UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

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BY

DELPHIA FAFA AGBAI

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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: Delphia Fafa Agbai

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. (Mrs.) Rosemary Seiwah Bosu

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

Name: Dr. Alfred Ampah Mensah

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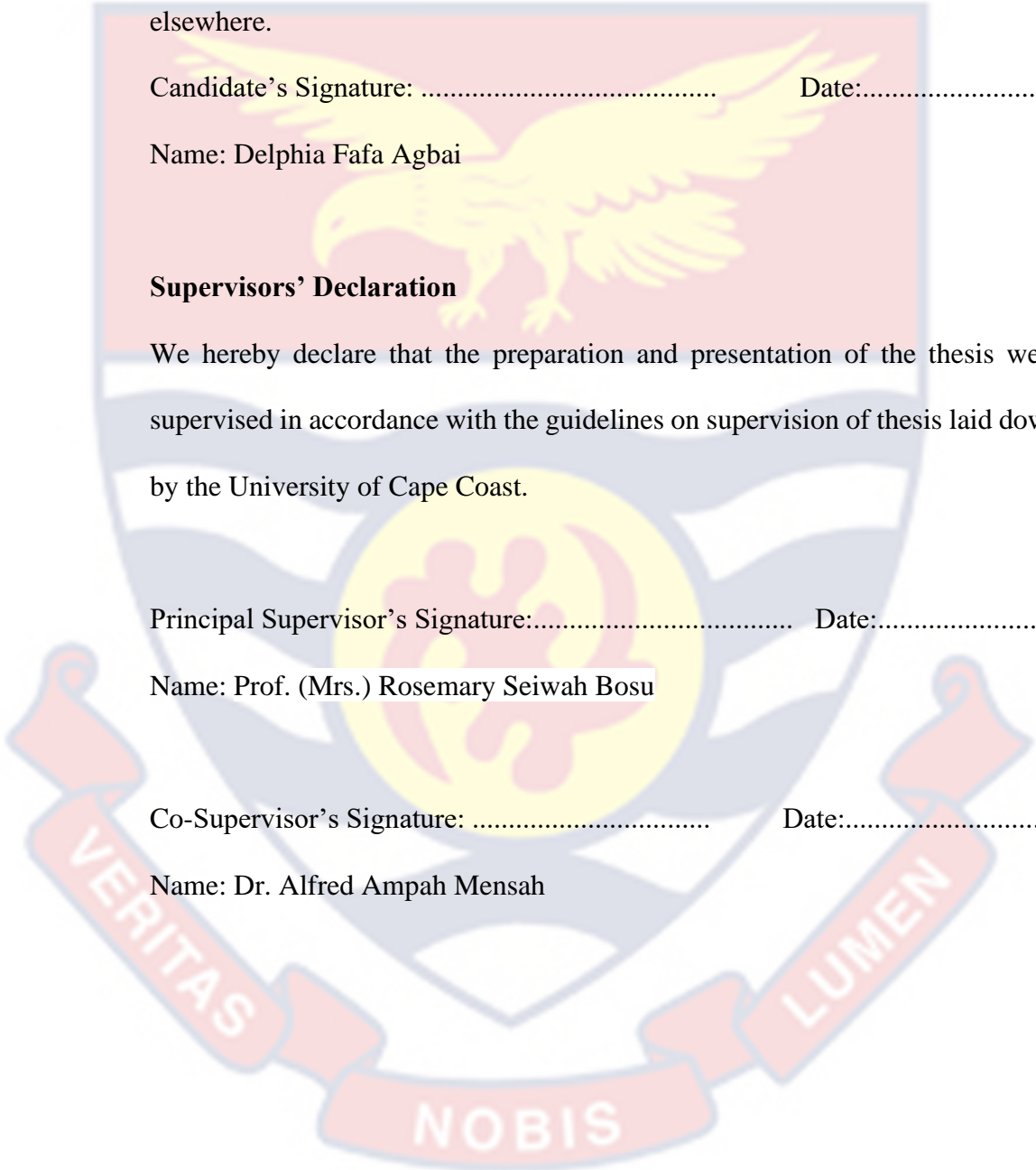
ABSTRACT

The study sought to find out the experiences of first-generation students at the University of Cape Coast. The study utilized the phenomenological approach. The snowballing technique was employed to collect data from 11 first-generation students of the University were collected using an unstructured in-depth interview guide. The study revealed that within the contexts of family and class status, personal expectations, cultural images, and the regulatory structure of institutions showed that first generation student experiences were characterized by a lack of knowledge both prior to and during university years. Also, participants believed that their determination contributed to their success in the University. It was also revealed that access to financial aid and college-sponsored scholarships were repeatedly cited by study participants as providing an opportunity to attend and remain in the university. It was recommended that stakeholders of education should institute and implement policies that can support first-generation students in the various tertiary institutions in the country. Another recommendation was that providing role models and developing strong relationships with potential first-generation students can led to increased number of students applying and attending the University.

KEYWORDS:

Experience

Family

First-generation

Students

University

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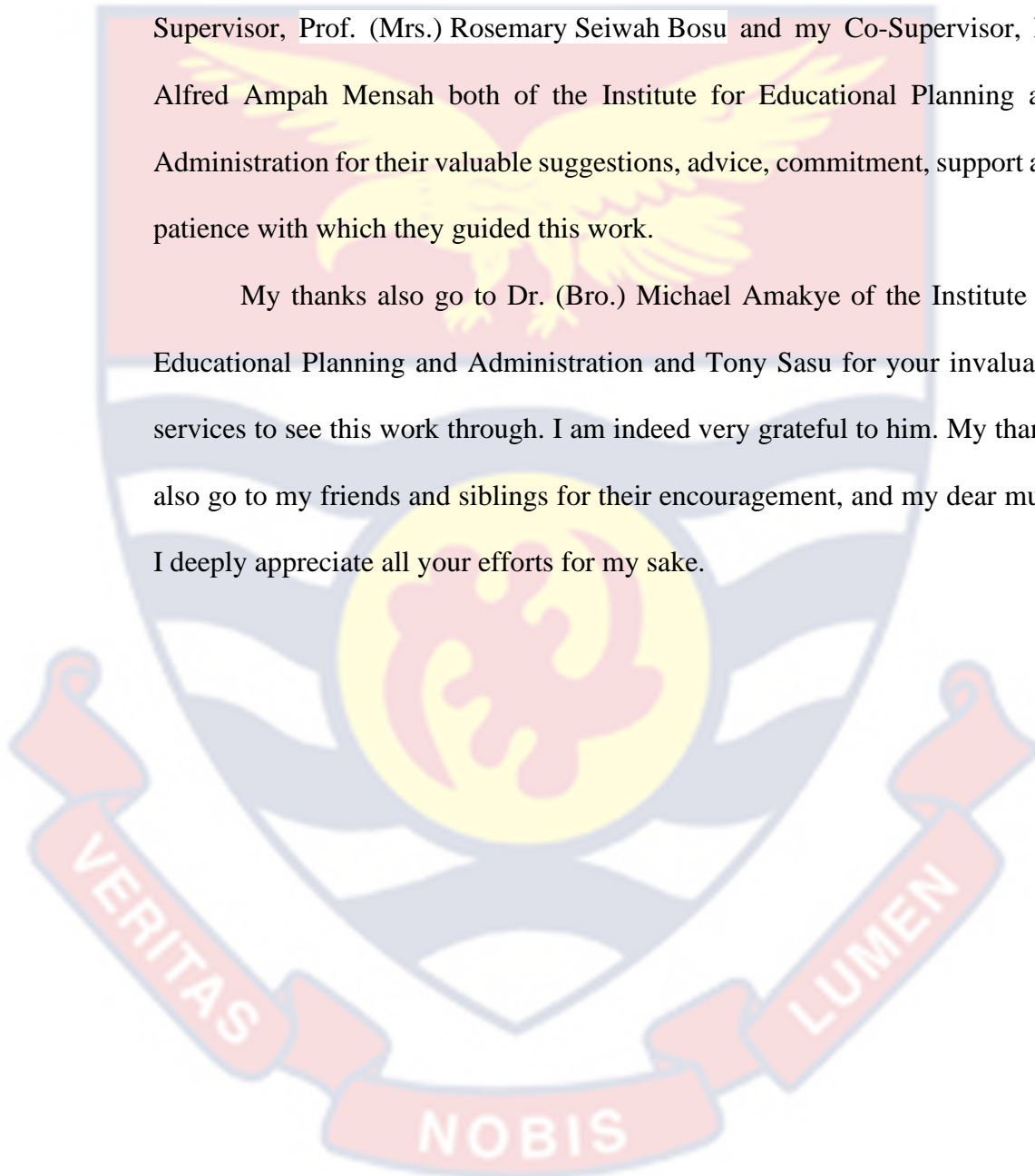
DEDICATION

To my mother, Aurelia Ama Ayitey for believing in me and encouraging me

and to my sons Andy Selinam Amuzu-Kpeglo Jnr, Daniel Senam Amuzu-

Kpeglo and Emmanuel Seyram Amuzu-Kpeglo, your sacrifices for me to pull

this work through means a lot to me and I promise you, I shall also sacrifice

the rest of all I have now for your growth and development. This I pledge and
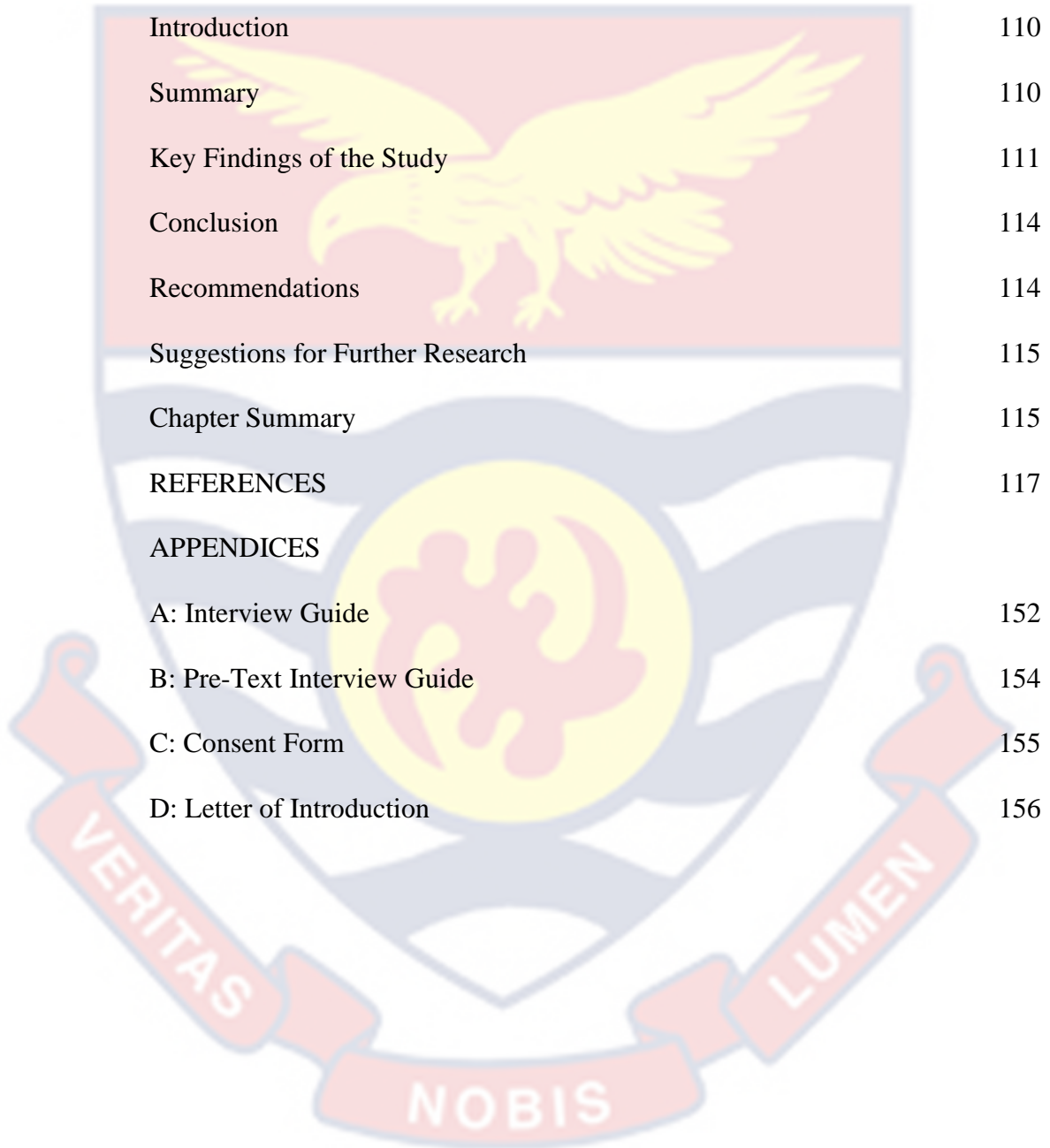
may God be my help.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Access and success in higher education is not simply a matter of students demonstrating academic ability but mastering the 'student' role in order to understand the lecturer's expectations and apply their academic skills effectively to those expectations. This appears to be a common phenomenon amongst students who have little intergenerational knowledge of higher education institutions (Collier & Morgan, 2008). These students tend to perform poorly, not only because they may be poor academic achievers but because they often do not know the institutional culture and how to navigate the systems, a process that will allow them to be part of such institutions and to succeed (Jehangir, 2010; Letseka & Breier, 2008; Letseka, Cosser, Breier, & Visser, 2010).

As higher education has become more accessible to different groups of students across countries in the world, more of these groups of students are students who were first in their family to attend university (Strayhorn, 2006; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Also, understanding how to navigate the process of gaining acceptance to university can be extremely thought-provoking for students. First-generation students are often at greater disadvantage because their parents lack the knowledge base of how the process works and what steps need to be taken along the way. Many students whose parents attended any higher institutions like university or college get ahead and even anticipate to go on to any other higher educational institutions.

Background to the Study

The pursuit of higher education represents a pivotal time in identity development. First-generation university students in Ghana and the world over, most of whom come from low-income and minority backgrounds are often not fully informed as to the benefits of university, what it takes to attend university, and how to navigate the university entrance process. First-generation students tend to be older, minority, more likely to be female, have dependent children, and come from low socioeconomic homes with parents who did not obtain a college degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). According to Chen (2005), the term first-generation students refers to those whose parents did not graduate from university and have a more difficult time successfully completing university than other students. Greenwald (2012) asserts that in recent decades, the number of students who are first in their families to attend college has risen significantly, from approximately 17% of entering students in 2007 to nearly one out of three students in 2012.

Literature focusing on first-generation college students (FGCS) has shown how these students often come from significantly different backgrounds than their continuing generation peers (college students who have at least one parent who has graduated from college). These backgrounds can include being students of colour, having minority ethnicities, or being from lower class white families, and pose difficulties in their transition to a post-secondary institution. FGCS are not as academically prepared since they often do not have access to Advanced Placement courses, mathematics beyond basic classes, or standardized test preparation (Bui, 2002; Engles & Tinto, 2008). First-

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generation university students receive lower grades (Chen, 2005), earn fewer academic credits (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004), and are less likely to graduate from university (Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009) than students whose parents attended and graduated from university. The problem, however, is that keeping such first-generation students enrolled in the university has proven to be a challenge. Choy (2001) reported that first-generation students were twice as likely to leave university prior to the start of their second academic year than students whose parents attended university. Her study also revealed several other factors that contributed to attrition among first-generation university students. These included receiving low grades during the first academic year, working a part-time job while attending university, not participating in campus activities, and not immediately enrolling in university after the completion of high school. Also, first-generation students are, along with minority and low-income students, considered "at-risk" student populations. Prone to performing poorly in university, or even dropping out, the risk factors for these groups of students are elevated by lack of parental support, low socioeconomic status, and inadequate academic preparation (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Choy 2001; Oldfield, 2007).

First-generation students are further characterized by their higher propensity for working full-time while attending university part-time (Warburton, Bugarin, Nunez, & Carroll, 2001). These attributes and qualities each influence the likelihood of persistence for first-generation students. The less engaged these students are and the less committed to the full university experience, the more likely they will be to drop or fail out of university (Pascarella, Wolniak, Pierson, & Terenzini, 2003). Pike and Kuh (2005) suggest

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in their research that first-generation students have a lower propensity of measuring up on some key university success indicators. Specifically, they noted that first-generation students were not as engaged in university life, had a lessened view of the supportive nature of their campus, and did not believe they had developed as much intellectually. Pike and Kuh (2005) believe that these variants are largely related to where students live while in university, as well as their educational aspirations. Pike and Kuh (2005) note the consistency of their findings with previous studies conducted by Chickering (1975), whereby residing on campus while in university had a positive relationship to learning outcomes and expectations for educational outcomes and intellectual development.

In response to first-generation student difficulties, most universities have placed significant emphasis on first-generation students and their unique needs for achieving academic success, maintaining enrollment, and meeting the requirements for graduation. Institutions have responded by enhancing existing support programs, developing new initiatives, and investing in additional resources that can provide these promising students with a realistic opportunity to be successful in university (Cushman, 2007). Zipin (2005) similarly argues that students who come from poor communities are at a disadvantage in schooling because they have not inherited cultural ways of knowing and learning. While Zipin's (2005) research focuses on school contexts, his theoretical model may be equally applicable to all teaching and learning contexts, including that of higher education.

Given disadvantaged backgrounds, students have to make huge adjustments to make their educational goals a reality. First-generation students

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are faced with the challenge of navigating higher education institutions on their own as few of their support systems at home may understand the magnitude of the work they have to complete as well as how to access support within the institution. The role that is played by families is significant to the success of students who join higher education. Croll (2004) highlights the importance of families as supportive structures that provide not only the identity and security to young people, but are also influential to the FGS educational outcomes. He contends that in addition to the higher socioeconomic status of the family, parental activities such as communication, mentoring and monitoring of homework are likely to lead to favourable educational outcomes for young people.

Parents and family members of FGS may not understand the time, energy, and emotions that must be invested in higher education institutions to be successful (Clark-Keefe, 2006). There may also be conflicting and multiple families and community pressures on FGS. Some FGS may be self-motivated individuals who are determined to achieve success beyond their family history. Other FGS may be driven by challenging family situations. They may be determined to break the cycle of either poverty or helplessness by entering the academic world with the hope that it might improve their socio-economic status and allow them an opportunity of good employment and a middle-class lifestyle. Their parents may also see their children's access and successful completion of a higher education degree as an opportunity for them to be relieved from the families' financial burdens (Thomas & Quinn, 2007). FGS are faced with other challenges that contribute to success within higher education namely lifestyle, social and shared living, financial needs, access to support available at the

university, bursaries and a general understanding of finding systems that can make the transition from high school to higher education bearable. The message that FGS receive is that their cultural capital, language, and resilience are not useful in the higher education context. Only when they are able to reshape themselves in the likeness of the status quo, can they be successful (Yuval-Davis, 2010).

