of whatever decisions that are made. My right to be heard, to be involved, as well as to be recognized and respected are all infringed upon. And this total absence of students' involvement in the decisions that are made by authorities portrays the ...process as authoritarian. [violation of rights]

Many of the decisions taken by my school are not fair to one gender- the females... Males are allowed the freedom to move in and out of town...the ladies are not allowed such freedom...the ladies hostels are a little far removed from the centre of the school...there no lights on the way...The SRC took the matter up and booked an appointment with the authorities of the college...however, the SRC was not given a hearing... males are allowed to

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stay and study after 'Prep Time'; the ladies are not... [injustice/ violation of rights]

Students are considered as children and as it is the belief in African societies, children are considered as exhibits. They are not supposed to poke their nose into the discussions of the elderly; elders decide for them. With such a cultural orientation, the elderly can calm their conscience and still cheat students- 'their children'. [culture- challenging the status- quo]

The college community is made up of three distinct groups of people; the college administration, the staff (teaching and non-teaching), and students; the major stakeholder group.

Justice, I understand is fair play. There's justice only when all the three groups [College authorities, staff-teaching & non-teaching, and students] are represented in a decision making process. Unfortunately, students are not involved even though they're the major stakeholder group **[*non-involvement*]**

As a student leader, I was not involved in any area of decision making. In view of that, I cannot talk of a genuine involvement. **There was not a case, a situation where I was called to sit with college administration or its representatives to discuss anything or issue. Nothing of that sort happened. My involvement, if any, would be described as just a 'token'. We were often called…but no fruitful discussions ever took place. [absence of genuine involvement]**

'We chose you to be our leader, thinking you could do something better for us. All you could do is remain silent. All you do is moving up and down throwing

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your hands as leaders. You go for meetings and just fold your arms; we don't know what you are doing for us'.

From the outside it was portrayed as if decisions are made by the administration together with the students' leadership. [Misrepresentation]

At any point, before a decision is taken, student leaders are called. In most cases, we were given prior notice so that we could prepare in advance**...but the decisions arrived at in those meetings were those that had already been taken by college authorities... we were just informed... [absence of genuine involvement]**

They do not have much confidence in us…...probably it is because of the prejudiced belief that students cannot do anything better.

I think the absence of students' genuine involvement in decision making is based on tradition…You see, in Africa we have this belief that the elderly is always right. [culture]

Such an entrenched belief influenced the practice of not involving students genuinely. *Our college's authorities are coloured with this African belief that children should not be permitted to share ideas with elders.* ***With such a belief, I do not think that the authorities shall engage students in any fruitful discussions.***

At best, any involvements of students will just be a formality. [token engagement]

My involvement…was not a genuine one and such treatment gave me a feeling of mistrust… [disillusion]

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The decision-making process of my college was not fair to gender... [injustice]

The non-involvement of students my college decision-making process constitutes a violation of the rights of students-the right to be heard, involved, recognized and respected... [violation of rights]

There was the absence of justice...as far as the decision-making process of my college was concerned. [injustice]

When I think about what I experienced, I become sad, very disappointed with myself, psychologically disturbed with a split personality; my self-worth gone...

Fray's Text

My college authorities involved students in decision-making...The decisions are made with the administration together with the students' leadership... [*involvement***]**

At any point before any decision is taken, students' leaders are called. In most cases...given prior notice...so that students can prepare in advance... **I consider the decision-making process being followed as useful...however, the decisions arrived at are those already made by the authorities before the discussions take place...** [not genuinely involved]

The decision-making process of my college can be described as democratic... However, **in most cases the process violated the rights of students with elements of injustice... [injustice and violation of rights]**

...**they (college authorities) don't have much confidence in us (students)...with probably the prejudiced belief that students cannot do**

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anything better...Authority is not delegated to me as the president of the SRC talk less the other leaders. Even during ordinary sessions like dining, masters come to conduct... [absence of recognition]

I think the absence of students' genuine involvement in decision-making is based on tradition...You see in Africa there's this belief that the elderly is always right...such an entrenched belief...influenced the practice of not involving students genuinely...**My college authorities are coloured with the African belief that children should not be permitted to share ideas with adults...With such a belief I don't think the authorities shall engage students in any fruitful discussions; at best, any involvement with students...will just be a token... [coloured by culture]**

Such cultural colouring made it difficult for me to find where I belong; for any individual considered a child in the Ghanaian culture is thought of as incapable of making any meaningful contribution to society; thus, **students are labelled as immature and irresponsible...they cannot be entrusted with responsibilities...** [prejudice]

I remember when I went to my first council meeting the Teachers' Representative was asked a question. When he was about to answer he told the Chairman 'let this boy know that he is under the oath of secrecy…' **He [the teachers' representative] referred to me as 'this boy'... There cannot be a genuine involvement when in the minds of authorities students are considered as children...**in the Ghanaian culture a child cannot or is incapable of making any meaningful contribution to society. Thus, **children are labelled**

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as immature or irresponsible by the adult world and thus not treated as people who can be entrusted with any responsibilities. [Prejudice]

…whereas **[we] students think we are capable of performing creditably any assignment that would be given to us, they (authorities) don't have much confidence in us as students, with probably the prejudiced belief that we cannot do anything better;** but we also feel that if given the opportunity, we can prove to them that we are more than capable of doing whatever they deliver to us… [Prejudice-challenging the status-quo]

This explains why even though the decision making-process is described as democratic yet students' involvement not genuine. Probably, **authorities called student leaders for meetings to show that students were genuinely involved in decision-making [misrepresentation]**

Any time a student faced the disciplinary committee of my college, the student was sure to be found guilty...By my experience I observed that the authorities of the college played the role as prosecutors, the jury as well as judge [Injustice]

Angem's Text

We have the governing council responsible for the overall running of the College. When we come to the day-to day running of the college, we have the college administration that is headed by the principal. **Decisions are made by the principal or his representatives through committee system. Students are represented on these committees...** [Involvement].

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In spite of this **the decision-making process that is being followed is authoritarian. [Element of control]**

The decision-making process...is not useful…Any decision-making process that is authoritarian in nature cannot be useful...

From the outside it's portrayed as if students are involved in making decisions but this is not so… they will call you alright to meet college authorities, but they have already made their decision... [Misrepresentation]

I attended a meeting where the agenda was on students' fees and utility bills. I raised my hand...was recognised by the chair...I stood up to speak...**I wanted to find out what criterion was used to determine the fees, and the time frame of the accumulated bills. I was stopped.** [Intimidation-element of control]

Surprisingly, I was not allowed to know. I left the meeting with the understanding that decisions had already been taken.

Students' presence during meetings was only needed to make it appear they were represented…what even makes the whole thing ridiculous is the fact that the fees to be paid… as well as the tabulations of the utility bill were on the Notice Board before students were called for a meeting. So to me, it was informational. [misrepresentation]

I was there to be given what had already been decided upon. **The college administration does not see students as being part of what goes in the college...The SRC is seen as different from the main school's administrative process... [absence of recognition]**

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As the financial secretary of the SRC, I was not in any way genuinely involved in my school's decision- making process. I should be genuinely involved; and given opportunity to express my opinions so that I can have something to tell my constituents... [non-involvement]

If my involvement were genuine, I would have been treated as an equal member

of Council…Suppose the Chairman or any other member of Council had made

The request I made, would the principal have brushed such individual off? ... I was just not recognized as an individual who could do anything meaningful... [prejudice]

See… **I was trying to find out the details of an issue… but I was abruptly stopped and asked by the chair to sit... I was not given the opportunity to speak again till the end. [intimidation –element of control]. I wondered and asked myself a few questions…was is not because of my involvement I was given invitation to attend a meeting?...Why was the meeting called? …...why invite me to a meeting and not to be allowed to speak?** [intimidation-challenging the status-quo]

Considering the decision-making arrangements in my college there was no justice. Inasmuch as I was invited to attend a meeting as required by the constitution of the college but **was not allowed to speak my mind on issues that were of matter to me and those I represent, there was no fairness**... Always the mind of school authorities is set on issues ...**As a student I did not have a mouth** [injustice]

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There was no delegation of authority to me as well as other student leaders...the school authorities does not see students as being part of what goes on in the college... The SRC is seen as different from the main stream of the school's administration...There are student representatives for the smooth running of ...the dining hall, general compound cleaning...but masters are always at the heels of student leaders as if left on their own they cannot perform...No doubt we are considered as children...because of cultural belief. [absence of delegation/ recognition]

College authorities do not involve me and my colleagues in making decisions because they [authorities] feel that students are not mature...students' involvement will expose authorities to something that they think should be hidden from students...School authorities are too prejudiced against students...We are considered as children...because of cultural belief [prejudice-cultural colour].

I attended a Council Meeting... The agenda was Utility Bills...I was given the chance to speak...My main concern was to find out the following: the time the bills started to accumulate, the people responsible for paying the bills, and the basis for charging each student 150.ooo cedis...Seeing what I was trying to do [arrive at] I was abruptly stopped and asked to sit down...I was not given another opportunity to speak till the meeting ended...I wondered...and put to myself questions such as: was it not because of my involvement I was called?, why was the meeting called...? Why invite me to a meeting and not be allowed to speak? ... Suppose any other member had wanted to find out the same

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information ..., would such person be stopped and asked to sit down? ... I drew the conclusion: as a student I was called to come, sit and listen; not to participate or meddle myself with what is for the elderly... that day I understood the often repeated proverb which is literally translated as: 'A child cracks a snail but not a tortoise' [injustice, violation of rights...challenging the status-quo]

The decision-making process of my college was not fair to gender...college authorities contracted a single hairdresser to come to our campus on weekends to take care of 300 ladies without students' involvement... [injustice]

I did not experience anything that can be described as genuine involvement... There wasn't any time that as members of the SRC we sat together with college authorities to discuss any issue... I was not genuinely involved...**My involvement was just a token,,, from the outside it looked like I was...but I wasn't... [absence of genuine involvement]**

Aklos' Text

Decision-making in my college involves the principal, representatives selected by the principal... **Student leaders who represent the larger student-body are also part of the decision-making...** [Involvement].

The process of decision-making is democratic...there is room for students to be part of what goes on... [not authoritarian]

In the many instances that I was involved...**the authorities came out with decisions that they had already made...but I still feel that I was part and parcel of ...decisions... [Involvement]**

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Because **I am invited as a member of the SRC**...; **I take part in the discussions and come out with final decisions...**[There's fair play or justice] **The decisions that are made in my college are sometimes not fair to gender... Whereas male students are at liberty to study in the classrooms after "Prep Time" females are not...;** they are locked in immediately after 10.00pm... They can't come out till the next morning; for their hostel is walled and enclosed with a heavy metal gate thus making it difficult for any of them to get out... **Males and female students must be seen as operating under the same rules and regulations...** [not gender friendly]