The University of Cape Coast admits thousands of students each year. The students admitted include first-generation students (FGS) and continuing-generation students. First-generation students most of the time struggle before getting the opportunity to pursue their program of choice or even get admission to the University. Most of the research that talks about FGS focus on deficit amongst FGS and very little in the ways in which students may navigate the higher education system (Kiguwa, 2014; Mehta, Newbolt & O'Rourke, 2011). Research also examines their agency in the context of disadvantaged positions to navigate higher institutions strategically. It is in this context that this study aims to explore the experiences of first-generation students in the University of Cape Coast.

Statement of the Problem

Considerable research has been done on First-Generation Students (FGS) in Australia (Burge, 2012; Gale & Tranter, 2011) the United Kingdom (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2010; Thomas & Quinn, 2007) USA (Aries & Seider 2005, 2007; Karabel, 2005; Leathwood & Read, 2008) and South Africa (Lourens, 2013; Fataar, 2012). These studies are consistent with the majority of the studies regarding first-generation students, placing first-generation students at a major disadvantage within higher education. Bui (2002) found that first-

generation students reported knowing less about the social environment which can lead to university withdrawal. Pike and Kuh (2005) reported that first-generation students were less likely to be socially and academically engaged. Additionally, first-generation university students have been found to have lower GPA during their first year than non-first-generation university students (Warburton, et al., 2001).

Students' academic and social success during the first-year is a reflection of their experiences within the institution; and their incorporation into the social and academic community fosters cognitive development as well as a self-perceived adjustment (Sedlacek, 2004). The literature suggests overwhelmingly negative experiences of First-Generation Students (Mamiseishvili & Rosser, 2010; Owens, Lacey, Rawls & Holbert-Quince, 2010). A search through literature available indicates that many of these studies are not centered on the experience of first-generation students. Also, there appears to be limited research in Ghana that deals explicitly with the topic of First-Generation Students. It appears that most first generational students in the University of Cape Coast find it difficult in choosing the program they want to offer and also find it difficult in coping with their studies on campus. Therefore, the focus of this study is to find out the experience of first-generation students at University of Cape Coast. Most first generational students in the University of Cape Coast appear to find it difficult in choosing the program they want to offer and also find it difficult in coping with their studies on campus.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of the study was to explore the experiences of first-generation students at the University of Cape Coast. In order to achieve the main purpose of this study, the following specific objectives were set to:

1. To determine the factors that motivate first-generation students to seek and achieve higher education in the University of Cape Coast

2. To ascertain the challenges encountered by first-generation students at University of Cape Coast.

3. To examine how first-generation students overcome the challenges experienced in the university of Cape Coast.

4. To know the measures that have been put in place by the University of Cape Coast Management to support first-generation students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

1. What factors motivate first-generation students to seek and achieve higher education?

2. What are the challenges encountered by first-generation students at UCC?

3. How do first-generation students overcome the challenges experienced in the university?

4. What measures have been put in place by the University Management to support first-generation students in UCC?

Significance of Study

This research has provided additional information regarding the issues facing first-generation university students as they adjust socially and

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academically to the university environment. The characteristics of first-generation university students provide the motivation to explore their university adjustment to identify issues that may hinder their progress in academia with the ultimate goal of improving their university experience. As the participation of first-generation university students in higher education will continue researchers of colleges and universities may need to conduct studies of the academic and social adjustment of this population to ensure that programs and services are responsive to first-generation students.

This study contributes to the knowledge base of higher education administrators, professors, professional staff and others who seek a more holistic understanding of first-generation students enrolled in institutions of public universities in Ghana. As first-generation students continue to enroll in higher education, it will be increasingly important for those who work with these students in the classroom, in academic support centers, or elsewhere to understand their particular needs and concerns, their backgrounds, and pre-tertiary experiences in order to effectively support and encourage them in managing their university experience. Studying the experiences of first-generation college students can help to inform decisions university make concerning policies and new programmes, as well as retention strategies, freshman seminar courses and approaches to orientation.

Delimitation of the Study

The researcher could have investigated different factors pertaining to first-generation students in the University of Cape Coast. However, the interest to investigate only first-generation students and the challenges they face in the University of Cape Coast was the singular prerogative of the researcher

believing that they are those who are deemed to be vulnerable in the University. The study was further delimited to only the University of Cape Coast, specifically, respondents who are first to be in the University in their respective families and the experiences they are going through. The reason for selecting them was because they possessed all the characteristics in relation to study. Besides, they fall within the category of people needed for the study. In addition, looking at the time frame for the completion of the research, it was not achievable to include the other members such as the University Management in the study. Therefore, selecting only the first-generation students gave the researcher the advantage to work within a time frame. Finally, a single study of this nature cannot cover an entire spectrum of a problem, hence, it is prudent for this study to concentrate on selected aspects of the problem.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include the small size of the sample. As the sample size was small ($n = 11$), a larger sample size may have yielded different results. Additionally, as to the voluntary nature of this study, the sample may not be representative of the University's population. Students volunteered to participate in this study, which may have resulted in the sample being different from a randomly selected sample. Although this sample consisted of first-generation students, it may not be representative of all first-generation student populations on the University of Cape Coast campus. The second limitation of this study was that the researcher is a first-generation student in her family. As a first-generation student, I was familiar with many of the experiences shared by the study participants, which could have influenced the analysis of the study's data.

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A final limitation is that the participants in this study could be considered successful first-generation students. As students had completed a minimum of 15 credit hours of coursework, they were successful in persisting through at least one semester. Hence, the experiences shared by this sample of first-generation students may not be representative of all first-generation students, in particular, those who were not successful in their first semester of tertiary education.

Definition of Terms

Academic Integration: the process of student assimilation into the formal (i.e., classroom and laboratories) and informal educational system (Tinto, 1975).

Academic success: it is a measuring tool for graduate schools, and Pascarella et al. (2004) estimated undergraduate grades have "a modest positive impact" on being employed full-time early in one's career in a position appropriate to one's bachelor's degree.

Attrition: refers to students who fail to re-enroll at an institution for consecutive semesters (Seidman, 2005).

First-generation college student*:* A student of whom neither parent has completed a college degree or received any postsecondary education (Choy, 2001).

Gender: as used here, it encompasses not only sex but also the social and cultural meanings attributed to being male or female. Gender is the social construction of sex (Hilke & Conway Gerheardt, 1994, p.1).

Higher Education: refers to postsecondary education, including but not limited to universities, and including colleges and technical training institutions. In

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Ghana, it is commonly referred to as tertiary education where it applies to colleges of education, and polytechnics.

Persistence: a student's continuation behavior leading to a desired academic goal. Persistence is interrelated with retention and attrition, and conceptualized by Seidman (2005), as the "desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning through degree completion" (p. 14).

Phenomenology: Research philosophy based on the detailed words, meanings, and voices or lived experiences of the participants in the study.

Retention: occurs when an institution retains a student from admission through graduation (Seidman, 2005).

Sense of belonging: the psychological sense that one is an accepted member of a community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Social Integration: for this study, this term refers to peer-group interactions and faculty interactions, which can be influenced by grade performance and intellectual development (Tinto, 1975).

Organisation of the Study

The study has been organised into five chapters. Chapter one provides an overview of the background to the study which serves as the basis for the entire study. This is followed by statement of the problem and to be addressed as well as purpose of the study, and research questions to be investigated. The chapter concluded with the significance, delimitation and limitation of the study and definition of terms. Chapter Two focused on the review of related literature. It discussed comprehensively the concept of first-generation students, factors that motivate first-generation students to seek higher education, challenges that first-generation student face in higher education, coping strategies first-

generation students use to overcome challenges they experience in higher education. Theoretical and Empirical studies were reviewed on First-Generation Students.

Chapter Three dwelt on methodology highlighting research design that has been utilized to execute the research. It also looked at sampling procedures, instruments for data collection, its validity and reliability, and finally, the analysis of data. Chapter Four reported on the results stemming from the analysis of the data to be obtained from the field work. This was followed by discussion of the results making reference to studies that support the findings of the current study. Chapter Five dwelt on the summary of the study, conclusions, practical implications, recommendations, and limitations of the study. It ends with suggested areas for further research.

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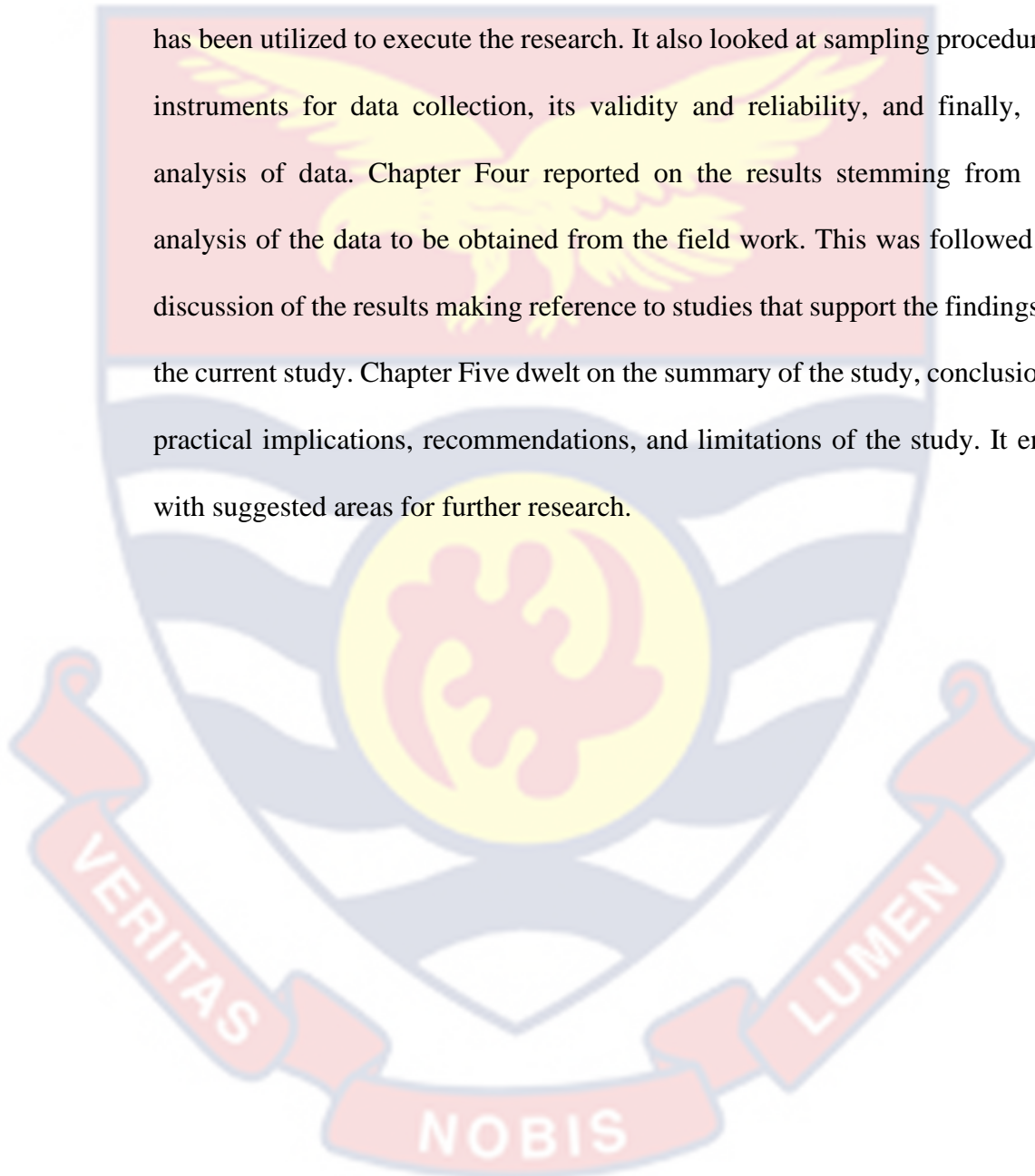
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review provides an important component for establishing fundamental element such as what has already been done or discovered about the topic. Myers (2009) observed that, literature review provides the context for the research topic, builds on previous research and includes the researcher's critical and analytical judgment. This literature review however shifts the focus somewhat to use the lens of FGS, to explore student experiences in a higher education context specifically in the University of Cape Coast. Therefore, the focus of this literature review is to review conceptual and empirical works that have been done on FGS experiences in higher education contexts, globally and locally, in order to locate the current study. Specific focus was placed on concept of FGS, nature of the experiences of FGS in higher education context, as well as conceptual and theoretical approaches to working with FGS. The literature reviewed the concept of first-generation students, factors that motivate first generation students to seek higher education, challenges that first-generation students face in higher education, coping strategies first generation students use to overcome challenges they experience in higher education, and the measures university authorities put in place to support such students.

Theoretical Review

There are many major theoretical approaches that have been used in research that involves FGS. These theories include Bourdieu's social and cultural capital, (Bourdieu, 1986), Yosso's social and aspirational learning theories (Yosso, 2005), resilience theory (Luthar, 2003; Ungar, 2008) and

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Bronfenbrenner's system's theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). These theories will be discussed drawing references from other studies which lie in the context of this study.

Bourdieu's Social and Cultural Capital

Studies of educational inequality frequently make use of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1997) used a social and cultural theoretical framework to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes. He suggested that young people from educated middle class families acquire cultural capital from their parents in a reflexive manner through observing, and interacting with the older generation which ultimately enables them to succeed as adults. Social capital is the totality of real or potential resources from membership in a group (Bourdieu, 1986). The power of social capital depends upon the ability to gain "material or symbolic profits" from the relationships and the form of capital associated with membership (i.e., economic, cultural, or symbolic capital) (Bourdieu, 1986). Parental investments in their child or children's education and social network are transferable into academic achievements. First-generation students, with a social network without (or limited in) institutionalized cultural capital, have fewer investments and therefore, less opportunity to generate educational profits. This serves to propagate educational stratification. The presence and activation of social capital is fundamental to social mobility (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Students with parents who have high socioeconomic status (SES) are more likely to graduate college, but they do so while scraping by academically (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). However, the social networks

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they build and the resources they have, land them better, higher paying careers (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013).

Relative to social origins, cultural capital ensures that children are positioned in social classes that are similar to that of their parents (Asshaffenburg & Maas, 1997). As stated by Dumais (2002), the acquisition of cultural capital and subsequent access to academic rewards depend upon the cultural capital passed down by the family (Lareau, 2000), which in turn, is largely dependent on social class. Cultural capital refers to a general familiarity with the traditions and norms necessary to be successful at an institution of higher education (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Miller, 2007). This familiarity is developed and passed on from interactions with others. In most instances, cultural capital would be learned from parents and/or peers who are attending or have successfully completed higher education. FGS, by definition, do not have parents/guardians who have knowledge of higher education that they can pass on to their children, and are therefore likely to have less cultural capital than non-first-generation students. FGS, who do not have this 'cultural capital,' do not understand the importance of involvement in all the activities that are part of higher education life, and then they struggle to adjust to higher education. The end result is that FGS earn lower grades and are less socially satisfied. Other studies have shown that they have lower graduation rates (Mehta, Newbold & O'Rourke, 2011). However, Yosso (2005) challenges Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital as something that only the middle and upper middle classes possess. While acquisition of cultural capital is a continual process (Bourdieu, 1986) that occurs throughout college, achieving equilibrium with non-first-generation students may prove arduous if the accumulation of

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dominant forms of capital begins at matriculation. Furthermore, first-generation college students' responsibilities outside of academia (Darling & Smith 2007) may hamper the accumulation process.

Cultural and social capital are integral to this study, as is economic capital due to its influence on the attainment of other forms of capital. Cultural capital has cumulative effects over the course of socialization and once transferred, acts as a vehicle for social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, cultural capital actively creates hierarchal distinctions that reproduce social class and the system of stratification. Students with more cultural capital intrinsically know "the rules of the game" and are able to navigate education. First-generation students are commonly from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, but their socio-economic statuses are recondite in elite institutions of higher education. How one attains social and cultural capital upon entering and inhabiting the institution of higher education remains an obscure question with no definitive answer. Given that most first-generation college students come from low-income families and low-income students are underrepresented at elite institutions of higher education, it follows that low-income first-generation college students attending elite universities are at a marked disadvantage when adjusting to their new environment composed primarily of upper middle-class students.

Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Theory

Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth "challenges traditional notions of cultural capital and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledges, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged" (p. 69).

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In her theory, Yosso describes alternative forms of capital possessed by marginalized peoples that are typically unrecognized by dominant groups and institutions: Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. Familial capital refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. Social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources. Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind. Resistant capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality. Yosso (2005) believes that the success of non-first-generation students cannot only be attributed to their social and cultural capital as Bourdieu indicates. The challenge is that the capital that the FGS bring to the higher education context is hardly ever integrated into the curriculum or social activities of some higher education institutions and this makes the FGS to believe that their culture does not count in higher education and forces them to integrate into a culture that is not necessarily their own.

Kiguwa (2014) agrees with Yosso and affirms that educational institutions in South Africa post 1994 reflect some cultural practices and expressions of experience that highlight cultural dynamics of power and these sometimes determine dominant experiences in higher education contexts. According to Jansen (2004), the final bridge to cross in order to achieve social

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integration at formerly-white higher education institutions in South Africa is to create an inclusive institutional culture, which he describes as, "the way we do things around here", in which students from diverse backgrounds "feel at home" (p. 122). The question therefore has been asked about how students cope given the oppressive structural context and resilience theory has attempted to explain apparent coping.

Yosso's CRT based framework guides this study as an attempt to capture a culturally competent view of the first-generation college student experience by expanding what is understood about their strengths, community resources, and cultural wealth. For the first-generation student, being able to join and expand college networks, including securing mentors and joining student groups while in college is often hindered by their unfamiliarity with college culture (Tinto, 1998). This unfamiliarity has enabled many researchers to approach studying first-generation students from a deficit framework, highlighting what they do not know and studying their achievement despite what they do not have in comparison to better-equipped students. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital consists of contacts and memberships in networks that can be used for personal gain (or human capital development). However, with Bourdieu's centering of voices and experiences of privileged, dominant member's society, Yosso's main critique concluded that Bourdieu's framework created a dichotomy that validated white, middle-class culture while consistently viewing students of color from a place of deficit.

Building upon ideas illustrated in Bourdieu's dominant-culture focused cultural capital framework, (that refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in

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society), Yosso (2005) utilizes critical race theory to center the theory on cultures of communities of color paying attention to the knowledge, skills, and abilities valued by the marginalized communities.

Bronfenbrenner's Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's systems theory uses the concepts of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem to emphasize the importance of understanding bidirectional influences between individuals' development and their surrounding environmental contexts (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). Bronfenbrenner's theory suggests that the major challenge of the education system is to understand the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between the individual learner and multiple other systems that are connected to the learner from the ecological system theory or systems change perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory takes into consideration the background and history of a person as well as his/her personal characteristics. The model acknowledges the environment as well as societal systems a person functions within and accounts for the reciprocal interaction between the person and his/her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological model after recognizing that the individual-contextual relationship was overlooked in other theories of human development, which were largely focused on either the individual or the context of development (e.g., the environment).