There were some areas I was not involved in decision-making... One area of much concern was finance... I'm not the financial secretary of the SRC...however, **I expected the college authorities to involve the financial secretary of the SRC but he was not...** In such instances, I was worried with the feeling of disappointment, betrayal and mistrust... [non-involvement] **Majority of the students I represent feel that as their leader I do not articulate their concerns or collective voice...** They are disappointed in me as I am also disappointed in the school administration... The feelings cut across: in the same way students feel they can no longer trust me..., so do I towards the college administration...**they feel I've betrayed them; similarly, I feel betrayed by the college authorities...** [non- involvement; challenging the status-quo]

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I observed that some decisions were taken to cheat students or that infringed on their rights... In order to make themselves sound very credible they [authorities] will often say: 'having considered so and so...as if students do not have the ability to consider as the adult members do... **It just reveals the saying that: 'abofra ne opanin di asem a, abofra na odi fo' (literally translated as any time a child and an elderly person has a case to settle, always it is the elderly person who is proved innocent...). [injustice-challenging the status-quo]** A typical example is withholding students' allowance. What is said to buttress the stand is 'the amount is returned to government chest'. They have already decided and that is it. **However, my interest is in the fact that**

I was invited... What I find unacceptable is that decisions had already been taken before the meetings are called. [External involvement...]

During meetings, the chair and the elderly group do not believe or consider students have the ability to consider what college authorities think best. So in the process of bargaining, students' points of view are brushed off. Such experiences reveal the truth in our Ghanaian culture that, 'abofra hunu ne nsa hohoro a one mpaninfo didi'); (translated as it is only when a child has learned to was his/her hands well that he or she is qualified to eat together with the elderly in society) and also, 'akwadaa b) nwa na)mm) akyeakyede3'. (Translated as, a child cracks snails not the more serious business of cracking tortoise).It means that **culture has put children into a mode; thus, determining what they can or cannot do. [cultural colouring-challenging the status-quo]**

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One area where students' rights are infringed upon is when it comes to disciplinary issues. Any time a student is accused, he or she is already pronounced guilty... the composition of the Disciplinary Committee is biased... [injustice]

Students are called for meetings but always decisions are taken on issues before we are called for discussion... even though we dialogue with them [authorities], it cannot be described as a dialogue in the real sense. ['just being heard']

One clear message my experience sends to me is: there is an adult world into which children must not dare to enter...there is a limit as far as their entry is concerned...and there is the child's world; and adults can enter as often as they can...[wittily, they [adults] say: 'abofra kawa na ennko opanin; ennye n'aduane. (literally, it is the child's ring an elderly can't wear; but as for the child's food, it can be eaten with ease by the elderly) [stereotyping]

Badges's Text

Decisions are very vital in an organization's success. **In my college, they are made by the various prefects that work in those departments in addition to school authorities or representatives of the college administration. [involvement]**

The process of decision-making followed by my college is a democratic one...I am involved in the decision-making process as a student representative... I am often called to sit together with school authorities and discuss issues that are of concern to the school... [involvement]

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There is justice in the decision-making process... authorities just don't call me and give me information... **I am called as a student representative to sit and discuss matters together... I'm treated fairly...I'm given the opportunity to talk...[fair treatment]**

There is some sort of delegation of authority to students... It's however not sufficient... I mobilize students to clear the ... compound... it has never happened seeing a student leader being giver the responsibility of seeing to the implementation of say a part of a project that has been decided upon to be carried out by the whole college... [Not fully or genuinely recognized].

Female students are treated unfairly. This has to do with the styling of their hair. School authorities have contracted the services of a single hair dresser. What makes it serious is, the hair dresser only comes to the campus on weekends to take care of 300 ladies. Obviously, she is unable and they also denied permission to go to town. Meanwhile, their male counterparts have the liberty to go to any barbering shop in town. [Unfair treatment-gender]

The decision-making process of my college conforms to human rights... We were made to pay a stipulated amount for food... students observed the food served did not 'tally' with the amount... students were given the chance to prepare our menu...**we were given the right to choose what we wanted to eat... the right to take part in negotiations and give inputs.**

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The authorities of my school often take some decisions which by nature violate human rights... Students took permission to go to town. They were given. While in town, tese students attended a program organized by the Scripture Union (SU). College authorities sat, and decided that the students took permission to go to town in order to sabotage a religious program being organized by the church on campus...**For this reason the SU Association on campus was summarily disbanded.** The affected students had the right to obtain permission to go out of campus. They had the right to attend any program while in town. Was it their fault to have been given permission to go to town? [Element of control-challenging the status-quo]

There is some sort of students' involvement at the food department but I cannot use the word genuine... in food matters, financial matters, students' disciplinary matters... students are not genuinely involved... [Absence of genuine involvement]

I think the authorities have in mind if they involve students in genuine discussions, they[students] may too inquisitive to dive into what they are being told...if it involves the payment of a particular amount they[authorities] think students may want to know categorically what the amounts to be deducted ...would be used for; the breakdown of the amounts... Authorities are aware ... if students get to know that they are being cheated, they will never compromise ... Authorities do not involve students in ...decisions in order to hide information... and thus, make it easier to cheat them...**students are**

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considered as children and as such must not 'know' some things... [Cultural colouring-Challenging the status-quo]

Though I was involved in decision-making in many instances I cannot describe my involvement as genuine. On many occasions decisions were made by college authorities and students were called to be given what dad already been decided upon. [Not genuinely involved]

The message my experience communicated to me is that there's world where information is stored for use of those who are adults and this translated into the larger society would mean there two types of moral rules- one set of rules for adults and another for children.

Sena's Text

The overall administration of my college is in the hands of the College Council. The day-day-day governance of the school is made up of the principal, the vice principal, representatives of the school administration and some students' representatives [Involvement].

Because **mostly it is like authorities have already taken the decisions before student leaders are called for a meeting, I find the process of decision-making to be a dictatorship or authoritarian** [element of control]

The process of decision-making adopted by my college is not useful...Students' representatives are not called to discuss issues... or at least, one of the student leaders should sit in a discussion with the authorities... for

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students to give their inputs... **To make the process useful, I think any agenda to be discussed must be known to student leaders; then we will discuss the issues with the larger student-body, take their views so that what we present at meetings shall be the collective voice of students. [[element of control challenging the status quo]**

There is no justice in the decision-making arrangements of my college because authorities... are not found to be doing things transparently. They hide things from students in order to cheat them... **we are not given the opportunity to bring out our grievances, articulate our views or share our opinions... [Injustice].**

Decisions are made and handed to us...we do not have a voice. Nobody is prepared to listen to us... [Voicelessness].

The question I ask myself is: 'why are we treated as children... what could be the reason?'... We are shown where 'power lies'... When students' representatives went to meet the patron of the SRC, two other masters joined him. I can't tell whether they were invited by our patron or not; **the point of interest is as we left his office after our meeting, we heard one of them say: 'these students are becoming too known; we shall scrutinize them...'[prejudice-element of control]**

There is no justice concerning the decision making arrangement of my school. Authorities hide things from students in order to cheat students. The element of injustice is that **we are not given the opportunity to articulate our views or share our opinions. We did not have a voice [voicelessness].**

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School authorities consider students as children. They practice paternalism [cultural colouring]

They are prejudiced against students on the premise that students are too inquisitive [prejudice-challenging the status-quo]].

Authority was never delegated to students... Authorities of the school do their own things... no transparency... **no delegation of authority to students;** probably, if that is done, students will get to know a hidden agenda. In fact, **the SRC is most cases rendered impotent; it existed by name. Decisions were made by the authorities and handed to student leaders to be communicated to our colleagues [Absence of recognition]**

As a result **the decision-making process in my college did not conform to human rights...** the right to be involved, to be heard or to know, respected and treated fairly were all infringed upon...knowing too well that even 'the fool is sometimes right'. [violation of rights]

The decision-making process of college was not gender friendly... the decision to contract **just one hairdresser to attend to 300 females at the weekends only... It's not practicable; yet that's what operates...** and painfully those ladies who cannot have their turn are not permitted to visit any other salon in town during the week; they have to wait till the next weekend... **How about the males? They are at liberty to visit any barbering shop of their choice.** It looks like when it comes to gender my school has two set of rules-one for males and another for females... [not gender friendly- injustice]

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My involvement in the decision-making process can best be described as a formality... I was not genuinely involved [token involvement].

The message communicated to me as a result of my experience is: there is an adult world as well as that of the child...Adults prescribe what children must do and are coerced to obey. Adults can easily the child's world. The child can't enter that of the adult without permission. Another is there we live in a male dominated world and surprisingly, females-a majority have accepted it as the norm.

Deku's

When it comes to decision- making, it is the principal, vice principal, senior hall `tutor, some masters and staff who represent the college administration on committees.

Students serve on these committees but I don't find them to be playing any meaningful roles. We attend meetings to receive information. [token involvement].

The process of decision-making in my college is not useful... I serve on the food committee but I attend meetings to receive information... **The process...is bad; it's authoritarian by nature... [absence of students' voice]**

By my experience, I don't think there is justice in the decision-making process of my college... the sale of Hand-Outs [to students] is used as a condition or a means or a guarantee to obtain CA marks...**Students are coerced to purchased 'hand-outs' at exorbitant prices... [injustice-challenging the status-quo]**

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There wasn't any form of delegation of authority to students... I am the Secretary to the SRC... Sena is responsible for women affairs... **The school decides to contract the services of a hairdresser to take care of more than 300 ladies on campus... 'Why did the school authorities not delegate to the two of us such responsibility-to negotiate and report to the administration?'...** We [students] are part of the school, so I think some authority must be delegated to us... [no recognition]

The decision-making process... doesn't conform to human rights...the rights of students are often abused... One hairdresser comes every weekend to take of the hair of more than 300 females... Any time she came, she was not able to attend to even a third of the number...and no lady is allowed to go to town and visit a salon of her choice... [violation of rights]

Decisions are made which violate the rights of students... As a female student I don't have the right to choose who should style my hair... and I don't have the right to ask for permission to go to town after classes any other day... [discriminatory-gender biased]

After 10.000pm ladies cannot go out of their hostel; they are locked up.. The males on the other hand, are allowed to study into the night... the males are at liberty to go to town and visit any barbering shop of their choice... **[gender bias]**

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There wasn't a time when student leaders had the opportunity to meet the college administration for any discussions... All stakeholders were not brought together to sit and deliberate and finally come out with appropriate solutions... **I have come to the realization that my involvement in the decision-making process of my school was just a token...decisions were often made and the outcome communicated to us... [token engagement]**

... Teachers...Hall Wardens...and all who represent the school administration are prejudiced against students; a mind-set which I think is coming from a cultural belief... **They consider us as children...always suspicious of us... [prejudice...cultural colouring]**

The rights of students are often abused as in the case of college administration contracting the services of one woman to take care of more than 300 female students on weekends. If she fails to come at a particular weekend then that is it... [abuse of rights]

There wasn't a time student leaders had the opportunity to meet the college administration for any discussion, to deliberate and finally come out with solutions. I have come to the realization that my involvement in the decision making process of my school was just a token... decisions were often made and the outcome communicated to us... [absence of involvement]