The microsystem is the innermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's model. This context is closest to an individual and encompasses interpersonal relationships and direct interactions with immediate surroundings. For example, family members and a child's school are considered part of the microsystem

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(Bronfenbrenner, 1995, 1998). The mesosystem refers to the relationships that develop and exist between the microsystems i.e. a mesosytem is a system of microsystems. An example of a mesosystem is a learner who comes from an unsupportive home environment may not receive the emotional support she/he requires, thus placing that learner at risk of developing possible barriers to learning. The same learner might have an attentive caring teacher who is able to provide a positive support that can boost the self-esteem of the learner.

The home and school environment complement each other for the benefit of the learner (Landsberg, Kruger & Nel, 2010). The exosystem does not directly affect individuals but encompasses aspects of structures within the microsystem. For example, financial difficulties within the family of origin and parental job loss, may affect a child, but do not involve the child directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The macrosystem is the outermost layer of Bronfenbrenner's model. This system includes social or cultural ideologies and beliefs that affect an individual's environment. For example, laws may be incorporated into the macrosystem. The systems theory will focus mainly on the experiences that might facilitate or hinder the FGS's progress in higher education (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). Bronfenbrenner's systems model is an appropriate model to study the experiences of the first-generation students as it allows for the examination of the reciprocal and dynamic interactions between the student and the campus environment (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Alford (2000) conducted a study to understand the formation of relationships by African students at urban commuter colleges in the North Atlantic region of the US. He found Bronfenbrenner's system's theory useful to understand the experiences including the problems these students faced in adapting to new environments.

This research seeks to explore the experience of First-Generation Students (FGS) in higher education (HE). Much has been written about FGS in the international literature (Jehangir, 2010; Jehangir, Williams & Jeske, 2012; Sellar & Gale, 2011) but little work has focused on the concept of FGS in Ghana and most specifically the University of Cape Coast to explore experiences of access and success, as well as widening participation in higher education. Most of the literature on FGS in Africa have focused on groups of historically disadvantaged students who are denied systematic access to higher education (Bangeni & Kapp, 2007; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012; Vincent & Idahosa, 2014).

Relevance of the Theories to this Study

First-generation college students face multiple barriers on the road to degree attainment in higher education. Theories of cultural transition have been applied to various populations associated with underrepresentation and lower persistence rates in higher education, but little research has applied these principles to the unique circumstances of first-generation college students. According to Bourdieu (1997), social and cultural capital refers to an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. Bourdieu asserts that cultural capital (i.e., education, language), social capital (i.e., social networks, connections) and economic capital (i.e., money and other material possessions) can be acquired two ways, from one's family and/or through formal schooling. The dominant groups within society are able to maintain power because access is limited to acquiring and learning strategies to use these forms of capital for social mobility.

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Yosso (2005), on the other hand, believes that cultural capital is not the only form of capital that determines success or failure in higher education, there are other capitals that play an equally important role in the success of marginalised students in higher education. It is the higher education setup that promotes the culture of the dominant group in the systems that determine success or failure of students even though students come from diverse groups. In Yosso's (2005) opinion, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, it is rather an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued (p.76) by privileged groups in society. She further explains aspirational capital which forms part of the cultural wealth theory. Bronfenbrenner's systems theory suggests that the major challenge of the education system is to understand the complexity of the influences, interactions and interrelationships between the individual learner and multiple other systems that are connected to the learner from the ecological system theory or systems change perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). The framework uses the concepts of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem to emphasize the importance of understanding bidirectional influences between individuals' development and their surrounding environmental contexts (Donald et al., 2010). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory takes into consideration the background and history of a person as well as his/her personal characteristics. The model acknowledges the environment as well as societal systems a person functions within and accounts for the reciprocal interaction between the person and his/her environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This study therefore draws strands from each of the above-mentioned theoretical frames

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and concepts to explore the experiences of first-generation students in the University of Cape Coast.

The Concept of First-Generation Students in Higher Education

Understanding the experience of First-Generation Student (FGS) requires an extensive exploration of the concept. The category of "first-generation college student" was introduced over 30 years ago (Davis, 2010). Students fit within this category by the following definition: "Students can claim first-generation student status if neither one of their parents or guardians possesses a four-year degree." (Davis, 2010, p.xiv). Examination of this group of students over the past years has established: (a) there are a large number of these students in higher education and more will be coming to campus; and (b) they often encounter difficulties in the campus experience (Davis, 2010; Housel & Harvey, 2009; Ward, Siegel, & Davenport, 2012). Not only do they often struggle with the academic classroom experiences leading to graduation, they also struggle with the social cultural challenges of campus life (Davis, 2010; Housel & Harvey, 2009; Ward, et al., 2012).

First-generation students are not new in higher education. The first surge of low-income, first-generation students occurred in the 1800's after the passage of the Morrill Acts (Trow, 2001; Woodbury, 2005). The term 'first-generation' in and of itself, does not have one set definition in academic discourse. It is a much debated and contested term locally and in other parts of the world. The notion of FGS intersects with debates on whether race alone can be a marker of disadvantage or whether other factors such as class or FGS status should also be considered as markers of disadvantage too (Heymann & Carolissen, 2009). In other countries, the notion of FGS often intersects with notions of "non-

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traditional" students. The question as to why some students should be regarded as traditional and others as non-traditional is a contentious one. This implies that some have the right, legitimacy and ability to engage with higher education while others reach that destination by default (Bruch, Jehangir, Lundell, Higbee, & Miksch, 2005). Although access has expanded, the cost of higher education has outpaced the financial-aid availability, creating a challenge for families to pay for college (Woodbury, 2005).

First-generation students whose parents did not obtain a bachelor's degree enroll in higher education at a much lower rate than continuing-generation students (Choy, 2001). One reason may be that first-generation students have less parental involvement in the application process. They have often been found to be less academically prepared for college than those students whose parents graduated from college. They have been found to have lower aspirations for their educational attainment than their counterparts (Pascarella, et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Those who do access college typically enroll at community colleges at twice the rate of their peers. Once in college, first-generation students have been found to have higher college attrition rates than their peers (Ishitani, 2006; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton, et al., 2001). Literature shows that when compared to their peers, first generation college students are at a pronounced disadvantage regarding basic knowledge about the higher education process, high school academic preparation, degree expectations and plans, as well as socioeconomic status and support (Pascarella et al. 2004; Rood, 2009; Orbe, 2008). Evidence also reveals that first-generation college students have a more difficult transition from high school to college than their peers, are less likely to stay in college and graduate

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(Pascarella et al. 2004; Orbe, 2008; Rood, 2009), and experience increased feelings of alienation and inadequacy (Aries & Seider, 2005; Stewart & Ostrove, 1993).

Given that only about half of high school graduates whose parents did not complete a bachelor's degree enroll in college directly after receiving their high school diploma, the question is in what ways are these first-generation students different from those high school graduates who do not go to college (Choy, 2001). Econometric models, for example, theorize that student enrollment behavior is at least partially influenced by the student and families evaluating the relative value of perceived benefits with the investment of perceived costs (Perna, 2000). In the short-term benefits might include participation in "college culture" (e.g., student organizations, athletics, social engagement) and the joy of learning, whereas long-term benefits may include higher overall earnings, participating in more fulfilling work roles, less unemployment and higher overall health. The perceived costs of enrolling in college include the actual costs of attendance as well as the opportunity cost of lost income during their time as a student where they are unable to work fulltime.

Characteristics of first-generation students

First-generation college students undergo some of the same challenges and obstacles as other students, but also have some of their own distinct struggles. According to Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) there are five key areas where first generation students differ with regards to characteristics from other college students: lack of parental experience with the college application process, how a student prepares for college both personally and academically,

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why they choose to attend college (almost solely as a means to obtain a good job), personal experiences, and their overall personality traits. In like manner, one study found first-generation students completed fewer credit hours, studied less, took fewer courses in the natural sciences, math, and arts/humanities, had lower college grades, and worked more hours per week (Pascarella et al., 2003).

Further research by Brachman (2012) found that first-generation students are less likely to be involved in various academic or social collegiate experiences such as study groups, student organizations, and using support services. Equally important, Inman and Mayes' (1999) study of students at community colleges found that first-generation students are more likely to believe they can work long hours at a job and still be academically successful in college and cite location as much more of a deciding factor in where to enroll than do other students. Furthermore, Padron's (1992) focus of first-generation students at Miami-Dade Community College found that they lacked an understanding of expectations within higher education, faced unsupportive parents and siblings, and were inadequately prepared academically. While academic preparation can help, even those who are prepared can still struggle. According to an achievement report, high-achieving low-income college students are far less likely to graduate from college compared to their higher income peers by a rate of 59% to 77% respectively and even among those who do graduate, substantially fewer when compared to upper-class students will matriculate to graduate school (Wyner, Bridgeland & Diulio, 2007).

Correspondingly, in Lehmann's (2007) qualitative study, first-generation students reported not fitting in, not able to relate to more affluent students with college educated parents, and not persisting to graduation despite

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solid academic performance. Additionally, Orbe (2008) believed two of the primary tensions: individual versus social identity and stability versus change identity were particularly important in understanding the experiences of first-generation students. Although Orbe (2008) was not explicit as to why this is the case, it is certainly possible that, at least for traditional age first-generation students, this may be the first time in their lives they are experiencing such an extreme contrast and tension between their expectations of themselves and the expectations others have for them in regard to success. The first-generation aspect potentially could be most salient, as Bean (2005) asserted that a parent's education consistently had the largest influence on retention compared to parental occupation or income, and that parental exposure provides the additional social and cultural capital which benefits interaction with the institution and adjustment to college.

Ultimately, one can clearly see that, at least up to this point, first-generational status can place a student at risk for greater attrition. All of this being stated, however, studies regarding parental influence have had mixed results. In fact, in one study, Shields (2002) found having a parent who attended a university helped students feel more prepared for the university experience, but that second-generation students felt no more successful than first-generation students, nor did the influence seem to impact GPA or levels of stress, which had been predicted by the researcher(s). To be clear though, this was only one study, compared to many multiple studies that state otherwise. Most research shows first-generation college students come into higher education at a substantial disadvantage and face many obstacles that place them in significant danger for dropping out of college.

For example, Wang and Castaneda-Sound (2008) discovered that first-generation students had lower levels of academic self-efficacy, have more somatic or physical symptoms, and tend to experience higher levels of academic difficulty than other students. That same study (Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008) also found that self-esteem was the single most important predictor of a first-generation student's psychological well-being. As has already been mentioned, there is much research out there that provides a thorough account of why this is the case. Pascarella, et al., (2004) pointed out that typically research on first-generation college students has focused on three distinct stages: the college choice process and ability to access higher education, the transition from high school to postsecondary education, and the persistence of these students along with eventual degree attainment. When it comes to entry level characteristics, some studies have found that those low-income students of greatest risk tended to be female, have lower levels of educational aspiration, have parents with less than a high school education, commute to campus, stop out and return to school later, need remedial coursework, have lower GPA's at the end of their first year, and are more likely to take classes part-time (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006; Chen, 2005).

Furthermore, a that study focused on low-income students found they are less likely to be involved with other students or experiences on campus (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Additionally, separate studies found that first-generational students were more at risk if they were Hispanic, of lower income, and had weaker cognitive skills (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; Terenzini Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). In regard to motivation to attend college, Bui (2002) found that first-generation students are more likely to report

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pursuing higher education to help their families out financially after college, gain respect or status, and bring honor to their families while also expressing a greater fear of failure in college, have more worries about financial aid, and feel they will need to put more time into studying than continuing generation students.

Factors that Motivate First-Generation Students to seek Higher Education

Motivation is a highly complex concept that is influenced by a large number of factors, but can be summarized generally as either extrinsic or intrinsic. Extrinsic refers to external factors and intrinsic refers to internal factors as it relates to an individual. Internal motivators are intrinsic needs that satisfy a person, whereas external motivators are considered environmental factors that motivate an individual (Bassy, 2002). According to Deci (1975), individuals are 'amotivated' when they do not perceive contingencies between outcomes and their own actions. They are neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated. They perceive their behaviors as caused by forces outside of their own control. Motivation is an individual drive necessary to direct actions and behavior towards the achievement of a goal (Analoui, 2000). Research has shown that, for first-generation students, the motivation to enroll in college is a deliberate attempt to improve their social, economic, and occupational standing (Ayala & Striplen, 2002).

First-generation students are at distinct disadvantages across three main categories: demographic/social (the "college knowledge" awareness so instrumental in success); transition (cultural change); and persistence (most likely to leave after year one and, when graduated, less likely to enroll in graduate programs) (Pascarella, et al., 2004). These categories, however, often

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neglect the specific changes and development of these students once in university settings, despite Terenzini et al.'s (1996) cognitive development study that emphasized that the development of these students within the university that is of considerable concern to administrators.

There are a variety of factors that motivate first generation college students to strive for a college education. Higher Education (HE), globally, is widely regarded as an enabler of social mobility to students, irrespective of their life circumstances (Bowen, Kurzweil, Tobin, & Pichler 2006). In this context, the main motivation for students to attend HE when their parents have not, concerns their aspiration towards social mobility and the perception that HE will provide them with a possibility of a steady middle-class income and lifestyle. Jehangir (2010) and Thomas (2012) suggest that higher education is viewed by FGS as a chance to start afresh, and to assist their aspiration to social mobility and financial sustainability that the FGS' parents may not have been afforded and this in turn will have a positive influence in their communities.

First-generation college students differ from their counterparts in both age and family background. Compared to their non-first-generation counterparts, they are more likely to list the ability to get a better job (77.3% versus 71.2%) and make more money (76.4% versus 70.0%) as reasons to further their educations (Pryor, 2005). Terenzini et al., (1996) found that first-generation students received less encouragement from their parents to attend college, compared to second-generation students. Smith and Zhang's (2010) findings indicated that "first-generation students received the least amount of parental support in preparing for and gaining access to college" (p. 66). "Regardless of the emotional support provided by parents, if parents lack

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college experience, it is possible that they may be unable to provide instrumental support while their children adjust to a new context" (Yazedjian, Purswell, Sevin, & Towes, 2007, p. 30).

This could easily be attributed to the likelihood that parents who have a college education are more knowledgeable about college and have access to more financial resources than parents who did not attend college (Hertel, 2002). Dennis, Phinney and Chuateco. (2005) hypothesized that when first-generation college students realized their families were unable to provide the instrumental support necessary, they were more likely to turn to peers when dealing with academic issues.

Attribution theory and self-determination theories have been used to develop a "cohesive motivational theory for students" (Cokley, 2000, p. 536). Both theories address motivation originating from self (intrinsic) and motivation originating from external (extrinsic) factors (Cokley, 2000). Intrinsic motivation has been associated with good academic performance (Deci Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Consequently, intrinsically motivated students are more likely to persist in school than students with a smaller amount of intrinsic motivation. However, research on African students has shown that when students do not link their academic involvement to an outcome, then they are less motivated (Cokley, 2000). Studies have indicated that first-generation students are more extrinsically motivated (Cokley, 2000). Since extrinsic motivation is positively related to academic behaviours of students, it has been suggested that extrinsic motivation may be more affective for first-generation students (Van Laar, 2000). According to Cokley (2000) in a study on first-generational African American students, he found that they tend to begin

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college with a high level of extrinsic motivation inspired by their economic potential. However, if they experience a decline in academic performance, their motivation decreases.

The motives that students have for attending college are influenced by their cultural values (Phinney, Dennis, & Osorio, 2006). Markus and Kitayama (1991) have suggested that individuals with collectivistic orientations are motivated to achieve in order to meet the demands and expectations of others, particularly family members, whereas those with an individualistic orientation are more likely to be motivated for personal reasons. The motivation to attend college can be related to both individual and collective concerns. Individual motivations are based on personal interest, intellectual curiosity, and the desire to attain a rewarding career. Cote and Levine (1997) found that students with personal/intellectual motivation to attend college had higher college grades than those with other types of motivation. Phinney et al. (2006) also found that career and personal motivation was related to college adjustment for an ethnically diverse sample. Motivation for college may be related to the value placed on education as well. Young people from these backgrounds may go to college, in part, in response to family pressure for academic performance and to meet family expectations regarding education.

It is important to underline that the path to university is far from equitable for all students, since the majority come from low-income families. Along with financial constraints, these students face day-to-day challenges such as inadequate academic preparation, a lack of readily available information, and a lack of peer mentoring as they strive to be the first in their extended family to attend university and acquire a diploma. However, as a consequence of the

problems associated with low socioeconomic status, a lack of cultural capital, and a lack of academic readiness, students attend university encountering hurdles that have a negative impact on their academic results. Motivation is tough to achieve, especially when dealing with students who face several challenges. Outside of the classroom, social support may help youngsters accomplish amazing things. Individuals are more prone to have sensations of inner motivation when they are supported by socially esteeming others. Social support may be important for academic success because of its influence on motivation.

Challenges First-Generation Students face in Higher Education

An educational barrier has been defined as anything, natural or made by humans, hindering an individual from completing his or her educational goals (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2010). Rendon (2006, 1995) noted that barriers could be classified into four categories: (a) student-related barriers, (b) institution-related barriers, (c) cultural barriers, and (d) out-of-class barriers. Rendon found that student-related barriers included family background, psychosocial factors, low socio-economic status, doubts about being college material, poor academic preparation, lack of clarity, and unfamiliarity with higher education.

First-generation students experience college differently than their non-first-generation peers (Ishitani, 2006; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Naumann, Bandalos, & Gutkin, 2003; Pascarella et al., 2003; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tinto, 1993). Parents of first-generation students help their children less than non-first-generation parents in selecting a college to attend or with financial aid decisions (Chen, 2005; Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta,

2011; Gibson & Slate, 2010; Thayer, 2000). First-generation students tend to come from lower socio-economic homes and have lower educational aspirations (Bui, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1996). Additionally, first-generation students tend to come from underrepresented minorities groups (Lohfink, & Paulsen, 2005). Perna (2006) explored the characteristics of underrepresented students and categorized this group as disadvantaged, low socio-economic income (based on Pell grant data), first-generation, nontraditional, students-at-risk, ethnic minority, underserved, and students of colour. Many first-generation students struggle to live in two worlds (Hsaio, 1992) the world of college and the world of family responsibilities. As many first-generation students are older, live off campus, and have families to support (Hodges-Payne, 2006) they are more likely not to attend college full-time and work a high number of hours while in college (Chen, 2005; Ishitani, 2006; Prospero &Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Researchers note first-generation students work more and study less than their non-first-generation peers (Bryant, 2001; Chen, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2003). In fact, Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) found that first-generation students work more hours than their non-first-generation peers adding to the likelihood of dropping out of college before their second year of study. Along the same lines, full-time and part-time employment responsibilities, and family obligations have been cited as variables associated with putting first-generation students at greater risk of dropping out from school (Chen, 2005). The majority of first-generation students attend community colleges (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012), with 52% reporting that they plan to enter four-year colleges on a transfer track (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

Results of studies (D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Engle et al., 2006; Warburton et al., 2001; Horn & Nunez, 2000; Terenzini et al., 1996; Majer, 2009) differ when it comes to first-generation student grades earned in college. Although Inman and Mayes (1999) found no significant differences between the grades of first-generation students and their non-first-generation peers, other studies contradict those findings Pascarella et al. (2004) and D'Allegro and Kerns (2010) found that first-generation students earned lower grades in college than their non-first-generation peers.