I think students were not genuinely involved in making decisions because as students we were considered as children and therefore not given the opportunity to speak and be listened to. Our leaders also thought students

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genuine involvement will expose what they intend to hide from children...'we are considered as being inquisitive'. [prejudiced by cultural belief. challenging the status quo]

One clear message which my experience communicated to me is that **there's an adult world with a mindset that is prejudiced against children's world. This 'adult world' is interpreted through traditional culture... When the adults want to cheat the young, they use some proverbs such as: Akwadaa bo nwn ommo akyekyedee (a child cracks snails; not tortoise); meanwhile, the same adults believe that when it comes to decision-making, they say 'tikro nnko agyina' (one head is better than one). In sum even though the child has a 'head', there is nothing in it when it comes to making decisions.**

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APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTEURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARTICIPANTS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARTICIPANTS Estimated time : 60 minutes for each		
PART A		
ITEM	ACTIVITY	PROBE/PROMPTS
Introduction	-Greetings and self-introduction -Declaration of purpose of meeting, and seeking participants consent foe audio/video recording/ interview	
PART B Questions – questions may not be followed as itemized Research question one		
Background of participant	a. I want to know who you are. Your portfolio, your background JHS/SHS days. Please can you tell about yourself and the reason(s) for choosing to represent students as a member of the SRC?	Prompt: should indicate positions held at both the basic and senior High school levels and the reason for vying for a position in the SRC. etc.

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	b. What activities are you generally engaged in as far As your portfolio is concerned?	
Areas of College life where vital decisions are made. The process used or followed. (i.e. nature of/ in decision making And Usefulness Social justice	1. In which areas of school life do you think vital decisions have to be taken in your school? 2. Who do you think are actually involved in the decision making process in those areas? 3. What process do you think is being followed in decision making in your school? 4. a. Do you think the process adopted by your school is useful? b. why do you say so?	Q1. Probe: when participants fail to mention other sectors e.g. Can we include say the academic and financial sectors? Q2. Probe: find out for example if or whether committee system is followed and who are represented. Q3. Probe: find out whether there is the element of 'participation' on the side of the students. (i.e. the nature of participation) Q4. Probe: let participants give reasons with illustrative experience to buttress what they say.

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Social justice continued	5. a. Considering the decision making arrangements in your school, would you say there is justice as far as decision making is concerned? b. why do you say so?	Q5. Probe: let participants describe an experience that illustrates injustice/ justice (i.e. fair play) in the process of decision making.
Conflict resulting from decision making	6. a. Are there existing student or staff groups in your school which you think influence decision making? b. why do you think so?	Q6. Probe: let participants give tangible reasons- preferably an experience to illustrate their point.
	7. Do you think there is some external pressure on decision making in your school? b. why do you think so?	Q7. Probe: let participants describe an experience that shows the existence or influence of such pressure.
Delegation of authority	8. a. Are there any conflicts between students or staff and students	Q8. Probe: let participants describe an experience that illustrates a conflict

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(student empowerment)		showing the nature of it.
Human rights	9. a. Do you think there is sufficient delegation of authority to students in your school? b. Why do you say so?	Q9. Probe: let participants describe an experience of delegation or non-delegation of authority.
	10. a. do you think the decision making process in your school conforms to human rights? b. why do you say so?	Q10. Probe: let participants describe an experience that illustrates the presence or the absence of human rights spelling out the type(s) of rights. E.g. the right to be heard.
	11. a. have there been some decisions taken by your school authorities which you think violate human rights? b. why do you say	Q11. Probe: let participants describe an experience that illustrates a violation of human rights and the type(s) of rights.

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Human rights continued	so? 12. a. have there been some decisions taken by your school which you think was not fair to one gender? b. why do you say so? 13. a. do you think the decision taken by your College authorities consider the religious differences of the students? b. why do you think so? RESEARCH QUESTION 2 -The 'how' of students' involvement in decision making.	Q.12 Probe: let participants describe an experience to show this unfairness. (i.e. gender bias) Q13. Probe: let participants describe an experience that illustrates that stand.

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Genuine involvement (a)	14. In which areas of decision do you think students are genuinely involved?	Q14. Probe: ask participants to describe an experience that illustrates a genuine involvement in decision making
No genuine (b) Involvement	15. In which areas of decision making do you think student are not genuinely involved?	Q15. Probe: ask participants to describe an experience that illustrates a non-genuine involvement in decision making.
Reasons (c)Underlying students Non-involvement	16. Why do you think school authorities do not involve you (students) in making some decisions?	Q16. Probe: let participants bring out 'reasons' from their experiences.
Students (d) Feeling about level Of involvement	17. How do you think students feel about their level of involvement in decision making?	Q17. Probe: let participants bring out or spell out the 'feeling' and the experiences that led to such feelings.
Area of (e) Dissatisfaction in decision making	18. In which areas of school life are students often not satisfied about decisions taken?	Q18. Probe: let participants spell out the areas of school life and the 'nature' of the decision made.

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Actions taken (f) By students as a results of dissatisfaction of decisions made	19. a. What actions do students often take when such decisions are made? b. why do students take such decisions?	Q19. Probe: let participants bring out the type of actions. Let them describe experiences that led to the taking of such decisions.
Impact of unfavourable decisions on students	20. What impact do students think unfavorable decisions have on them?	Q20. Probe: let participants give examples of such impacts. Let them describe an experience of an unfavourable decision and associated impact.
Effect of involvements on students future lives	21. Do effects do you think students involvement in decision making have on their future life?	Q21. Probe: let participants itemize effects. Let them describe an experience of an involvement and the associated effect.
How students would want to be involved in decision making.	22. How would you want to be involved in decision making?	Q22. Probe: let participants describe an experience to illustrate the 'how'.

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APPENDIX E

EMERGING THEMES

Emerging Themes and Sources That Influenced Their Identification

Research question one	Research question	Interview data	Literature	Personal idea
Decision making process is authoritarian				
Cultural factor(s) affect/ influence decision making				
Decision making violates students' rights				
There is no justice in the process of decision				

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making				
Decision making is not fair to one gender				
Decision making does not consider religion differences of students				
Research question two	Research question	Interview data	Literature	Personal idea
Students involvement in the decision making is toke (i.e. not genuinely involved)				
Students are considered as children by school				

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authorities				
Non-involvement has psychological impact on students Genuine involvement in decision making prepares students for their future lives				

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APPENDIX F

FIELD NOTES TEMPLATE

Date: November 18, 2012 **Time of observation:11:30** **Observer: Researcher**	
Facts and details in the field site	**Observer comments**
Insert verifiable sensory (information in chronological order)	[insert reflections/ subject responses to the facts and details of the setting]
Reflective summary: [insert below, the overall observation as well as additional questions you have for future data collection]	

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Date: November 18th 2012 **Time of observation: 11:30** **Observer: Researcher**	
Facts and details in the field site	**Observer comments**
Organisational structure of the college **Council chamber** A chamber for council meeting were furnished; an indication of well-defined administrative structure. In line with the administrative structure, all officers e.g. hall masters had their offices where they operate SRC Secretariate of much interest was the secretariat constructed for the SRC to operate. It was well furnished with needed gadgets to make the SRC operational. **Students Accommodation** The lady's' Hall, though very near the Colleges' administrative block was walled with a very thick gate. The males' hall was not walled.	As I listened to participants' comments and compared with my reflexive thoughts, I found that the college had a very well defined administrative structure…a well-defined organogram. The college compound had lights during the night except the road that leads to the ladies hostel. Council meets at scheduled tomes and student leaders who serve on the council are invited by the college administration to discuss issues The college dining hall, though was not very spacious to accommodate all students during dining sessions. Plans were in place to add more space at the adjoining sides of the hall.

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Reflective summary The existing evidence of the colleges administrative structure, give evidence that in as much as SRC has a secretariat, students would be involved in matters when it came to decision making. I could draw the conclusion that college authorities care for the welfare of students. What messages could such a well-defined structure communicate to students? Their lived experience will answer such a question because it is one thing putting up a structure and another thing working it out.	

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APPENDIX G

Thematic Structural Analysis of Participants Text

Table 1: Thematic Structural Analysis of Asabek's Text

MEANING UNITS	INTERPERATIVE CONCEPTS	SUB-THEME
Students serve on these committees… so students are part of the decision-making process…	Involvement	Being involved
Students who are the major stake-holder group are not given the opportunity to voice out their opinion about issues… I describe process… as authoritarian….	Not offered opportunity to express views-element of control	Not given voice
Students' inputs, views or opinions are not sought for in matters that concern students… I attend council meeting only to present a case minus any involvement in discussion as a full member…	Not fully engaged in meaningful discussions	Not genuinely involved
There is injustice in the decision-making process of my college. I'm not recognized… I am the S.R.C. President but I cannot give any instructions to my fellow students… the reason is that there is nothing like delegation of authority.	No delegation of authority.	Not recognized
Because the decision- making process is authoritarian the rights of students were often violated…..	Rights not recognized	Violation of rights.
In most cases the female students are discriminated against…	Not being fair	Injustice
I found that the so-called decisions to be arrived at have already been made before I was called as a student leader….	Not given opportunity to share ideas.	Not genuinely involved

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A meeting was scheduled between college authorities and student leaders…We were mandated to pay the casual laborers the figure proposed by the authorities.	Imposition of decision-element of control.	Not given voice
Decisions are imposed; and that is the main reason… I describe the decision-making process of my school as authoritarian.	No deliberation.	Not genuinely involved
When it is official time for our teachers to teach, they are nowhere … Students approached the vice-principal and complained… A meeting was scheduled… A day before the scheduled meeting, it was postponed… Teachers concerned had met the vice principal on the issue … without students. The communiqué that came out of that meeting read thus, Henceforth tutors shall be engaging students for normal classroom interactions at odd times; students are therefore to take note and comply' .	Total disregard of students' welfare-challenging the status quo	Disillusioned
I am called to attend meetings but … I am given or handed down the decisions which have already been made …	Not offered opportunity to discuss and debate	Not being recognized violation of rights.
In February, 2011 College Council met… I had been given an invitation… The meeting started… The principal gave the overview of what he had planned for the academic year…. I was called to make my presentation. In brief the SRC was requesting for a piece of land to put up an SRC Secretariat…. After the presentation the chairperson gave a few remarks and asked the principal; 'do you have a piece of land for your student? The principal answered in affirmation… 'Prefect, see	Intimidation-unfairness	Violation of rights and injustice/disillusioned

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the principal …. You are excused' … The principal added: 'You are being asked to leave'. I stood up and left very confused … filled with feelings of disbelief, disappointment, anger and betrayal.		
As I went away I asked 'where do I belong and what does it mean to be a member of a college council….'	Absence of recognition-challenging the status quo.	Not recognized-confused
The point is I was not just invited as a student leader …. I was invited … like any other member of council …..	Not treated fairly as an equal	Violation of rights/not treated as equal.
I have never experienced any genuine involvement in decision making …. My engagement was just a token.	Absence of deliberation.	Token engagement
There has not been any occasion where I, as college prefect, have been called to discuss any issue with college administration on behalf of students ….	Not accepted and being part of a Absence of recognition.	Token engagement Not recognized
Psychologically, I become disoriented, disillusioned, demoralized and thus lose any self-worth.	Loss of self-identity.	Disillusioned-psychologically disturbed
I am not recognized as an individual with any interest in the community where I belong; and that I have no rights.	No recognition	Not recognized as an individual with rights.
The one main reason why students were not genuinely involved on decision-making was that we were considered as children …..	Adult prejudice	Being prejudiced