Sense of belonging

The term 'sense of belonging' refers to one's sense of community or sense of membership or value within a group or organization. Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as "the students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling of connectedness, or that one is important to others" (p.16). Sense of belonging can be viewed as a basic human need that has an influence on a person's behavior. In the context of college, it is particularly relevant as college students are typically in an awkward personal development period in which they are exploring their identity and are highly influenced by their peers. The absence of belonging occurs when students encounter experiences that are unwelcoming or unfriendly or cause feelings of alienation or isolation (Strayhorn, 2012). Sense of belonging is considered significantly important for students who, for instance, "are marginalized in college contexts such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, low-income, first-generation students" (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 17).

Many students feel their working-class identities do not match that of the institution and expectations are not conducive to their values (Stephens,

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Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Stephens et al. (2012) found institutions of higher education adhere to individualistic standards which require students to work and achieve independently which oftentimes can bring feelings of competitiveness. This study found that working-class collectivist cultures can be in direct conflict with this type of environment which tends to value more togetherness, sense of belonging, and family first. Where Strayhorn (2012) has identified these feelings as a lack of sense of belonging, students usually voice these concerns as culture shock (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009). To describe the culture shock experienced by FGS, Reay, Crozier and Clayton (2009) used Bourdieu's (2002) notion of habitus and field described as an "out-of-habitus" or "out of field" experience (p.1110). Gardner and Holley's (2011) study reported FGS felt like an "imposter" that will be "found out" (p. 87).

As students transition into college, they experience feelings of loss as they cope with the decision to leave their high school identities and adapt to new lives as college students (Fassinger & Schlossberg, 1992). Students who perceive a sense of isolation or incongruence with faculty and the dominant campus culture often feel unwelcome and find it harder to persist (Tinto, 1993). In contrast, students who report feeling a greater sense of belonging to the university have a stronger commitment to the institution and are more likely to remain in college (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2002). The development of close friendships and feelings of socially acceptance is critical in helping students develop a sense of identity in the new environment (Panori, Wong, Kennedy, & King, 1995), which ultimately leads to a sense of belonging.

First-generation students often feel like they are alone. As the first in their family (and possibly in their community) to attend college, they can feel

ostracized and unable to relate to their continuing-generation peers. The feelings of separation are further compounded after first-generation students attend college and return to their communities, often commenting that they feel changed by their college experiences and now more distant from their families and hometown communities (Jehangir, Stebleton, & Deenanath, 2015). First-generation students often have their family's support, but this can lead to monumental pressure and empty well-wishes. First-generation students often feel like the "chosen ones" of their family, the individuals who have a chance to succeed through a traumatic situation. This feeling is defined as "survivor's guilt" (Piorkowski, 1983; Tate, Williams, & Harden, 2010).

Struggling to fit in might lead FGCS students to be less engaged. One of the major differences between first-generation college students and their peers was that first-generation students were less engaged and integrated in diverse college experiences (Pike & Kuh, 2005). Not only were they less engaged, but they perceived college less favorably than continuing generation students. As mentioned earlier, the need for many FGCS to work to offset the cost of their education means that they have less time to engage in campus activities (Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, & Ditzfeld, 2017; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Campus engagement activities like study abroad and extracurricular increase the likelihood that students graduate as they contribute to feelings of connection to peers and the institution. Therefore, first-generation students' lack of engagement negatively affects their success. First-generation students are less likely to participate in extracurricular and non-course related activities; however, when they do participate, they are more likely to yield positive

benefits from these interactions than continuing-generation peers (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Lack of support

First-generation students often did not have the same amount of support as their continuing-generation peers (Ishitani, 2003). A large part of today's higher education experience includes engagement in and out of the classroom. Research has shown that first-generation students are engaged, but unlike their continuing generation peers, they rely on themselves for academic success; they do not see others' involvement as beneficial (Pike & Kuh, 2005; Yee, 2015). First-generation students expressed that the responsibility to succeed was theirs alone. For example, they do not expect professors to "hold their hands" and felt that doing well in college required self-discipline (Yee, 2015, p. 845). For FGS, it is a point of pride to continue individual success and enjoy the fruits of their individual accomplishments. Their individualism is also connected to a sense that they do not have access to the benefits that their continuing-generation peers do, so they must be responsible and independent; there is nothing for them to fall back on (Tate, Caperton, Kaiser, Pruitt, White, & Hall, 2015). Therefore, this perspective restricted their ability to form possible relationships with their professors that their continuing-generation peers might establish and benefit from. Additionally, FGS do not seek faculty support because they feel intimidated (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2007). Because first-generation students failed to establish these relationships, they missed opportunities for advice on how to improve their grades and perform well on upcoming exams and assignments (Yee, 2015). This perspective led to subsequent isolationism, for within this thinking first-generation students

reasoned that if they were doing well, they did not need to seek the professor because the professor's consultation was only necessary if help was required.

Furthermore, they also might dig holes of academic difficulty too deep to escape but could have been prevented if they had contacted their professors earlier. In the instances when first-generation students do seek help from their faculty members, they do not yield all the possible benefits as their interactions are either too brief or the students do not accurately articulate their needs as well as their continuing-generation peers (Yee, 2015). Although the student and faculty member are communicating, it is not successful. Additionally, some first-generation students are aware that interacting with their professors might help them with future letters of recommendation but they are unsure of how to develop a relationship, and therefore, tend to avoid the situation entirely (Yee, 2015). Additionally, FGS feel unsupported by their friends. For first-generation students, social support is important for success because it offers an outlet for understanding and reducing stress. First-generation students benefit more from the social support of friendships rather than the academic support that peers might offer (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Durón, 2016)

Role of parents

First-generation students struggle with their ability to navigate the college application and financial aid process, and the transition into higher education (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The limited role of parents in the decision making of their children is a result of never having attended college (McConnell, 2000). Schunk and Pajares (2002) offered that the family environment could influence student's self-efficacy through encouragement and support. Parents who have never attended college tend not to prepare their

children to attend college, unlike parents who have experience in higher education (Engle et al., 2006; Garcia, 2010; Gofen, 2009; Horn & Nunez, 2000; McConnell, 2000). This may explain why first-generation students are nearly four times more likely to drop out of college than their non-first-generation peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Research results have demonstrated that one of the strongest predictors of persistence among college students is the educational level of their parents (Choy, 2001; McConnell, 2000). D'Allegro and Kerns (2010) study confirmed that first-generation students performed more poorly academically than non-first-generation students.

First-generation students lack the advantage of having parents who attended college and can share experiences with their children (McConnell, 2000; Pascarella et al., 2004; Sy, Fong, Carter, Boehme, & Alpert, 2011). Consequently, informational resources such as deadlines for financial aid applications are noted as being especially challenging to many first-generation students (Choy, 2001). Sy et al. (2011) confirmed that parents of first-generation students provided significantly less informational support than the parents of continuing-generation students. Parents of first-generation students lack the knowledge of how to navigate college putting their children at a disadvantage with respect to knowledge of financial aid, navigating the enrolment process, degree planning, and recognizing the value of a college education (Pascarella et al., 2004). Due to their lack of experience in higher education, studies reveal that parents of first-generation students help their children less with decisions including which college to attend than parents of non-first-generation students (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; McConnell, 2000; Thayer, 2000).

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Not only are first-generation students challenged with learning how to navigate the college environment on their own, but many of their parents are not supportive of their children's plans to attend college (McConnell, 2000; Terenzini et al., 1996; Vargas, 2004). Both first-generation and non-first-generation students indicate support received from their parents, relatives, teachers, and guidance counselors were important variables in their decision to attend college. However, Saenz and Barrera (2007) found first-generation students do not receive the same encouragement their non-first-generation peers receive from their parents. Ishitani (2006) associated low parental expectations with higher rates of attrition of first-generation students.

To compound the challenges first-generation students' experience many of their parents do not understand the need for college (McConnell, 2000). Many first-generation parents fear their children will move away from home; may not be able to help with household responsibilities, or will change while attending college (Gofen, 2009; McConnell, 2000; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Smith (2001) found that parents of first-generation students are often apprehensive about the cost of higher education and often refrain from encouraging their children to pursue a college education. In particular, low-income families of first-generation students struggle to understand the benefit of a college education (McConnell, 2000; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

First-generation students struggle with navigating their way into higher education, which includes lack of access to "financial information and social networks" (Saenz et al., 2007). First-generation families do not participate in college visits, and financial aid and planning workshops as do continuing-

generation families (Choy, 2001). First-generation parents have less influence on their children's decision of which college to attend (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; McConnell, 2000; Thayer, 2000), with first-generation students citing financial aid, ability to live off campus, and work opportunities as factors used in deciding which college to attend (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001).

Studies have found that low-income, first-generation students are four times more likely to leave college than their non-first-generation peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008), are more likely to be older, employed full-time, and have dependents to support (Chen 2005; Choy, 2001; Smith-Morest, 2013). Many first-generation students attending community colleges report they plan to transfer to four-year schools or attend to complete specific courses needed to gain employment (Smith-Morest, 2013). Nomi (2005) found in the Faces of the Future Survey, that while most non-first-generation students enrolled in community colleges plan to transfer to a four-year institution, first-generation community college students are more likely to attend college to improve job skills or obtain an associate degree (Nomi, 2005).

However, the six-year outcomes for low-income first-generation students are dismal with only 30% receiving an associate degree or certificate, 14% still enrolled, and 51% having dropped out of school (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Comparatively, low-income first-generation students who began and attended four-year public institutions fared slightly better, 45% received a degree or certificate, 22% were still enrolled, and 33% dropped out of college after six years (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Whether attending a two-year or a four-year institution, the challenge of completion is shared by a considerable number of first-generation students.

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Academic preparedness

Once enrolled in college, first-generation students tend to take fewer credit hours per semester than their non-first-generation peers. First-generation students earn an average of 18 credit hours in the first year of higher education compared to 25 credit hours earned by their non-first-generation peers (Chen, 2005). Additionally, first-generation students report working more hours than other students (Chen 2005; Pascarella et al., 2004; Smith-Morest, 2013; Terenzini et al., 1996). Working has been suggested to result in first-generation students studying fewer hours than their peers and a strong predictor of attrition for community college students (Fike & Fike, 2008). Overall working has been proven to have strong negative implications for first-generation community college student growth and persistence during college (Chen, 2005; Fike & Fike, 2008; Pascarella et al., 2004).

First-generation students come to college with weaker academic skills and preparation than their non-first-generation peers. Fifty-five percent of first-generation students require some remedial coursework. Comparatively, only 27% of non-first-generation students require remedial coursework in college (Chen, 2005). The need for first-generation students to complete remedial courses increases the time to completion, the cost of higher education, and risk of attrition (Chen, 2005).

Collier and Morgan (2008) offer that aside from academic ability student success in college requires "mastery" of becoming the "college student." The researchers posit that students who arrive at college with a clear understanding of what the role of a college student is will better understand the expectations of faculty and respond appropriately. Consequently, first-generation students

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have no reference or resources to learn about the role of a college student (Gofen, 2009; Thayer, 2000). First-generation students may be challenged in understanding what the role of college student requires (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). Research confirms that parents who have attended college groom their children to enter higher education from an early age (Collier & Morgan, 2008). First-generation students experience greater difficulty transitioning from high school to college (D'Amico & Dika, 2013).

Research has also shown that first-generation students benefit more from classroom involvement; participation, and collaborative learning than their non-first-generation peers (Kuh, Pace, & Vesper, 1997; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). Soria and Stebleton's research (2013) found that even though first-generation students benefit from classroom discussion, collaboration, and faculty interaction, they were less likely to engage in the classroom than their non-first-generation peers. Service-learning offers students personalized instruction with high levels of faculty-student interaction (Bui, 2002). McKay and Estrella (2008) suggest that first-generation students would benefit from service-learning courses. Service learning provides the First-Generation Student with the opportunity to develop relationships with faculty and peers who can help them navigate higher education. Service learning can also offer the First-Generation Student the chance to build self-esteem by contributing in the classroom and the field (Joyce, Weil, & Showers, 1992; McKay & Estrella, 2008), in turn building academic self-efficacy.

Financial Aid

First-generation students tend to come from lower socio-economic households (Bui, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1996). Additionally, first-generation

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students tend to come from underrepresented minorities groups (Lohfink, & Paulsen, 2005). Perna (2006) explored the characteristics of underrepresented students and categorized this group as disadvantaged, low socio-economic income (based on Pell Grant data), including first-generation, non-traditional, students-at-risk, ethnic minorities, underserved students, and students of colour. Without the financial support of their families many first-generation students are forced to work while in college (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). The need to work creates conflict between work and academic commitments (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Students enrolled in community colleges tend to be low-income, ethnic minorities, and first-generation students (Kezar & Yang, 2010). These students come from families, which have a limited understanding of higher education including financial aid (Vargas, 2004). However, Somers, Woodhouse, and Cofer (2004) found first-generation students who receive financial aid and work-study awards were more at risk to leave college than their continuing-generation peers.

First-generation college students are concerned with their finances in a different manner than their non-first-generation student counterparts. As they seemingly have more external pressures including family and other factors, the demand for their money is directed to places other than education, and thus the level of stress elevates. Additionally, the financial aid process is often perceived as allusive and mysterious, where the real needs of the students were not considered, but rather the schools assigned "random" amounts. In a study of 204 first-generation students, "Personal responsibility to follow instructions, read the literature available, and acknowledge their own role in seeking information was largely absent among the participants" (Eitel & Martin, 2009). Without

control over the outcome, most students felt frustrated and helpless by the system.

As such, students with an increased debt load or lack of financial understanding lean towards a tendency to "stop-in" and "stop-out" of school, lending to a negative effect on persistence (Harris as cited. in Coley, 2000, p. 13). Belonging, fitting, lack of support, role of parents, academic preparedness, and financial aid are all factors that can have positive or negative effects on the university experience, particularly for FGS.

Coping Strategies First-Generation Students use to Overcome Challenges they Experience in Higher Education

First-generation college students successfully managing to enroll in college have already overcome a significant barrier or challenge (Drotos, 2011). Once students have been enrolled, first-generation college students continue to face unique challenges in higher education. Some students may not have family support in that parents of first-generation students do not always understand educational pursuits (Billson & Terry 1982; Lynch & O'Riordan 1988; Goodwin 2006; Kleinfeld 2009). Traditional approaches to coping emphasize individual traits or styles, that is, stable properties of personality. They emphasize coping as a process in which an individual employs on-going effort to manage specific demands appraised as difficult or overwhelming. Although stable coping styles do exist, and are important, coping is highly contextual and for it to be effective it must change over time and contexts (Eisenbarth, 2012; Folkman, 2008; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

Transition to university life requires that students learn to cope with new work and a different interpersonal environment which imposes many intellectual,

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social and instrumental demands (Wintre, Dilouya, Pancer, Pratt, Birnie-Leftcovitch, Polivy, & Adams, 2011). According to Aldridge and Roesch (2008), the daily stress and coping processes in multi-ethnic adolescents are varied and many. Findings revealed that adolescents use their full range of coping strategies rather than relying on one or two strategies. It was also reported that adolescents regularly employ flexible coping mechanisms which is linked to better adjustment in adolescents. The styles of coping elicited by stressful events are important and closely related to positive or successful adjustment to a new environment (Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer, 2000). Students may devise their own coping strategies, which can be functional or dysfunctional, when faced with stressful situations (Ayele, 2011). Proactive coping and preventive coping have a positive impact on individual adjustment to university life (Schwarzer, 2000), meaning they can be described as functional ways of coping.

Dysfunctional coping strategies are negative coping mechanisms which are destructive to psychological well-being and are associated with a low or poor academic performance. Due to an inherent desire to belong and to feel socially accepted, students find themselves using maladaptive coping mechanisms such as illegal drug use, alcohol abuse and promiscuous sexual behaviours (Thurber & Walton, 2012; Fischer, 2009). These types of avoidant coping methods are dysfunctional and can lead to withdrawal, negative attitudes, and avoidance of problems (Fischer, 2009; Leong, Bonz & Zachar, 1997). According to Tuna (2003), another way of coping for students includes behavioural disengagement, such us reducing efforts to deal with a stressor and/or self-distraction. This involves doing things to distract from the stressor

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and include day dreaming, escape through sleep and in the worst-case scenario committing suicide.

According to Sledge (2012), the greater the family participation in the individual's entry into university life, the better the individual is prepared to cope with the challenges ahead. He suggested that the emergence of negative emotions is likely to appear as students deal with differences in values and morals that they are exposed to in higher education environments. This causes them to question their own, and their family and community values. According to Mudhovozi (2012), positive coping, characterised by an approach-oriented style and problem-focused effort, is related to fewer emotional and behavioural disorders. It also predicts positive academic, personal and emotional adjustment in an individual's first year of tertiary education. The author conducted a study which revealed social networks and effective (and realistic) beliefs amongst positive coping strategies.

Peer support networks and friends are also noted as important for students, as they are able to share their burdens and have positive socialisation experiences. Abdullah, Elias, Uli and Mahyuddin (2010) state that students are likely to use both problem-focused and emotion-focused forms of coping in stressful encounters. For example, a student may rely more on problem-focused coping in situations in which there is a possible change in the outcomes (for instance, coping with the stress felt because of an up-coming examination), but in situations in which little can be done to change the outcomes, such as coping with stress while waiting for the results of an examination, they may rely more on emotion-focused coping. This is a negative way of coping, but it may be the only realistic option when the source of stress is outside their control (McLeod,

2009). Molapsi (2009) reports that other students use positive methods of coping to deal with academic stress for instance, they break down modules into sections, form study groups and try to avoid time-wasting activities. The author also reports that some students state that consulting lecturers and studying hard helped them to cope with the challenge of facing different instructional methods and increased work load in a tertiary environment. Use of active and internal coping strategies such as direct problem-solving, positive thinking and leisure activities is related to positive well-being. On the other hand, the use of avoidant coping strategies such as withdrawal and avoidance is positively related to a decreased emotional and psychological well-being and depression.