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TABLE 2: Thematic Structural Analysis of Opak's Text

MEANING UNITS	INTERPERATIVE CONCEPTS	SUB-THEME
Most of the decisions of the college come from the principal and some people who work close with him….	Absence of students' involvement.	Not being involved
The process of decision-making being followed can best be described as a dictatorship. The authorities say it and it is final ……	Absence of students' involvement.	Not being involved
My understanding of justice is fair play or fair treatment … there is injustice. …	Not given fair treatment.	Injustice
The same leaders tell us 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'.	Challenging the status quo.	Violation of rights
Since students were paying the piper (laborers) did we (students) not have the right to call the tune by deciding how much the laborers should be paid or at least, by being involved in the negotiation process ?.	Not recognizing the right to negotiate- challenging the status quo.	Injustice and violation of rights/ disillusioned
The principal called us (student leaders) for a meeting… There was nothing like discussion …..	Not offered the opportunity to share views.	Not genuinely involved
In my college … the voice of all groups are not heard; especially that of students, who form the majority…	Voicelessness –no opportunity for deliberation	Not given voice
We are often invited by the principal for it to look from the outside we (student leaders) go to have discussion with college authorities …	Absence of discussion	Not genuinely involved

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By calling us to a meeting … he wanted us and others to think that he did not take decision alone…	Portraying a meeting has taken place.	Non-involvement
When the principal met the whole school he said: "I called your leaders… and told them…." The 'calling' connotes a meeting and therefore a discussion…..	Looking as if discussion has taken place Absence of deliberation.	Non-involvement Non-involvement
There was unfairness to gender. Females are always discriminated against.	Unfair treatment to gender.	Gender bias
The process of decision-making did not involve all stake-holder groups.	Absence of students' voice-inequality.	Not given voice
Once I observed our bath house facility had a broken tap causing the whole bath-house to be flooded …. I rushed to the Senior Hall Master and told him about it. 'I am coming! I am coming!' he shouted at me. He said this absent-mindedly.	Absence of recognition	Not recognized
The point of interest is that if the Senior Hall Master recognized me as a leader, he could have asked me to do that which he could not do at that present moment …….	Not recognized as a leader.	Not recognized
I was a student leader but I did not have the authority to give instructions to other students…. Because the college administration does not consider me or any other student leader as people with the ability to do anything on its behalf….	No delegation of authority	Adult prejudice

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There is so much of intimidation in my college…. Decisions are already taken so what you are going to say will not add or subtract anything……	Intimidation-not offered opportunity to discuss	Not given voice
This stance of my principal is based on culture. More often the adult members of my college showed this believe with such saying as: Akwadaa bo nwa ; ommo akyekyedee (literally, a child cracks snails which is easier but not the dangerous and relatively difficult task of cracking tortoise.	Cultural colouring-identity crisis	Prejudiced (as a result of cultural belief) disillusioned
At best the extent of my involvement in the decision making process of my college can be described as just being heard ; there was never a deliberation.	No opportunity for genuine engagement –	Token engagement

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TABLE 3: Thematic Structural Analysis of Fray's Text

Meaning Units	Interpretative Concepts	Sub-Theme
My college authorities involved students in decision- making… The decisions are made with the administration together with the students' leadership….	Involvement.	Being involved
I consider the decision-making process being followed as useful… however, the decisions arrived at are those already made by the authorities before the discussions take place….	Absence of deliberation	Not genuinely involved
In most cases the process violated the rights of students with elements of injustice. …..	Unfair treatment	Injustice and violation of rights.
They (college authorities) don't have much confidence in us (students) … with probably the prejudiced belief that students cannot do anything better … Authority is not delegated to me as the president of the SRC talk less the other leaders.	Absence of recognition.	Being prejudiced/not recognized
My college authorities are coloured with the African belief that children should not be permitted to share ideas with adults…. With such a belief I don't think the authorities shall engage students in any fruitful discussions at best, any involvement with students…will just be a token .	Coloured by culture.	Prejudiced as a result of cultural belief/token engagement
Students' are labeled as immature and irresponsible …. They cannot be entrusted with responsibilities.	Prejudice	Being prejudiced/not recognized

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He (the teachers' representative) referred to me as "this boy"….		
There cannot be a genuine involvement when in the minds of authorities students are considered as children. Children are labeled as immature or irresponsible by the adult world and thus not treated as people who can be entrusted with any responsibilities.	Prejudice	Not recognized
We students think we are capable of performing creditably any assignment that would be given to us , they (authorities) don't have much confidence in us as students, with probably the prejudiced belief that we cannot do anything better;	Prejudice challenging the status-quo	Not given voice
Authorities call student leaders for meeting to show that students were genuinely involved in decision-making.	Misrepresentation.	Not given voice
Any time a student face the disciplinary committee of my college, the student was sure to be found guilty. By my experience I observed that the authorities of the college played the role as prosecutors.	Unfair treatment	Injustice

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Table 4: Thematic Structural Analysis of Sena's Text