In a study with Mexican American college students, Garcia-Vazquez, Vazquez, and Huang (1998) found that students used active coping when faced with challenges. Of the nine possible coping responses from which students could choose, the two most supported responses were *taking a planned action* (i.e., proactive) and talking with friends (i.e., seeking support), while two others, that is, drawing on past experiences and seeking assistance from a professional counselor, were among the least supported. In another study with Latina College students, Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez and Rosales (2005) found that a planned action was used by most participants, while two of the least supported coping responses included seeking professional help from a counselor and not worrying about a stressful situation. In addition, Edwards and Romero (2008) found that Mexican-American youth used active coping responses when faced with discriminatory experiences in an academic setting.

In overcoming challenges, Institutions play an important role in motivating students by understanding intrinsic and extrinsic factors that

motivate students to remain in college. Postsecondary institutions should provide a range of programs to help these students face their challenges and weaknesses. Colleges and universities should escalate the process of creating bridge programs that link higher education to secondary education. These experiences provide academic and social pathways that assist first-generation students overcome inadequate preparation for college. It is recommended using creative approaches to motivate students, such as field trips, presentations by other first-generation college students, and collaborative planning for transition could benefit this population of students (Hicks, 2003). Providing first-generation students with teaching opportunities and research-related professional development opportunities may serve as an incentive for these students' retention (Gardner, 2013).

From an institutional perspective, investments in first-generation student success require a paradigmatic and cultural shift around institutional responsibility and capacity as aligned with first-generation student academic needs and desired performance outcomes. Effective institutional initiatives that support first-generation student success tend to include a series of strategies, including academic and social support structures as well as effective classroom practices that support a more blended academic and social environment. Such efforts are not easy to create and implement, given the characteristic divides across institutional departments and divisions. Strengthening institutional capacity to better serve first-generation students requires the willingness and ability of institutions to realign campus practices to focus on a cohesive and common objective related to student academic success (Harmon, 2012).

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Ongoing academic and social supports before and after enrollment are integral to first-generation student success. As noted by Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2006), academic and social support programs can help students adjust to college and provide clear paths to degree attainment. Nonetheless, while these supports may be necessary, they are not sufficient. It is important to integrate faculty-driven and classroom-based practices as well. In this respect, colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to better support first-generation student success. Although many institutions host programs and initiatives that foster student-faculty interaction through academic and social support activities, much more can be done to enhance students' academic progress. For institutions that serve large numbers of first-generation students, this imperative is especially urgent. Although true for any institution serving first-generation students, his clarion call has sparked a number of innovative efforts to better support first-generation and other underserved populations.

First-generation students are more likely to require remediation than their non-first-generation peers (Chen, 2005). Given this likelihood, it is not surprising that a number of first-generation students tend to struggle in specific disciplines, particularly math and English. It is important that institutions looking to improve first-generation student success work closely with faculty from departments where these students tend to struggle academically. This requires getting a sense of what current departmental standards and processes are and how they may be revised, reworked, or altogether reformed to better support student success. Approaching this work requires institutions to be cautious not to impose such efforts but rather to work collaboratively with

faculty. Offering faculty the flexibility and opportunity to think creatively around assessment, learning outcomes, and development within the context of departmental expectations has proven to be an effective approach.

Instructional styles and course content set the foundation for a student's classroom experience. A number of studies (Chickering and Gamson 1991; Kuh et al. 2006) highlight promising classroom-based practices to increase student achievement; learning communities, supplemental instruction, and applied research are just a few examples of techniques that enhance student success. But how do successful evidence-based strategies work to support first-generation student success? The answer requires institutions to examine current barriers and challenges in the curriculum for first-generation students. Whether it means overhauling a first-year experience program or reexamining developmental and remedial education, successful institutions looking to enhance the curriculum and learning outcomes of first-generation students target crucial moments within the first year of college. Institutions successful with curricular and pedagogical redesign are strategic in their approach and target reform efforts by way of campus-wide opportunities and resources to validate the need for such work.

Like other underserved populations, first-generation students may need support to start and keep them on their path to success. A number of academic and social supports have proven helpful in cultivating student success, including bridge programmes, financial literacy seminars, and freshmen orientations. However, these supports are not always sufficient. Institutional policies and practices that include faculty-driven, classroom-based approaches can have a significant effect on retention and graduation rates. Emerging research indicates

that high-impact practices involving curricular change and faculty involvement can increase students' academic engagement, thus increasing their chances of staying in college.

Chapter Summary

The literature review provided important ingredient for establishing foundational element on what has already been done or discovered on the topic: the following areas of study were considered conceptual and theoretical review with emphasis being placed on literature work on factors that motivate first-generation students to seek and achieve higher education, challenges encountered by first-generation students, overcoming the challenges experienced by first-generation students and supportive measures for first-generation students.

Theoretical bases, literature reviewed as well as empirical studies visited have provided evidence that first-generation students face different experiences in college globally. However, no substantial evidence has been found in Ghana, especially among students of the University of Cape Coast of their experiences. Studies on persistence, attrition, challenges amongst others gave contradicting findings of which the study will come clear of the issue. There seems to be no work done locally towards experiences of first-generation students in Ghana. Again, the lack of literature and interest in first-generational students' study has necessitated the study. Furthermore, this study will add up to the varying research and literature on first-generation students across the world. This study will also contribute to policy formulations by relevant stakeholders in the education sectors.

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The chapter provided detailed information on the research path followed in the examination of the experiences of first-generation students at the University of Cape Coast. This section described the research design of the study. It explored the population, sample and sampling methods. In addition, data collection and data analysis procedures as well as ethical issues considered in the study had been discussed.

Research Design

Research design sets the philosophical foundation and orientation of an investigative process. According to Brewer and Hunter (1989) diversity of methods implies rich opportunities for cross-validating research procedures findings and theories. To exploit these opportunities means developing a broad-based research strategy exploring new avenues that methodological diversity presents. According to Creswell (2007), research paradigm is used to describe a researcher's philosophical view and conceptualisation of reality. This worldview about reality is the perspective, or thinking, or school of thought, or set of shared beliefs, that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data (Alise & Teddlie, 2010). Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) defined research paradigm as the conceptual lens through which researchers examine the methodological aspects of empirical investigative processes to determine the research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed. This has significant implications for every decision made in the research process, including choice of methodology and methods.

According to Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006), qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting to obtain in-depth understanding about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them. They further explained that the central focus of qualitative research is to provide an understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants (informants). Qualitative approach focuses on the depth of information rather than generalization about a much smaller number of people and cases. Qualitative researchers are interested in exploring and/or explaining social phenomenon as they occur in the natural setting.

Within the qualitative paradigm of this research, the study utilized the phenomenological approach. I was deliberate in choosing a research methodology that best aligned with my research objectives. Phenomenology is a relevant philosophic methodology that was utilised to describe the phenomena. A phenomenological inquiry "is an attempt to deal with inner experiences unprobed in everyday life" (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology, rooted deep in the works of philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, and Mach, was formally introduced by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century (Moran, 2000; Guignon, 2006). Husserl defined individuals as connected meaningfully with everything else in the world (Vagle, 2014). Phenomenological principles assert that scientific investigation is valid when the information gained comes about through rich description that allows

for understanding of the essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994). The philosophical phenomenological method comprised four intertwining steps: 1) the epoche, 2) phenomenological reduction, 3) imaginative variation, and 4) synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological data are the participant's descriptions and perspectives related to the phenomenon to be researched (Groenewald, 2004).

Creswell (2007) describes two types of phenomenology: hermeneutical phenomenology, which focuses specifically on interpretations by the researcher of a phenomenon of interest, and transcendental phenomenology, which is primarily focused on creating detailed descriptions of the study participants' experiences and allowing the essence of the participant's experiences to emerge. The type of phenomenology that best suits itself to this study is that of transcendental phenomenology because of its focus on specific, meaningful, individual experiences of a phenomenon; in this case, those narrated by first-generation students at the University of Cape Coast.

The goal of this study was to learn more about the lived experiences of a group of first-generation students within the university environment. As a result, efforts to collect information about and understand that lived experience were focused on capturing as much of the essence of what it means to be a first-generation student as possible, rather than on measurements or statistics. In this kind of study, the researcher must speak with the student, spend time with him or her at the university, and engage with the student in a thorough way. The intent of this study was to interpret and to understand as opposed to observing, measuring and predicting. First-generation students as a concept experienced

differently by each subject, and therefore each subject's life experiences were described differently during the interactive focus groups and one-on-one interviews during data collection.

Furthermore, within the phenomenological paradigm, the case study comparative approach was adopted to be able to see and know the views of the students in order to avoid the risk of generalities on issues which according to Rohlfing (2012), regardless of how similar cases are they can never be perfectly identical. Many researchers support the use of case study as a strategy of inquiry when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Yin 2003). A case is either designed as an instance of a class of events (George & Bennet 2005, p.17) or it may be theoretical or empirical or both; it may be a relatively bounded object or process, it may be generic or universal or specific in some way (Ragin & Becker 1992, p.3). A case is a bounded empirical phenomenon that is an instance of a population of similar empirical phenomena (Rohlfing 2012, p. 24). What constitutes a case is largely dependent on the researcher's demarcations as a result of choices made.

The demarcation of a case closely depends on choices made by the researcher whose obligation is to clarify what the phenomenon of interest is (Keman & Woldendorp 2016 p. 422). It is a phenomenon or one of events (Vennesson 2008, p. 22) chosen, conceptualised and analysed empirically as a manifestation of a broader class of phenomena or events. Stake (2006) defined case study as a "qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) . . . over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 73). In this study, the cases are

bounded by time and place/activity (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 2006). Case studies are detailed examinations of one setting or one group of individuals (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992). Case studies are not necessarily purely qualitative, but can contain quantitative components as well (Yin, 2003). Along with structured interviews of the participants, the researcher examined the phenomenon of experiences of first-generation students in the University of Cape Coast as the study unfolded.

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), scientific discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars and a discipline without exemplars is ineffective. A case study is used when the researcher is interested in investigating a problem within a real life context. When studying a contemporary issue in which the phenomenon and its context are closely interwoven, a case study is an appropriate methodology (Yin, 2003). To the best knowledge of the researcher, no formal research case studies have been done that involved the University of Cape Coast. This type of case study could be described as heuristic since it is focused on providing new insights within a specific population (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). This study could also be described as an instrumental case study since this group can possibly represent other societies in similar situations, although that would be determined by the reader and not the researcher. The study took place over a period of six weeks which allowed the researcher to interview the participants under different conditions and achieve a deeper understanding of how they understand the role of taboos in the governance structure in the society. While this study has depth, as with most case studies, it

does not necessarily have breadth. The reader will determine how the information fits into similar situations and how it applies to him or her.

Population

Sekaran (2003) posits that population is the entire group of people, events or things of interest that the researcher would like to investigate in a study. The population of the study comprised all first-generation students at the University of Cape Coast. In all the total population was 50. According to the Students' Record Management and Information Section (S.R.M.I.S) of the office of Dean of Students' Affairs of the University of Cape Coast, 50 students were recorded to be first-generational students and were affiliated to the various traditional halls in the University

Sampling Procedures

A sample is defined as a subset of the portion of the total population and it must always be considered as an approximation of the whole itself (Sarantakos, 2005). This implies that a sample consists of carefully selected subset of the units that comprise the population. Therefore, by observing critically the characteristics of the sample, one can make certain inferences about the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn.

As this study proposed to use first-generation students as the sample, for the study, the snowballing technique was employed in the sampling process where a small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for the study. Using the snowballing allowed the researcher to easily identify the first-generation students. It was going to be a difficult task for the researcher, but using this technique ensured that a first-generation student could easily identify another student and this made finding

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the participants less difficult. This technique according to Morgan (2008) is a useful way to pursue the goals of purposive sampling in many situations where there are no lists or other sources for locating members of the population of interest, but it requires that the participants are likely to know others who share the characteristics that make them eligible for inclusion in the study. The reason for this is that it allowed the researcher the discretion to select respondents who to her estimation are sources of relevant data that would meet the objectives of the study (Sarantakos, 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen (2003). Morgan (2008) further advances the argument that Snowballing is particularly useful for locating hidden population. However, the danger to the tool is the risk of capturing a biased subject of the potential participants because any eligible participants who are not linked to the original set of informants will not be accessible for inclusion in the study. In view of this a sample of Eleven (11) first-generation students were sampled for this study.

Table 1: Participants and their stories

No.	Participant (pseudonym)	Story
1.	Miriam	Miriam did not have the support of her parents as she embarked on her journey to higher education. The parents wanted her to stop her education at the SHS level which was not in her plans. Growing up with her mother and father and three siblings at Abetifi, she was told that in their family no one has ever been to the secondary school. It was therefore a privilege for her to go as far as SHS. Miriam believes that her

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family did not think she was ready for a university education. I made frantic efforts to be the first in my family to attend the university to bring honour to our family name and also be a role model for my siblings. I want to be someone in future. Now am here in the University of Cape Coast reading Bachelor of Arts. The struggles of my family motivated me to learn hard and gain admission.

| 2. | Kweku | Chorkor is a fishing community and everybody there is in the fishing industry. My father is a fisherman and my mother is a fishmonger. I am the fourth born of my parents. My eldest brother died at sea and none of my siblings is in school. It is recently that they were enrolled thanks to the free education that has been rolled out by the government. All my friends are into fishing and it was the singular initiative of my uncle who lives in Koforidua who pleaded with my parent to send me to go to school. Even their decision was for me to end at the secondary school. But being at school and hearing my friends talking about which university to attend motivated me to also aim for the best. My parents had to borrow money for me to pay for my fees and I have told myself that I have to finish the university, get a better job and also help my family |

by ensuring that the rest of my siblings get university education.

| 3. | Yaw | My path to University has been personal because it has always been me and my father. In class five I lost my mother to an accident on the Cape Coast Road. Yaw was born near Kasoa and believes that everyone should have goals since everyone wants something. The oldest of three, Yaw lived in a single-family home with his father and two sisters. According to Yaw, they did a few things together, but everybody had their own agenda. |
| 4. | Mansah | A strong-willed, determined girl, Mansah is reading Psychology with the Faculty of Educational Foundations. Offering perspectives that revealed her humor and frankness, her interview responses were always candid and colorful. From the very beginning, Mansah showed confidence during the interview. Having never participated in something like this, she acknowledged she had no idea what she was getting herself into, but was willing to share it all. Mansah attributed much of her confidence and iron-willed nature to all that she had overcome in her life. Her childhood and adulthood were both impacted by family dysfunction that often resulted in low self-esteem, transitional living, and a longing for a sense |

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of family, the inability to pursue her own dreams, self-reliance, and ultimately, the drive to push forward.

5.	Yacobo	Yacobo sensed from early childhood that she was different from all the others in her community. She was older than most girls in the community. Neither of her parents attended University although they have had some form of education up to the senior school level. Both had to drop out due to financial constraints in their families. They are successful in their business but Yacobo does not want to tow the line of their businesses. She want to be someone who has attained a university degree and to lift the family name high.
6.	Francis	Francis was age 22 and started University after staying home for four years when he completed SHS. He says the poverty level in his family is very high and he had to work odd jobs to raise funds to buy admission forms and subsequently pay for his admission. He says although he is in school, he still works by washing his friends' cloths for money. Francis' father used to be a farmer but now he is in the house as his leg had to be cut due to a snake bite and the mother is also home nursing him.
7.	Gilbert	Gilbert is in his second year at the University. He described his neighborhood as predominately

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farming neighborhood, economically poor but one in which individuals were motivated to pursue their goals. He was raised by his maternal grandmother and taught never to allow his environment to determine his destiny. Gilbert is an only child and the first to gain admission to a university. His aim is to become a renowned journalist.

| 8. | Dominic | He is an education student and plans to break the jinx in his family by proving everyone wrong. Unlike the other participants, his high school was in his community. He and his older brother were raised by their mother and father. He shared that although his parents did not have a University education, they stressed that Dominic would get a one education. In sharing his experiences, Dominic would typically provide his view of the other person's perspective. He was aware of other perspectives. His style of speech was slow and reflective. He is a laid-back and perceptive person. |
| 9. | Daniel | Although many of his high school class-mates did not attend University, he always did well and surrounded himself with people who also went on to University. His parents always had the expectation that he would go to University so he felt like attending university went without saying. He did not necessarily |

understand the meaning of being a FG student at first. He felt that FG status was always portrayed as a negative stereotype. Throughout the entire interview, Daniel was very sensitive and emotional. He really connected with me and immediately let his guard down and poured out his feelings. He cried a couple different times in the interview showing sincerity when he discussed his struggle, triumph, and pride.

| 10. | JoAnn | JoAnn is the only child of her parents. She attributes her academic preparedness to her father because he started teaching her things very early on when she was a little girl. Being from a not so well to do background, her mom did not have the opportunity to attend school and get an education at all. JoAnn is the only girl in a family of many brothers and thus, her mother was very strict with her, especially concerning her education and grades. While she knows there is pressure to please her family, make them proud, and ultimately help them financially, she says that she does not let the pressure get to her. She does what is best for her. |
| 11. | Awo | Awo is a first-year student. The youngest of five siblings, her father died when she was 11 years old. Neither of her parents went to university nor have any of her siblings. University education was never really |

discussed at home and Awo said she didn't consider it an option until a teacher in high school encouraged her to think about it. Thanks to this teacher and the support of a small group of friends, Awo applied to UCC and enrolled in its Social Sciences programme. When she had her admission letter, she said she remembered that her mother saying, "No way, that's not going to happen. It's way too expensive." Other family members and friends, however, "were excited and shocked" that she was planning to attend University.

Source: Field survey (2021).

The views of the selected students were sought to know their experiences in the University of Cape Coast. However, the 11 participants were chosen because the interview had reached saturation. This was so because the responses were becoming the same at a point.

Data Collection Instrument

In as much as in studying a smaller sample, care has to be taken to avoid misrepresentation of the people and their culture, in much the same way, a large sample could be a hindrance to a detailed study of the participants (Small, 2009). A good phenomenological work demands a critical observation of every detailed and smallest experience, which demands staying, and observing actions and inactions of participants. For a meaningful contribution to be made, care should be taken for the data collected to have a rich basis. For this reason, I adopted the Semi-structured interview technique **(Appendix A)** for gathering

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data. According to Briggs, (2007), interviews are commonly portrayed not just as ordinary conversations but as carefully structured to elicit inner worlds of people with minimal intervention and to maximize their value for public discourse. The facial expression and body language of the person being observed should all inform the researcher answers to a given question. Knowledge gained to understand a phenomenon does not always require huge numbers. Sometimes, good and tactful skills and personal contact with just a few people can do the work.

Greef (as cited in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delport, 2005) describes the one-on-one interview as "a conversation with a purpose or an interactional conversation". This purposive conversation focused around a specific topic to elicit information in order to understand the individuals' perceptions, opinions and points of view as formed by their socialization, academic, cultural and life experiences on campus. In this type of interview, the researcher attempts to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewees' point of view or situation (Dawson, 2002). Researchers have to be able to establish rapport with the participant since they have to be trusted if someone is to reveal intimate life information. As a result, one-on-one interviews with all the participants is a flexible approach to data collection, which allows the first-generation students in UCC to talk freely about the experiences they had in UCC as well as providing an opportunity for them to express their experiences in their quest to support themselves on campus. The goal of the one-on-one interviews was to elicit in-depth information that was too sensitive (Polit & Hungler, 1999). The one-on-one interviews will be ended when data saturation will be reached.

The interview guide employed in the data collection is made up of four sections; the motivation factors, challenges, overcoming challenges and measures to assist first-generation students. Each section is made up of at least a question or two to help obtain correct, and accurate information from respondents and also achieve the objectives of the study. Various constructs have been suggested as indicators of the validity of a qualitative research study. De Vos et al. (2005) state that "the strength of a qualitative study that aims to explore a problem or describe a setting, a process, a social group or a pattern of interaction will be its validity." Validity is further enhanced by the in-depth description of the complexities of variables and interactions which will be so embedded with data from the research setting (De Vos et al., 2005).

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

According to Sekaran (2003), validity of an instrument relates to the extent to which it actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Siniscalo and Auriat (2005) state that an instrument has content validity when an agreement is obtained from a panel of judges or experts on a topic that the statements in the instrument do not relate to what they are supposed to measure. The concept of validity is described by a wide range of terms in qualitative studies. This concept is not a single, fixed or universal concept, but "rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects" (Winter, 2000, p.1). Although some qualitative researchers have argued that the term validity is not applicable to qualitative research, yet at the same time, they have realised the need for some kind of qualifying check or measure for their research. For example, Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest that the validity is affected by the researcher's

perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption. As a result, many researchers have developed their own concepts of validity and have often generated or adopted what they consider to be more appropriate terms, such as, quality, rigor and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mishler, 2000; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001).

The discussion of quality in qualitative research initiated from the concerns about validity and reliability in quantitative tradition which "involved substituting new term for words such as validity and reliability to reflect qualitative conceptions" (Seale, 1999, p. 465). The interview guide was given to experts who are well versed in research for scrutiny, taking into consideration how well the items are developed and whether the objectives of the study, research questions and hypotheses, as well as the variables of interest. This helped to ascertain the face and content validity of the research instrument. This purpose was to examine whether the items are related to the research questions and also if they comprehensively cover the content needed to provide appropriate response to the research questions. In addition, it is to determine if any of the items is ambiguous and misleading. Suggestions and corrections made were adopted and incorporated into the interview guide **(Appendix B)** to enhance its validity.

Reliability is concerned with how reliable and accurate the research methods and techniques for collecting data are. The reliability is a way of measuring how well a method provides a researcher with the same results, if the method were to be repeated under the same circumstances. If a method is not reliable, it also lacks validity, but high reliability does not automatically mean high validity. It is possible to use a method that would provide the researcher

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with the exact same results under different occasions, without actually measuring what was intended (Yin, 2003). According to Denscombe (2003) the meaning of reliability is whether research instruments are neutral, and if in doing a similar study the same results will be achieved. Reliability as indicated by Sekaran (2003) is the consistency and stability of a measuring instrument regardless of the stability of test takers. Stangor (2004) stipulates that the reliability of a measuring instrument is the extent to which the instrument is free from error, thus measuring consistency over time variables of interest.

A pilot test of the instruments was then conducted at the University of Education, Winneba. Five (5) participants were chosen for the pilot testing because they were first-generation students admitted into the University. The data gathered were analyzed and it was proven that the instrument was reliable for the main study in the University of Cape Coast. The pilot test further helped to revise and modify the items on the interview guide thereby making the questions simple and clearer.

Data Collection Procedures

An introductory letter was taken from the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) to all hall masters within the university. The administration of the instrument was carried out personally by the researcher. Explanation of the nature of the interview guide was given to the students and permission was sought from the student to record the conversation during the interview. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to motivate them to freely respond to the questions. Data was collected through one section of one-on-one interviews. The one-on-one interviews was tape-recorded, and the audio-tapes listened repeatedly before

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been transcribed to facilitate analysis. Field notes were also scrutinized to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data. However, the interviews was conducted in a quiet environment, but familiar location for example a conference room within the hall. Interviews were arranged at times that were convenient for study participants and lasted no more than 20 minutes. Participation in this study were voluntary and students had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any form of penalty. There were no benefits involved in participating in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life. There were no direct benefits to the study participants for their participation. All data collected during the interviews was kept in strictest confidence. The digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed after the interviews and member checking have been done for use during the data analysis process. The interview transcripts, and the researcher's field notes was used in the data analysis process.

Data Processing and Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is an active and interactive process where researchers typically scrutinize, read and reread data carefully and deliberately in order to search for meaning and a deeper understanding (Polit & Beck, 2008). With the interviews, the researcher decided to use open coding, inspired by a grounded theory approach, for the analysis stages. The researcher believed that it was easier to analyse data by grouping them into categories or subcategories before combining them into themes, rather than developing themes and then fitting all the data into the themes. Open coding was used at the beginning to open up the data to every potential and all possibilities contained within them. Open coding, as defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008),

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is: "breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data. At the same time, one is qualifying those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions" (p.195).

After considering meanings related to the data and examining the context, interpretive conceptual labels can then be put on the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). They stated that identifying the meaning of data is more important than the actual procedures used for analysing data. This researcher selected most of the key phrases that were special to the interviewees and gave coding to the phrases that were relevant to fit research questions and the issues in which the researcher was interested. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated, "...coding requires searching for the right word or two that best describe conceptually what the researcher believes is indicated by the data" (p.160). Hence, the thematic approach was used to analyze the data and, in some instance, verbatim reportage from some parents was used in the interview analysis. The Nvivo11 software was used to analyse the data into themes. A direct response from respondents will be indicated with an upper-case letter and a numerical subscript.

Ethical Considerations

It is imperative and necessary for every researcher to put into consideration ethical issues governing the research. This is for the fact that social researchers need to prepare themselves in terms of all ethical issues in the design of a study in order to build a sound, ethical practice (Neuman, 2006). In this study, the participants' privacy was respected by seeking their consent to choose to participate or not first, as one of the tenets in social research requires voluntary participation of participants. In this regard, there were explanations

of the objectives of the study, as well as its significance to boost participants' voluntary participation. There is the belief that subjecting participants to answering items in a questionnaire could cause physical and emotional harm to them. Thus, statements in the questionnaire were framed in a way that presented a variety of options and free will to participants so that, they could select items appropriate to them. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher revealed her identity to participants of the study for the purpose of clearing their minds of all doubts and deceptions of the study and also, assuring them of not sharing information they provide with anyone. Concerning anonymity, participants were not asked to provide their identity on the questionnaire.

To avoid the scientific misconduct in research, called plagiarism, the study followed strictly the prescribed standards of scientific behaviour to avoid plagiarism. The researcher ensured that ideas, works and writings made use of were acknowledged and referenced appropriately. Before going to the field to collect data, the researcher sought clearance from the Institutional Review Board. In doing this, the researcher applied for clearance through the Head of Department and with a summary of the proposal for scrutiny to the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board for ethical approval. Data collection was carried on receipt of the ethical clearance

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined a systematic approach of the processes engaged in by the researcher to arrive at the detailed and rich data collected from the participants. It dwelt on the method and research design which employed the use of the quantitative approach, specifically the descriptive survey. It discussed

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in detail ways of data collection and analysis, as well as emphasized on the statistical tools, not failing to mention the rationale behind the use of such tools in reaching the outcome of the study. In addition, the researcher discussed the ethical concerns binding the study.

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CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter deals with the results from the data analysis as well as the discussion of the findings. The analysis was done guided by the research questions. The discussion on each finding, which was separated from the results, comprised the interpretation of the data supported with previous findings from the related literature coupled with its implications where possible. The study was undertaken to examine the experiences of first-generation student in the University of Cape Coast. The instruments used to collect the data was an unstructured interview guide. In all, 11 first-generation students were used. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine the factors that motivate first-generation students to seek and achieve higher education in the University of Cape Coast

2. To ascertain the challenges encountered by first-generation students at University of Cape Coast.

3. To examine how first-generation students overcome the challenges experienced in the university of Cape Coast.

4. To assertain the measures that have been put in place by the University of Cape Coast Management to support first-generation students.

Participant Profiles

All participants were between the ages of 18-25 years-old. Each student had already attended at least one semester and was representative of a diverse cultural and gender sample. All participants were introduced to the idea of attending college between 16-17 years old which is consistent with the

literature. Other relevant data from the participant profile was also incorporated using quotations from the interview data to highlight their experiences below. An interview protocol was developed to guide the interview and answer the research questions

The participants were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and to maintain student confidentiality. The following names were chosen: Miriam, Kweku, Yaw, Mansah, Yacobo, Francis, Gilbert, Manye, Dominic, Daniel, JoAnn and Awo. All of the study participants were first-generation college students. Each student was asked in the face-to-face interview to tell me about their background as a first-generation college student.

Research Question One

What factors motivate first-generation students to seek and achieve higher education?

Research question one sought to determine what factors motivate first-generation students to seek and achieve higher education in the University of Cape Coast. The two themes that emerged from this objective are firstly the role model for siblings and to raise the standard of living in the family and secondly aspirations in life.

Role model for siblings and to raise the standard of living in the family

When discussing the factors that led to their enrollment at University of Cape Coast, it was revealed through the interview process that, first-generation students are mostly motivated by the zeal to set a good example for their younger or other siblings to follow. In the interview, some said since they are the first born or eldest child in their family, they are motivated to set a good standard for their younger siblings. According to Daniel, opting out of

university is not an option for him as his sibling are all females and they look at him as a role model in the family. He said:

> *I'm the eldest among my siblings and I want to be*
>
> *a source of inspiration to my younger siblings.*

Daniel knew he wanted to go to the University to prove a point in the family. Daniel's story ties in with that of Yaw's who said:

> *I am the first child of my parents so I have to be a*
>
> *pacesetter, my sibling are following my footsteps so I*
>
> *have to go somewhere higher so that they will be*
>
> *motivated.*

Miriam indicated that she felt that her parents really impacted her decision to pursue a university education. Her parents only have basic level education. According to her, the struggles of her parents motivated her to learn hard and gain admission and also for her siblings to know that with perseverance, one can achieve their aims and purposes. She noted that:

> *… being the elder if you are not able to be in the*
>
> *university it means those following, they can't also*
>
> *make it, so I think twice and said whatever be the*
>
> *situation I also have to be in the university… I am part*
>
> *of the educational system in my family so when I finish*
>
> *school and gain meaningful employment I have to*
>
> *ensure that my siblings are also well educated.*

Some of the participants stated that they wanted to set examples for their siblings. For example, **Kweku** said:

> *"…I wanted to set an example for my siblings."*

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The statement goes to show that, Kweku has the family's progression at heart and wants to break the cycle of fishing in his family. He hopes that in the family, there is going to be a graduate from the University. Children of resilient poor families are capable of accomplishing both academic and social-psychological achievements despite the lack of economic resources in their homes. Moreover, resilient families have been found to have clear-cut expectations of their children and share core values and routines.

The participants agreed that family day-to-day life throughout their upbringing was what enabled them to break the trend of no family member attending university and open the door to social mobility. However, all the participants, without exception, stated that their family or one of their family members was what contributed to their breakthrough. With two exceptions, all informants mentioned their family in their first words. The external factors which can also influence an individual's motivational state can include, but are not limited to parental influences and the ideas of influencing siblings. Although most feel that intrinsic motivation has a far greater effect on a person's outcome, environments are believed to play a role in the process as well. Parents can nurture and support children, while stimulating curiosity and encouraging self-discovery (Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Aspirations in life

Although most of the first-generation students are motivated by the zeal to set a good example for their younger or other siblings to follow, others had other motivations which were classified under aspirations in life. This is in line with the study by Ayala and Striplen in 2002. Research showed that, for first-generation students, the motivation to enroll in college is a deliberate attempt to

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improve their social, economic, and occupational standing. According to McCarron (2012), first-generation students have paths to higher education. University aspirations and family support are vital in the persistence of educational attainment. Based on this study, it could be possible that University aspirations are key in shaping first generation students' aspirations to pursue tertiary education as alluded to by McCarron (2012).

For instance, Awo said she seeks higher education because her mother didn't get any so she is forcing herself to get that standard. Awo's story is not unique to that of Mansah who is motivated through the love that she has for learning or studies. Mansah said:

> …*Ok me myself I love to study and I love education and want my future to be very bright so I decided to further my studies …"*

Again, Francis said he is a good student so why shouldn't he seek for higher education.

Dominic said he is motivated by how his role models have gone through higher education and made it, so he intends to seek higher education as well. He alleged

> *yeah, what motivated me is -er-mm some of my role models who happen to be -er-mm university graduates and because of that they are key element in the development of our country Ghana.*

Furtherance to this assertion by Dominic, Kweku said after working with teachers who had higher qualification and knowing their salary they are getting, he saw the need to seek for higher education.

> *Ok well, after senior high school I was doing pupil*
> *teaching and when you look at your salary and you*
> *look at the work of what you are doing and what they*
> *are giving you and you look at other teachers who*
> *have better certificates they are not even doing the*
> *work well and they are taking better money and since*
> *my grades are good and I want to go on have a nice*
> *future I decided to struggle through. (Kweku)*

Generally, students seek higher education because parents didn't get any. Others were motivated because of the love they have for learning and others too their mentor. Being an example for siblings and to raise the standard of living in the family and aspirations in life in this study revealed that participants were concerned with other people and that is why they were motivated to pursue a college degree. The first-generation student's aspirations tie in with the assertion of Cohen and Geske (1990) who state that the importance of first-generation students is that their educational mobility leads to social mobility as education is the key for many other aspects of well-being. McCarron and Inkelas (2006) in their study found a positive relationship between parental involvement and educational aspirations of first-generation students. Their findings indicate that first-generation students rely on their parents' involvement and support as their move to college is not straightforward and involves major difficulties. Being a first-generation student in Ghana is a privilege for some children because it breaks a generational cycle and also makes them feel appreciated.

It is widely accepted that poverty deprives children and young people of significant opportunities, experiences and even freedom (Sen, 1999). In other words, poverty reproduces itself through restricting goals, resulting in a psychological poverty trap. Students like being at the same postsecondary institution as their peers, and when they have a role model to look up to, they aim higher. This ties into the Social Capital theory which addresses the relationship between nonmaterial and resources and mobility. When looking at aspirations and the ability to achieve those aspirations, the concept of capital becomes important, specifically cultural and social capital, which aid in the transmission process and act as a mechanism for the intergenerational replication of inequalities. Families are also instrumental in the eventual educational attainment of young adults through their provision of a variety of resources (Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006). The ability to aspire to a life of relative wealth is, therefore, itself a marker of privilege, something that is influenced and formed by one's surroundings, and which can render poverty difficult to escape, even in the absence of structural barriers. This Social Capital is acquired so early in life that it becomes seen as the natural way of being and is so deeply ingrained that it does not appear so much a chosen behaviour but as the natural order of things. It may seem counterintuitive, but aspirations can be so low as to limit young people's opportunities, as well as being too ambitious.

Research Question Two

What are the challenges encountered by first-generation students at UCC?

This research question was to ascertain the challenges encountered by first-generation students at University of Cape Coast. First-generation students

experience college differently than their non-first-generation peers. Parents of first-generation students help their children less than non-first-generation parents in selecting a college to attend or with financial aid decisions (Chen, 2005). According to Bui (2002), first-generation students tend to come from lower socio-economic homes and have lower educational aspirations. Four themes were achieved from this objective. They include: financial challenges, stigmatization or rejection, inadequate concentration on academic work due to issues at home, and inadequate 'pre-university' information.

Financial Challenges of First-Generation Students in University of Cape Coast

When it comes to the challenge of funding higher education, there is no difference between male and female students. By coming from impoverished homes where they want to make a difference by pursuing higher education, the participants indicated that funding was a challenge in the beginning for them but also due to their varied experiences from home, they were able to take up part-time jobs to fund their stay in school. The cost of college is the single most significant factor in choosing a college, Nomi (2005) reports. Students of the first-generation are likely to be from a low-income household, working full-time and attending part-time courses (Nomi, 2005; Darling & Smith, 2007). For many first-generation students, financial support is important, and the availability of financial support plays a major role in choosing a college. Most students say their parents make sacrifices in order to keep them in college. In order to help fund the higher education of their children, some parents have to borrow money. One student reported that her mother had to borrow money from friends and another respondent also said that to help him pay for his

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accommodation and other fees, his uncle had to borrow money. They said this was money lent without interest. Francis stated:

> *My dad collected the loan for me with interest when I got admitted to college. And paying the loan plus interest now is an issue. Only during my first year at university was my father able to support me.*

As two of these respondents said, there are some problems associated with borrowing money from the bank or from friends. As mentioned in the quote above, there is the issue of not being able to pay off the money borrowed. Another issue one participant listed was that borrowing money from family members was difficult and it could also be embarrassing. JoAnn did note that:

> *Often my mother has to borrow money from another person when I need money on campus and pay her back when she gets the cash. It's not easy, in general, to get or borrow money from anyone. He or she has no trust in you, and so they don't want to give the money away. They are normally friends, so they are not involved. Some are not at all good. Therefore, if the person is not good, you also try to reassure the person and even beg the person to give you the money.*

This challenge cuts across all the students interviewed on campus. For instance, Mensah stated:

> *I get challenges financially; sometimes there is challenge in paying my fees and all that''* while Awo said "*ok, the family is not all that what do we call it*

> *well to do, so definitely financial problem is the major*
>
> *thing.*

First-generation students mostly don't get financial support or enough support from their family. In Awasthy and Khimani's (2015) study, it was also deduced that first-generation students face financial challenge.

Five of the respondents reported receiving financial support from their parents, but the money they received was not adequate. They had to rely on other sources of financial support as a result. According to them, they relied on family members for financial support, such as siblings, aunties, uncles, grandparents or cousins. One respondent pointed out that not all members of the family are prepared to help. Miriam said:

> *Everybody fends for himself/herself in my family. They*
>
> *have what they believe is sufficient for them and then they*
>
> *tell you things are also hard for them when you go to*
>
> *them. Things aren't all that easy. But when I go to my*
>
> *cousin, he knows that I'm a student and that he's been to*
>
> *university before. He therefore knows, , about the*
>
> *difficulties that students face at university. That is why he*
>
> *supported me.*

Dominic had to say this:

> *Funding my education is complicated. I asked my brother*
>
> *to bring me money, and he said he didn't have any. He*
>
> *also goes to school and he also has to work to get money*
>
> *to provide for himself and his education.*

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Since some of the students stated that understanding how to fund their education was the most difficult part of their journey, it is important to look at the challenges they faced in sourcing for funding for school. It emerged from the data that most of the students were oblivious of the funding aspects of tertiary education. Daniel said, "Financially, it was hard to learn about it, because I feel like there was so much." Similarly, Gilbert also said that he was part of several projects that helped him learn about university and university finance, but the data was fresh and it was difficult to catch everything: "Sometimes they would only tell me something once and for me, I need to repeat things." Both Yacobo and Mansah said that the most difficult thing for them to get to higher education was the financing. Mansah said, "it was really difficult for me not to have resources and knowledge about financial aid." Yacobo summed up her experience by sharing: "I feel like they (high school) teach you how to get there and how to manage your time... They don't teach you the real issues such as financial aid or money." Financing higher education is an important part of the university going experience for all students, but it seems that first-generation college students are not getting enough help in this field.