Meaning Units	Interpretative Concepts	Sub-Theme
Mostly it is like authorities have already taken decisions before student leaders are called for a meeting, I find the process of decision-making to be a dictatorship or authoritarian.	Element of control	Non- involvement
To make the process useful, I think any agenda to be discussed must be known to student leaders ; then we will discuss the issues with the larger student-body, take their views so that what we present at meetings shall be the collective voice of students.	Element of control challenging the status quo	Not given voice
There is no justice in the decision-making arrangements of my college because authorities … are not found to be doing things transparently . we are not given the opportunity to bring out our grievances, articulate our views or share our opinions.	Unfair treatment	Injustice
Decisions are made and handed to us ….we do not have a voice. Nobody is prepared to listen to us.	Voicelessness.	Not given voice
The point of interest is as we left his office after our meeting, we heard one of them say: 'these students are becoming too known; we shall scrutinize them,,,'	Being prejudiced- element of control.	Not recognized as adults
We are not given the opportunity to articulate our views or share our opinions. We did not have a voice.	Voicelessness.	Not given voice

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School authorities consider students as children. They practice paternalism.	Cultural colouring	Not genuinely involved
They are prejudiced against students on the premise that students are too inquisitive	Prejudice- challenging the status-quo	Not being recognized as adult members
Authority was never delegated to students, no delegation of authority to students; the SRC in most cases rendered impotent; it existed by name. Decisions were made by the authorities and handed to student leaders to be communicated to our colleagues.	Absence of recognition.	Not offered opportunity to express views
The decision-making process in my college did not conform to human rights.	Feeling of unfairness	Violation of rights
The decision-making process of college was not gender friendly….. just one hairdresser to attend to 300 females at the weekends only … It's not practicable; yet that's what operates….. How about the males? They are at liberty to visit any barbering shop of their choice.	Not gender-friendly.	Injustice
My involvement in the decision-making process can best be described as a formality.. I was mot genuinely involved.	Not genuine involvement.	Token engagement

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Table 5: Moving from sub-themes to overarching Theme.

Sub-themes	Main themes	Overarching theme
Not given voice Decision-making process reveals injustice(Intimidation)	Decision-making process is Authoritarian	
Not being recognized as individuals who are mature enough to make any meaningful contribution to discourse Not recognized as adult	Adult stereotyping	Culture does not promote the practice of participatory democracy.
Decision-making process violates students' rights Decision-making process is not gender –friendly (injustice) I attend meetings only to receive information As a student leader I am only an errand- boy I attend meetings but there is no discussions.	Students are both externally and internally excluded from decision-making	
Level of participation leaves students in a state of schizophrenia.	Student involvement is just a token.	

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Table 6 : Developing Overarching Theme from Meaning Units

Meaning Units	Interpretive Concepts	Sub-Themes	Themes	Overarching Themes
As a student leader am not called to sit together… for any discussion… Students are not offered opportunity to voice out their opinion I attend meetings only to receive information As a student leader I am only an errand- boy I attend meetings but there is no discussions.	No opportunity for dialogue/Discussion	Not given voice	Decision-making process is authoritarian.	
As a student leader I can't give instructions.. We are not recognized I attend Council meeting but I am not treated as an adult member.	No delegation of authority (Prejudice).	Not recognized as adult member.	Adult stereotyping.	
…The decision-making process is authoritarian.. rights of students are violated. It seems there are two set of rules/regulations in my college… one for males… the other for females. From the outside it looks as if I am involved… am called for meetings	Not being fair	Decision-making process violates students' rights (injustice)	Students are both externally and internal excluded from decision-making.	

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but no discussion take place…				
… I attend meetings but the way my principal and other adult members will look at you will deter you to dare to speak. I attend meetings only to receive information… minus any genuine discussion.	Not genuinely involved.	Token engagement	Students' involvement is just a token	Culture does not promote participatory democracy.
Emotionally I become depressed…with a lot of self-esteem. …I sometimes become an enemy to my colleagues…you will be left hanging…you can't go to the authorities…you can't go to your fellow students…	Emotionally disturbed/Loss of self-identity	Split-personality.	The level of involvement in decision-making leaves students in a state of schizophrenia.	

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APPENDIX H

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

In case of reply the number and date of this letter should be quoted

My Ref. No. TE/GES/582/6/79

Your Ref. No.

REPUBLIC of GHANA

TEACHER EDUCATION DIVISION
HEADQUARTERS
Ministry Branch Post Office
P.O. Box M. 45
ACCRA.

Date: 24th March, 2012

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION
MR. JOHN PEPRA-MENSAH

The bearer of this note, Mr. John Pepra-Mensah, is a PhD student of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) of the University of Cape Coast.

He requires some information from your outfit for the purpose of writing his thesis as a PhD requirement.

We would be grateful if you could give him the necessary assistance to enable him collect the required information for his thesis.

We thank you for your co-operation.

DR. (MRS) EVELYN O. ODURO
for: SAMUEL ANSAH
DIRECTOR

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APPENDIX I

INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

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27th February, 2012

Our Ref. EP/153-2

The Director
Teacher Education
Division

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

The bearer of this letter, **Mr. John Pepra-Mensah** is a PhD student of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration of the University of Cape Coast. He requires some information from your outfit for the purpose of writing a thesis as a requirement of PhD.

We would be grateful if you would kindly allow him to collect the information from your outfit. Kindly give the necessary assistance that **Mr. Pepra-Mensah** requires to collect the information.

While anticipating your cooperation, we thank you for any help that you may be able to give him.

Thanking you for your co-operation.

Rosemary Boom

for Prof. George K.T. Oduro
DIRECTOR

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