The financial support structure is also more tenuous for first-generation college students, and this can lead to a variety of other problems, such as not being able to afford course supplies and emergency costs that can occur during one's college career. In addition to the functional realities generated by such an extreme gap, first-generation students often record higher rates of use of financial support services relative to their peers of their continuing generation. While the need for access to financial assistance is not unexpected considering the median family income of first-generation college students, research

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indicates that this group of students is more likely to lack the skills of financial literacy to make fully informed decisions during the student loan process.

Stigmatization and rejection of First-Generation Students in University of Cape Coast

Other students had challenges related to stigmatization and rejection they encountered on campus. One student talked about the inferior feeling he feels. McGregor, Mayleben, Buzzanga, & Davis (1991) studied the personality characteristics of first-generation college students and found that they had lower self-esteem than those students whose parents had attended college. They also found that first-generation college students were more likely to perceive that they would have difficulty adapting to stressful environments, such as college, than did their non-first-generation college peers. Self-esteem issues and stress management are two characteristics that surface in other studies as well. This coincides with the finding from this research that first-generation students feel rejected in one way or the other. First-generation students are mostly likely stay at home for long periods before getting the opportunity to continue their education. This is because they mostly work to get enough funds before coming to the university. When this happens, they turn to be older than their colleagues and that brings up stigmatization.

According to the participants, things are different in the university compared to the Senior High School. They indicated that they face unique psychological challenges. In communities, jobs, family, faith, and group position assignments are passed down through the generations that create intergenerational continuity. For the first-generation applicants, academic capital has the ability to learn how to apply to college. The students' social

support in their communities helps them continue to attend university. Due to having little first-hand experience, the first-generation college students are dependent on social capital within the school for entering the higher education process. Networks and relationships shape social capital, while human capital determines its value. When it comes to first-generation college students, both factors are important. Social capital is important in both the home and school processes, but it has different functions in the college going process.

Even though there are many successful former first-generation students, there is considerable stigma associated with the first-generation status. Mariam said

> in the first semester of my being in school, I chose to be invincible because most of the students in my class were all coming from well-to-do families and have had members of their family attending different universities. I did not want to be pitied because I am from a poor background.

This statement goes to confirm Ishitani's (2003) assertion that first-generation students often did not have the same amount of support as their continuing-generation peers. For First-Generation Students, it is a point of pride to continue individual success and enjoy the fruits of their individual accomplishments. Their individualism is often related to a sense that they do not have access to the advantages that their peers of the continuing generation do, so they must be accountable and independent; there is little to return to them. Some of the participants stated that they there is a reduction of self-worth

due to the negative perception associated with first-generational students in modern times. For example, Kweku said:

> *The first challenge I encountered was that… I sometimes feel inferior to some people who might have been advice by people who already attended university. … so I'm always challenged to put in much effort otherwise I will feel rejected and feel disappointed in my family.*

Another student (Gilbert) talks about discrimination he gets because of his age.

> *…oh there have been a lot of challenges like sometimes discrimination because of your age … and sometimes thinking that you should have passed this stage.*

While it has been argued that three different factors are included in the social class: objective social class, subjective social class, and classism, the perceptions of stigmatization by others for seeking support (Vogel, Wade, & Ascheman, 2009) assesses the perceptions of the participants that it would be socially inappropriate for a person to seek therapeutic help from their social networks. These experiences of stigma could contribute to increased self-stigma, which has a negative correlation with attitudes towards pursuing therapy. The interactions of the respondents with classism, however, did not explicitly contribute to internalized self-stigma. This result is comparable to previous studies that showed that perceptions of prejudice were not specifically connected to self-stigma (Cheng, Wang, McDermott, Kridel, & Rislin, 2018).

While most students shared how academically successful their primary focus in college was, none specifically stated how their identity in the academic field became popular. Instead, when engaging with peers of higher social standing or with faculty, first-generation students' identities were more common, although students were not always aware of the norms associated with these experiences. This lack of knowledge contributing to identity salience can be traced, or rather lacked, to the first-generation students of cultural and social capital. First-generation students are less academically prepared before college, work more hours in college, and have trouble making friends outside their social class relative to continuing generation students (Stuber, 2011). Participants did not specifically notice the disparities in cultural capital, but it became clear that feelings of disparity were embedded in cultural capital as they addressed feelings of diversity as often applied to material indicators and general life expenses. During faculty and staff encounters, which can also be related to cultural capital, this "differentness" feeling was repeated. In different campus environments, students explored how they sometimes felt insecure because they did not have the cultural resources their peers possessed. These experiences relate to feelings of not belonging to an elite campus and subsequent methods of stigma management.

These approaches included a combination of aligning with the dominant middle-class culture for First-Generation students, discarding (or at least keeping them separate) their original lifestyles, monitoring how they handled themselves, and withdrawing from new or awkward circumstances. While all participants experienced some sort of "difference" or difficulty communicating with peers from a higher social class, this was particularly true for students

coming from rural communities. In more wealthy suburban areas, participants who attended high school had a much better time adapting to the social environment of the schools. However, rural students endured a kind of cultural shock in the upper-middle-class environment of the university. The results presented here build on cultural and social capital literature as well as habitus theories, despite little literature on social class disparities between rural and suburban communities.

Inadequate concentration on academic work due to issues at home

First-generation learners appear to have lower rates of graduation than their peers of the non-first generation (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Research has shown that low-income and first-generation students are less likely to participate in academic and social interactions that encourage college success, such as studying in groups, engaging with faculty and other students, participating in extracurricular activities, and using support services (Jehangir, 2010). In addition, first-generation learners appear not to be as academically active as their non-first-generation peers because of family and job requirements (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2008). Overall, first generation students appear to be at a distinct disadvantage with regard to academic readiness in high school relative to their peers.

Another challenge identified was the students' inability to concentrate on their academic work as a result of home related issues. One student (Gilbert) said his challenge is related to not having or getting materials for learning which we can link to financial problem. He also talked about distraction from his siblings from the house.

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> *hmm the challenges I think will be materials in learning*
>
> *and also I think home attention because sometimes your*
>
> *younger ones will be calling that this has happened at*
>
> *home.*

Many of these variables are likely to exacerbate one another, posing several challenges at the same time to first-generation students. In addition to poor study abilities, for instance, first-generation students may have both job and family commitments, variables that, when combined, may cause even greater difficulties in achieving their goals. This is in agreement with Jehangir's (2010) assertion that first-generation Students frequently enter universities with perceived obstacles to their progress. The first-generation experience's challenges, however, include more than just seeking resources, like overcoming an intimidation factor. Students of the first generation, torn between two traditions, family and school, are in constant tension. Their education distinguishes them from the family culture, but they are never completely accepted by university culture. Their sense of self is questioned when many first-generation students pass through the academy. Through schooling, they evolve and grow as people, sometimes being unrecognizable even to themselves. Students of the first-generation experience optimism by idealizing the power of higher education (Collins, 2000). The means to an end becomes education: the end of their family financial hardship. Training is also seen as the secret to making life simpler, the desire to work less and be paid more, reducing financial stress and overcoming life's burdens. For some, when they gain acceptance into an organization, there is a sense of accomplishment that comes, particularly if accentuated by family praise (Kish, 2003). According to London

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(1992), first-generation university students must shed one social identity and take on another in order to achieve academic achievement and social mobility. A long, painful phase is this identity change.

Students have to adapt to their new institutional setting academically and socially, and the degree to which they adapt will play a role in their post-secondary outcomes. For example, poor academic preparation, family obligations, and full-time employment can pose severe challenges to the ability of a student to integrate into post-secondary institutional life. Besides these social and academic adaptations, the additional challenge of cultural adaptation is faced by first-generation students. In particular, there is a distinct "cultural mobility" aspect associated with postsecondary enrollment, particularly if no other member of the family has had any postsecondary education. While many students have little problem making this transition, others may experience tension between their family/friends' cultures and their new college culture. How students of the first generation negotiate these disputes may impact their ultimate performance.

Lack of Pre-University Information

Literature has made us aware that a large portion of today's entire college-going population is composed of first-generation students. However, for some of them, the absence of pre-university data has proved to be an obstacle. The level of academic adjustment to this new setting is an effective indicator of how well a student has adjusted to university. As soon as first-generation students enter an educational establishment, they start facing problems, which are often challenging to overcome unless the student is engaged in the academic process. The study findings indicate that due to lack

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of pre-university information, first generation students go through a lot of hurdles to achieve their academic goals. As Kweku puts it:

> *Since I am the first person to be here there are certain*
>
> *things. I didn't know so I am learning certain things*
>
> *while I'm on campus.*

Another challenge that came up was a student who said she didn't know anything about the program she selected. This has been a concern to her since she didn't want to read or meet any reading course in her studies.

> *I didn't have any idea about anything even the program*
>
> *I was coming to offer. Because I didn't like reading*
>
> *subjects so I choose B.Ed. maths so I was thinking it*
>
> *would be maths but when I came to meet the reading*
>
> *course, they have become my challenges.*

Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) suggested that a parents' lack of experience with higher education deprives first-generation students of the "intergenerational benefits of information about college," which, ultimately, makes college a potentially greater challenge for these students. Billson and Terry (1982) in their research found that continuing generation students were supported by their parents to a greater extent than first-generation college students. This coincides with the findings of Cushman (2007), Naumann, Bandalos, and Gutkin (2003), and Terenzini, et al. (1996), who determined that first-generation college students did not receive as much support from their parents because their parents did not have post-secondary school experience from which to draw upon.

For other students, the university searching process has become an "obstacle." JoAnn remembers being upset and disappointed: "*I'm here, I'm in UCC, what am I supposed to do now*?" It was hard for her to learn how to navigate the campuses of the university. According to her she sometimes misses classes because the lecture theatres are not labeled well and always confuses her. Awo also mentioned that "*it was really difficult to have a rough transition. I expected it to be difficult, but I did not think it would be difficult*. Cabrera, Miner and Milem. (2013) have argued that lack of preparation and knowledge makes it challenging to begin the enrollment process into postsecondary education. Obviously, first-generation students are students who may not have any information about university before coming. This study as well as studies from Awasthy and Khimani (2015), Callanta and Ortiz (2009), Hirudayaraj, (2011) indicated academic support prior to university is limited. It is therefore worthy to note that the data presented showed that setting the framework for the ambitions of the students for university studies, parents played a crucial role. To assist them in their search for university admission, the students in this study relied on extended family members. Aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters were actively involved in the lives of the students by giving guidance, suggesting places for further study, helping with application forms and providing financial assistance for university entry.

Data analysis found that university funding was the greatest obstacle for the participants. Adapting to university life as a challenge was also described by the study participants. The students felt ready to apply to university, but things were daunting once there. The students changed with time, but they remember being frustrated by all the college processes they were unaware of.

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In order to help the procedural aspect of accessing higher education, first-generation university students rely on social capital within the school environment due to the absence of first-hand experience. While first-generation university student families may have limited human resources in terms of higher education, in the form of emotional and motivational support, it does not preclude them from providing tremendous support and social capital.

Research Question Three

What do first-generation students do to overcome the challenges experienced in the university?

The focus of the third research objective was on what and how the FGS overcame or minimized the challenges they experienced as FGS. Two main themes were identified from the FGS responses. They were: obtaining financial support from loans and friends and encouragement from people around.

Obtaining financial support from loans and friends

First-generation students face academic, financial and cultural obstacles today, even as university education is increasingly required for career achievement. In the creation of policies and practices to help them cope with those problems, university leaders and faculty members, including those who are first-generation themselves, play a critical role. In overcoming their financial challenges, some of the students sought for help from their friends. Other students made use of the scholarships and loans available on campus. First generation students tend to depend sometimes on their friends for financial support. They borrow money from friends when they experience financial difficulty and also take loan from institutions or loan services made available.

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Students used different means to overcome their financial challenges. Francis describes what he does in this manner

> *Ok, for finance right when I got here, I took a student loan from level 100 so it use to cater for my hostel and other things whiles mummy look for the fees in the house. Um, I have people in my church, my community who also do support me.*

Francis is one of the many students who knows avenues of getting financial help in school and outside school. He talked about student loans and help from church members. This sounds promising as this tie into the initiative of the student support system being implement by the University Management to assist not only first-generation students but also students who are brilliant and from poorer homes. Francis' story is no different from that of Yaw.

> *I knew someone here before, so sometimes when I am facing certain things or I'm down I just tell the person. I also work by washing for my friends and also writing assignments at a fee just to keep me going on campus. I am proud of where am coming from but also, I have to work hard to get by on campus.*

These statements from the participants confirms D'Amico and Dika's (2013) theory that without the financial support of their families many first-generation students are forced to work while in university. However, the need to work creates conflict between work and academic commitments (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). First-generation college students are concerned with their finances in a different manner than their non-first-generation student

counterparts. As they seemingly have more external pressures including family and other factors, the demand for their money is directed to places other than education, and thus the level of stress elevates.

Yacobo said she has some friends who help her out whenever she is in need. She comes from a cultural background where some parents do not encourage girls' education too much and some of the girls themselves do not fancy it. These reponses indicate three main sources of obtaining funds to help with the financial challenges they faced. The sources were loans, church and friends. Lee and Mueller (2014) in their research on Student Loan Debt Literacy, comparing first generation students and continuing generation students, concluded that first generation students rely more on loan to complete their program compare with their counterparts (continuing generation students).

Due to a lack of social support, low-income parents have to rely on teachers and the education system to help educate their children with regard to financial aid (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2009). Often first-generation families fall in this group. No matter what their socioeconomic status, both of the participants believed in this theory of dependence during the interviews. As discussed by Choy (2001), post-secondary education involves a process; a process of selecting, applying, and funding one's education. The increased social capital in the school allowed for greater access to higher education.

Encouragement from people around

When it comes to postsecondary access, students whose parents have not attended college are at a disadvantage. First-generation university students remain at a disadvantage in terms of remaining enrolled and earning a degree

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for those who conquer obstacles to accessing and enrolling in postsecondary education (Choy, 2001). In addition, low-income FGS are disadvantaged not only by the lack of college experience and data from their parents, but also by other social and economic characteristics that limit their educational opportunities (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Some of the students overcame their challenges by relying on the encouragement from people around them. First-generation students get encouragement and support from significant people in their lives. Awo said:

> *where I want to be become my motivation to overcome my challenges, because if I see the sacrifices I have made so far, sacrifices my mother have made so and sacrifices my friends and my colleagues have given me so far I need to press on other that given up right now.*

Awo's statement is in sharp contradiction of Friedlander, Reid, Shupak and Cribbie's (2007) statement that student self-efficacy is predictive of academic adjustment. Awo does not need adjustment in the school. She is only motivated and encouraged by the sacrifices that her mother has made to ensure that she is in school despite her social background.

In addition, first-generation students cannot rely on guidance about managing university life from university-educated parents. The specifics of university life, academic opportunities and social norms are generally not known to them, so they will need guidance. This sits well with the response from Gilbert who said

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> *if my parents they don't know anything about it I seek*
>
> *help from people who have gone through the*
>
> *university system.*

This statement alone is indicative of the fact that being encouraged to pursue something that will be beneficial is enough to the student.

Again, coupling such pressures with limited resources to begin with, lower socioeconomic status, first-generation students are more apt to remain at home or attend university close to home. The struggle to cope with demands from home, in addition to financial constraints, further inhibits their ability to form connections with peers, especially in their critical first year of college (Wilkins, 2014).

It is worthy to state here that, all the participants remained thankful to their families, mindful of this ever-present struggle as first-generation students, for overcoming the challenges they had faced and the parental support they earned through education to step forward and better their lives. All participants indicated that they were inspired by family members, particularly single mothers who had raised their families and extended family members who were encouraging, while describing their persistence and what allowed them to remain focused on their objectives. Realizing that their parents did not have the chance to receive college degrees, they felt motivated to continue making their families proud as first-generation college graduates and many shared how they intended to "pay it forward."

Studies done by Bui (2005), McKilip, Godfrey and Rawls (2012) cover students' chances for higher education. Every intervention has both a positive and a negative effect, as well as a negative one on the target population based

on where it is given to them. An inverse relationship between absences of teachers and the college attendance of their students was discovered by Bui (2005). The teachers' involvement made the process more consistent, which benefited the students. Additionally, this was found to be consistent with the interviews throughout this analysis. The students mostly looked to their teachers and advisers for guidance with regard to process but also for encouragement and inspiration. They became well-known to the school staff, who encouraged them to remain focused while they searched towards further education. Some students described getting more guidance and others reported receiving varying amounts of assistance from their counsellors. It was made apparent during the interviews that not all counselors had the same number of human resources to help their students cope with life's difficulties. Based on their own physical and social wealth, counselors may have a positive or detrimental effect on first-generation students.

Research Question Four

What measures have been put in place by the university to support first-generation students in UCC?

       This research question focused was on finding out what institutional support measures were available and accessible to FGS. Two broad themes emerged for this section: student support measures and establishment of a sense of identity.

Institutional Supporting Measures in place for First Generation Students

       Understanding an institution's role acknowledges the importance of a student's culture and climate to promote student success. Institutional assistance has provided students with the means to achieve (and even exceed) their goals.

With reliable evaluation and regular reviews, students were more likely to excel in the classroom. Finally, through participation, students are more likely to excel through successful academic and social interaction. They made mention of students' loans but not specifically for first-generation students. The scenario presented by the respondents confirmed the urgency of providing institutional support services to higher education students. Although deep questions have recently been raised about difficulties related to students' support services, the benefits of these services are unfathomable (Drake, 2011; Hunter & White, 2004).

Francis describes what goes on in the University.

> *ok for me, I have not heard anything concerning support*
>
> *for we first-generation students. All that I have heard is*
>
> *the all students can go to the SRC Office and talk to them*
>
> *but they will not be able to help you financially.*

However, Mansah reiterated the various announcemnets that goes around in the university and especially the Halls of Residence:

> *Um no, I have been hearing about the school alumnus in*
>
> *the halls and staff but not heard about that thing there.*

Unlike University of Cape Coast, Holt Winter and White (2017) indicated in improving college outcomes for first-generation students, there were three institutional practices providing, (a) a caring and coordinated community of support, (b) early college experiences, and (c) tutoring and mentoring supports.

Providing environmentally supportive and collaborative and ensuring that fundamental financial needs are met, research findings indicate that

institutional support services, such as those that focus on academic, personal and financial aspects of college experience, can help low-income students in elite institutions in particular (McLaughlin, 2012). In other words, institutional assistance can have a significant impact on the retention and success of low-income university students. The key factors for their school success can be that they have key people to guide them through the complex higher education system. Through advising, mentoring, early warning, and learning communities, programs that intentionally develop support systems can change the low-income student experience of college.

Institutional support systems in the University of Cape Coast, according to the participants further related to studies. All participants cited that the student services provided by the University were satisfactory after they were introduced to the management of the services. Meanwhile, five of the participants narrated that they had positive experiences regarding the services, such as timely response to students' complaints, accurate information, hospitality, and friendly interaction. However, Gilbert and Yacobo reported negative experiences regarding student services provided by some staff of the University. Gilbert mentioned that the service was not friendly to male students. He saw discrimination between male and female students in which female students received more priority in service than male students. As Gilbert said:

>*...when staff served female students, they were more proactive and with a warm-hearted. However, when turned to serve the male students, their services were not as good as when they served the female students, so there was favouritism in serving students.*

For Jacobo and Awo, they stated that the Students Support Service Unit of the University was disappointing and did not ease student's needs.

> *...I initially found their services were complicated and uncomfortable. When I first got to their office, it felt I was being court marshalled. I was being asked a series of questions just because I was a first-generation student* (Yacobo).

> *...I experienced several disappointments about services provided by the staff of the office. They provided less friendly services and could not provide information exactly about what I needed ...so this made me reluctant to communicate a lot with the staff except for registration purpose only (Awo).*

These support services included academic services and financial services. The role of student support services is very important in enhancing student persistence in the University of Cape Coast. The pivotal role of this Unit on student persistence supports a study conducted by Fozdar, Kumar and Kannan (2006) at Indira Gandhi National Open University. Fozdar et al's study demonstrated that insufficient academic supports and lack responsiveness from support centres affected largely students' decisions. Therefore, the Student Support Services Centre must provide the proactive supports including cognitive, affective, and systemic supports (Tait, 2000). Simpson (2013) asserted that first-generation students most often suffer in their first year in college because they lack proactive support. Therefore, change is required in institutional attitudes by providing supporting environments for improvement

and proactive, rather than reactive support. In the same way, Ivankova and Stick (2007) also reported that student persistence had a positive relationship with the faculty's roles pertinent to the support and encouragement, the willingness to accommodate the students' needs, and the capability to deliver personal assistance.

Establishing a Sense of Identity by Positive Friendship

According to the participants, the individuals they most depend on to get through the day-to-day experiences of being in the University are their families. These peers are the ones who praise their achievements, inspire them to do better in the classroom, and comfort them when they have a bad day. The participants mentioned making friends in the University as one of their targets early on, but it wasn't always as straightforward as they thought. Over time, they have been able to build positive friendships with peers that have been sincere, truthful and welcoming. Being away from home, the participants relied on course mates in ways that were often very intimate. These groups of friends have also been influential in their social life, but have often offered assistance in areas such as family issues and mental health challenges. Yacobo said :

> *A course mate of mine helped me in class one day by telling me that there was going to an unannounced quiz, something I knew nothing of. Later we met again on at the north campus (science) and we struck a friendship relationship and we are still friends. Now everything I do she is aware of it and has been guiding me through my studies. She is a true friend.*

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The number of friends was not the most critical part of this discovery, but the nature of the friendship was what mattered most. Tinto (1993) claims that students feel a feeling of alienation when they go to college and they abandon their friends from home when they transfer to the new and alien territory of college. His idea is that, in order to engage with this new culture, students need to get to know their peers and build new friendships. This goes to confirm what Dominic said:

> *Hanging around people that are likeminded, having study groups and stuff that are formed and being able to stick with them has helped me a lot. My friends treat me as an equal and does not judge me being a first-generation student. I really appreciate their concerns for me.*

This is very much in line with how the participants in this study characterized their college experience. Once they were able to meet a group of peers, students demonstrated a feeling of identity and a reduced sense of isolation. This transition is particularly significant in the first year, as students are new to the university and do not yet know how to handle life away from home. Cosden and McNamara (1997) point out that this social support is important when students move to college, particularly in terms of their social life. Students in this study explained how important it was to meet a group of friends who might go out and have dinner in the dining rooms or chat about things that were important to them. They disclosed that they relieve their stress by drinking, attending athletic activities, exploring the community, or bringing culture together. Once students were able to establish positive friendships, these

social stresses were minimized and they felt like they could be themselves and be welcomed by their peers into their fold.

Literature suggests that this mutual embrace of good friends promotes students' sense of belonging in a new living and learning world (Panori, Wong, Kennedy & King, 1995). Before these friendships were formed, students were uncertain of their position on campus. With time, they have been able to switch from peers, roommates, or strangers to lasting friendships, and have greatly led to a healthier sense of belonging on campus. Research on low-income students and friendships is somewhat minimal. In contrast to the results of this study that friendships are important to college success, Arzy, Seeck, Ortigue, Spinelli and Blanke (2006) observed that high-performance, low-income students approached campus friendships with caution. Students wanted to sit at home with their high school mates and did not feel relaxed with their university peers (Arzy et al., 2006).

Families of the first -generation college students have minimal human resources, but abundant support and social capital, in the form of emotional and motivational support (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; Trusty, 1998). The students indicated that their families in particular their mothers were motivators and sources of moral reinforcement in regards to the college selection process. The students benefited from the loving families' help to get to higher education. Families have incited their children to get better than they expected to get for themselves. These results were in line with previous studies. Interviewing revealed that family relationships were not necessarily positively motivating; this was another factor that emerged. This stems from the fact that the students were unable to get permission from their families to begin the project. Their

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drive to succeed was not sparked by emotional encouragement, but rather a dearth of it.

Chapter Summary

The research, interpretation and discussion were discussed in this section in line with the research questions. The first-generation college students profiled in this study were from families challenged by adversity. Although their circumstances were difficult, the beliefs and values of the parents were translated in a supportive fashion and were influential in shaping the achievement trajectories of the students. Respondents in my study shared how being first generation college students contributed to a lack of knowledge and a feeling that other students knew more. It was revealed that because respondents' parents did not go to university, they were not able to receive the kind of direction and advice that other students whose parents went to college received. This lack of parental knowledge and experience of academia directly impacted respondents' personal and academic progress, less financial aid, and conflict due to role reversal, while contributing to systemic isolation, lack of belonging and increased self-reliance. It emerged that some first-generation respondents were able to obtain support and assistance from siblings, mentors, teachers, adult connections, institutional representatives, school, community, counselors and family role models.

Respondents who did not have this kind of support had to adapt by figuring things out on their own. Some respondents were able to do what was needed to get accepted and to persist in academia without the knowledge and support from others. The lack of knowledge respondents experienced as first-generation students impacted them in various ways. For some, it caused them

to seek out other support and sources of knowledge; for others, it made them

even more determined to figure it out on their own. The respondents were able

to adapt in ways that allowed them to be successful. Counsellors and teachers

were also mentioned as a support for some the first-generation students although

not all of them were the same.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is composed of an overview of the study, a summary of the various findings of the study. Again, the final chapter deals with the recommendations based on the key findings, counselling, implications as well as suggestions for further research.

Summary

The goal of this study was to learn more about the lived experiences of a group of first-generation students within the university environment. As a result, efforts to collect information about and understand that lived experience were focused on capturing as much of the essence of what it means to be a first-generation student as possible, rather than on measurements or statistics. The qualitative paradigm was adopted by using the phenomenological approach as the researcher wanted to present the situation as it exists as far as first-generation students are concerned. The snowballing sampling technique was employed where a small pool of initial informants recommended other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for the study. This allowed the researcher the discretion to select eleven (11) first-generation students who to her estimation are sources of relevant data that would meet the objectives of the study. An interview guide made up of four sections; the motivation factors, challenges, overcoming challenges and measures to assist first-generation students was therefore used to solicit data response from participants. The instrument was pilot tested to ensure its validity and reliability. The various ethical issues laid down by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Cape Coast

(UCC) were strictly complied with. As proposed in the research protocol of IRB, UCC, the researcher presented the true research findings and used the results of the research study for only academic purposes.

Nvivo11 was used analyse the data from the study. The thematic analysis identified two themes that motivate first generation students to seek higher education which are aspirations in life and as an example for siblings and raise the standard of the family. As first-generation students, they are prone to encounter certain challenges which were identify as financial difficulties, stigmatization/ rejection, lack of concentration due to issues from home and lack of pre-university information. These themes (challenges) are core issues faced by first generation students so far as they have the desire to further their education to a higher level.

In addition to this, through thematic analysis three themes were identified to be the strategies first generation students adapt to overcome challenges. These themes identified were access to student loan, encouragement from people around them and involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

Key Findings of the Study

The main findings that emerged from the research questions were:

1. It was revealed in the study that, first-generation students are mostly motivated by the zeal to set a good example for their younger or other siblings to follow. Others were motivated because of the love they have for learning and others too their mentor. Being an example for siblings and to raise the standard of living in the family and aspirations in life in this study revealed that participants were concerned with other people and that is why they were motivated to pursue a college degree.

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2. What was clear was that first-generation students valued the support of their families. Although a few students shared the negative opinions family members held toward higher education, most participants were motivated to succeed by their families. Overall participants believed that their determination impacted their success in the University

3. The barriers that first-generation University of Cape Coast students faced were largely because of their identity as a first-generation student. They struggled to adjust because as the first in their family to attend college, they lacked context to understand what college life was like. Therefore, there needs to be a special effort to address the needs of first-generation college students because factors associated with the identity of being first-generation potentially hindered their success

4. One of the major challenges of first-generation students was how to pay for their education as they come from low-income homes. Comments from the respondents suggest that first-generation students see their continuing-generation peers as having many advantages, including financial resources.

5. Participants in the survey mentioned a variety of issues they encountered in the university. This was seen in their transitions and academic problems. Many others saw it as a barrier they had to conquer in order to keep going. One of their main concerns was the gap in academic rigor. Many participants said that they anticipated the coursework to be different, but they did not anticipate the amount of effort necessary to finish it. Nobody emphasized being unprepared for college, instead focusing on their own desire to complete their work.

6. Another issue the participants had was navigating their new surroundings; this may be understood by identifying their developmental stage and how they matured through the difficult new experiences they encountered. Many of the participants were forced to seek assistance or find out what they needed on their own. The participants stressed the importance of the counsel they received in their success. This was expected given that they were all new pupils. They had to face both personal and intellectual challenges. They all indicated that they had to keep pushing through their emotional challenges in order to embrace and overcome them.

7. When confronted with a difficulty, participants had to find out how to get aid.. Developing mature interpersonal ties was one way they coped with challenges on campus since they relied on the people they worked with.

8. The variables (financial aid award, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, academic advising) that students in this study confirmed to have aided their success confirmed past research. It is not surprising that academically successful first-generation students found support through interaction with faculty and staff. A constant theme heard from study participants was that they believed that faculty cared about them and wanted them to succeed.

9. Support services were noted by first-generation students as being valuable to their academic success. However, the students noted frustration in not being made aware of the resources until well into their first year of schooling.

Conclusion

The following conclusion was made in relation to the findings of the study. This study has contributed to literature related to sense of belonging and the university experience by students from the perspective of sense of place. Sense of belonging and involvement reflect an incomplete view of the university experience for first-generation students. Sense of place was found to be a more relevant perspective in which to view first-generation community university students as it takes into consideration specific factors that are important to them.

Recommendations

1. The study showed that first generation student experiences were characterized by a lack of knowledge both prior to and during university years. In this wise, it is recommended that the university put in measure to address this communication gap. The Management can use the radio station (ATL FM) to always announce to the students about the various programmes, funding opportunities to prospective students. Again, stakeholders of education should institute and implement policies such at student support services, counselling sessions, financial aid packages, scholarships that will help the first-generation student in the various tertiary institutions in the country.

2. The study revealed that one of the major worries of first-generation students was how to pay for their education as they come from low-income homes. It is therefore recommended that the Management of the University of Cape Coast set aside some funds to help cushion the first-generation students during their stay on campus. It is also important that

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they are also able to identify these students as some who are not from low-income homes may try and access the funds too.

3. Training is another key factor in ensure that these first-generation students are prepared to venture into the journey of higher education. Counsellors, lecturers, and staff need to understand the impact and power they hold in supporting all students in getting to the university. Providing role models and developing strong relationships with potential first-generation students can led to increased number of students applying and attending the University.

Suggestions for Further Research

1. The study was conducted in only one university. It is therefore suggested that the study be carried out in a private tertiary institution to allow a better generalization to be made.

2. A mixed methods study should be conducted to give participants the opportunity to be frank and come out with responses which perhaps were not included in the statements provided but can be relevant to the outcome of the study.

3. Studies should be conducted separately for both gender groups to know their experiences in the University.

Chapter Summary

The chapter presented an overview of the study which focused on the purpose and research methodology employed in the study. It also summarised briefly the major research findings which were followed by conclusions to the whole study and contribution to knowledge. Recommendations in connection

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with the key findings were projected and finally, suggestions for further

research were proposed.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND

ADMINISTRATION

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

Interview Protocol:

Warm up question: Please tell me about yourself? Name excluded.

Motivation Factors

As a first-generation student, what are the factors that motivated you to seek for higher education? Reasons why you are in school.

Challenges

Are you involved in any extracurricular activities outside of the classroom (student groups, work, community service, sports, student government)? Explain

With regards to university environment, what are some of the challenges you encounter as first-generation students?

Overcoming challenges

What do you do in your own capacity to overcome these challenges you face as a first-generation student?

In order to overcome your challenges, Do you feel it would be beneficial to be connected to alumni in your field to provide guidance to you? If so how?

Measures to assist first generation students

What support systems helped you in your journey as a first-generation university student?

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What student support services have assisted you in your University experience, if any?

How do you feel about the institutional support available to you (i.e. counseling, library resources, and community service opportunities)?

What could have helped you be successful in university that you did not receive at home or in university?

End question: Is there anything else I should know that I have not asked?

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND

ADMINISTRATION

PRE-TEXT INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Who are you and as a first-generation student, what are the factors that motivated you to seek for higher education?

2. Do you participate in other activities outside of the classroom (student groups, work, community service, sports, student government)? Explain

3. Do you encounter challenges in the university environment?

4. What do you do in your own capacity to overcome these challenges?

5. What support systems help you in your journey as a first-generation student?

6. How do you feel about the institutional support available to you?

7. What could have helped you be successful in university that you did not receive at home or in university?

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APPENDIX C

**CONSENT FORMS**

VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT FORM

Dear Participant,

The researcher, from the University of Cape Coast, is soliciting information on the topic "Experiences of First-Generation Students at the University of Cape Coast". This is purely for academic purposes and every information provided will be strictly confidential.

Agreement

The above document describing the benefits, risks and procedures for the research title has been read and explained to me. I have been given an opportunity to have any questions about the research answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate as a volunteer.

_____   _____

Date   Name and signature or mark of volunteer
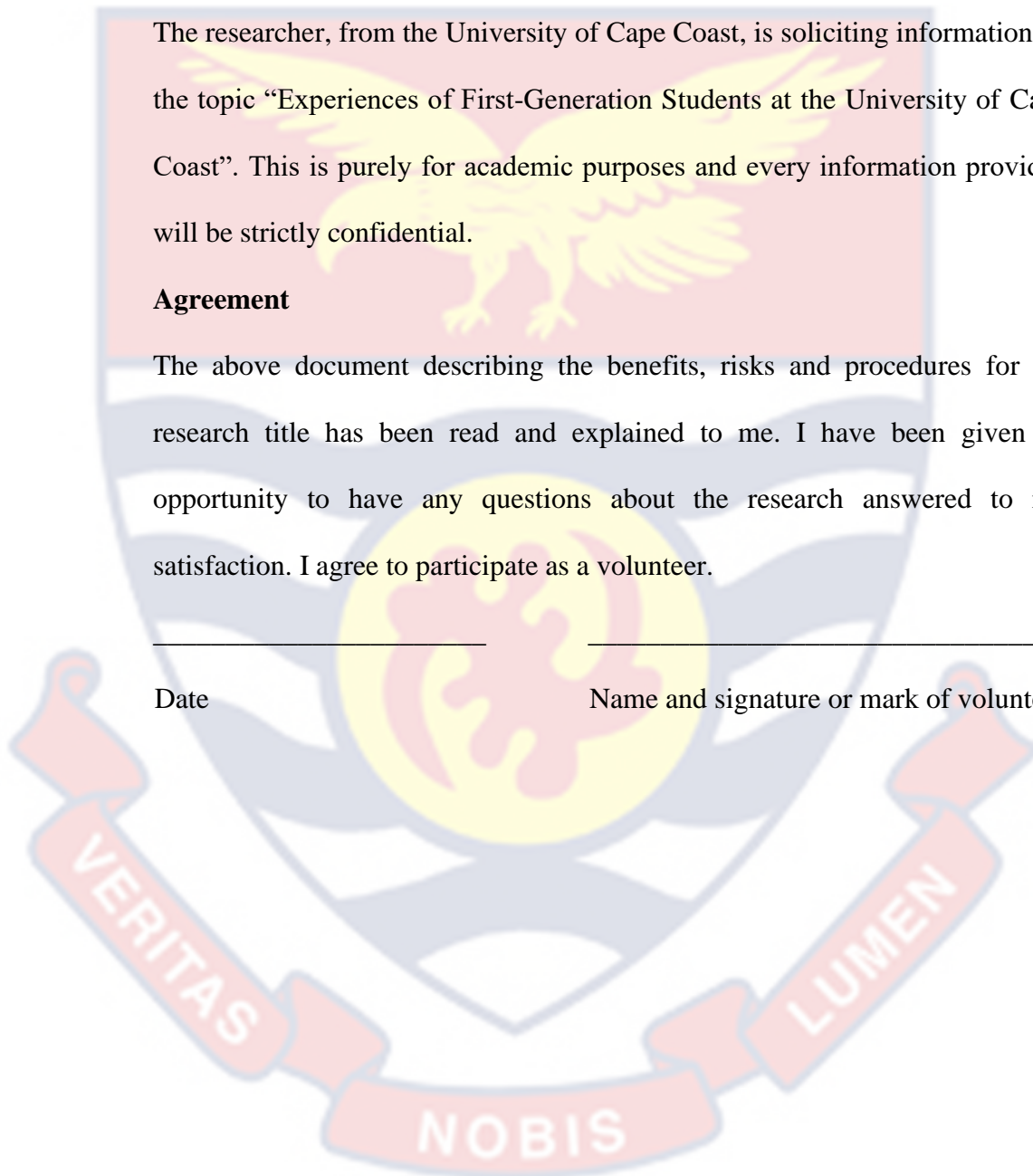
APPENDIX D

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

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