

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

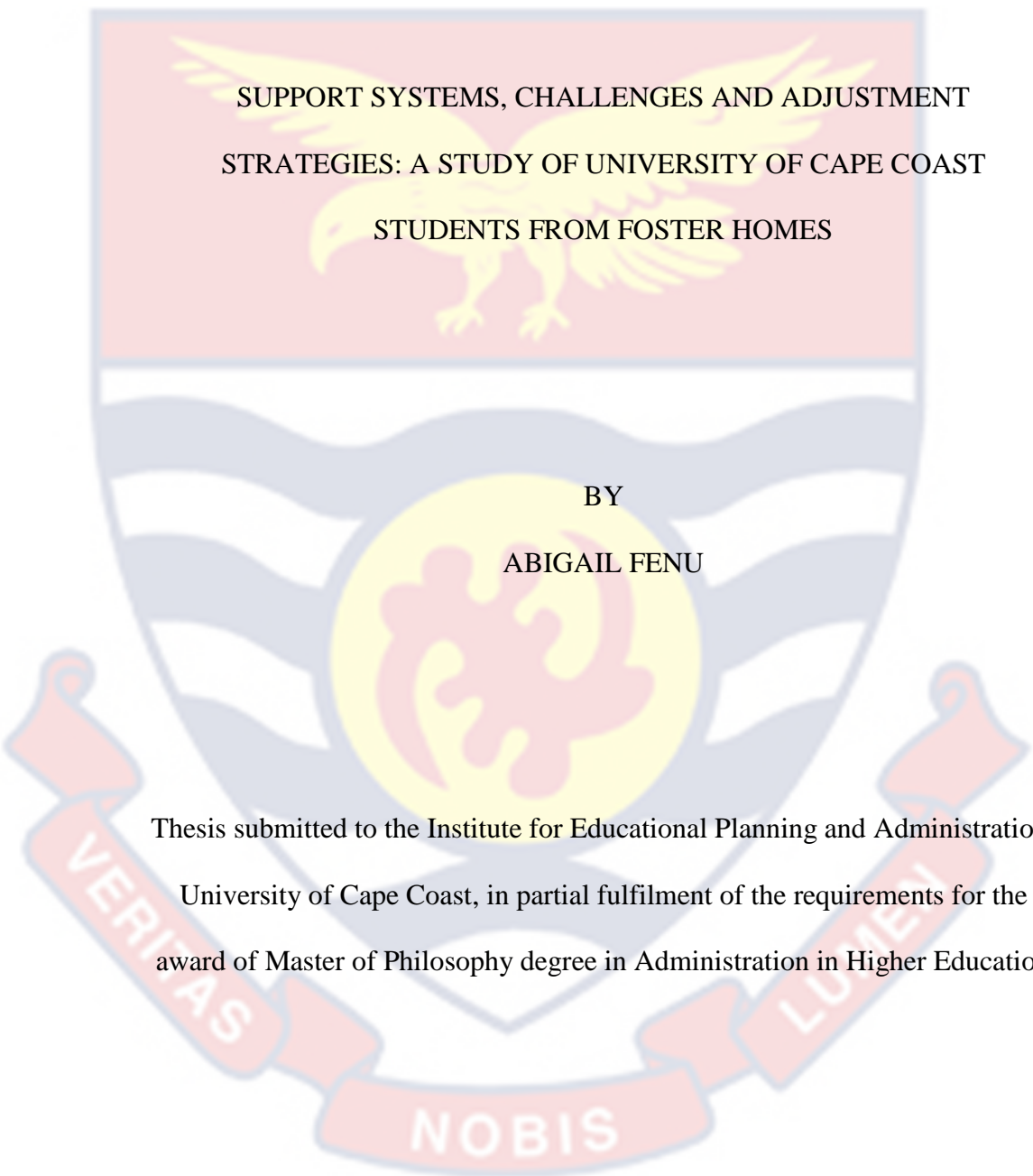


SUPPORT SYSTEMS, CHALLENGES AND ADJUSTMENT
STRATEGIES: A STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
STUDENTS FROM FOSTER HOMES.

ABIGAIL FENU

2023

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST



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BY
ABIGAIL FENU

Thesis submitted to the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration,
University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of Master of Philosophy degree in Administration in Higher Education

JUNE 2023

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 the University or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: Date:

Name: Abigail Fenu

Supervisors Declaration

I 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: Dr. Michael Boakye-Yiadom

ABSTRACT

The study explored the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, the challenges they encounter, and the adjustment strategies they use to overcome their challenges. The study was qualitative research which adopted the phenomenological research design. The exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling technique was used to sample 18 participants for the study. These participants included four current foster youth and 14 former foster youth who were pursuing undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. Researcher developed interview guide items were used to gather data for the study. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) and thematic analysis approach were used to analyse the data that were gathered. The study found that there were no support systems in the University of Cape Coast that were meant for only foster youth, however, general support systems such as counselling services, students' loan, scholarship for brilliant students, extracurricular activities, and support from university staff and religious organisations existed. The foster youth faced financial, academic, emotional and psychological challenges. They endeavoured solving these challenges through self-determination, counselling, engaging in minor jobs, perching and reducing transportation expenses to lecture halls. It was recommended that policy makers in the university create support systems specifically meant to address the needs of foster youth in the university. Again, administrators, counselors and lecturers in the university should establish an individualised comprehensive approach to offer the needed emotional, psychological and material support to deal with the problems foster youth encounter.

KEY WORDS

Adjustment Strategies

Challenges

Foster Care

Foster Youth

Higher Education

Support Systems



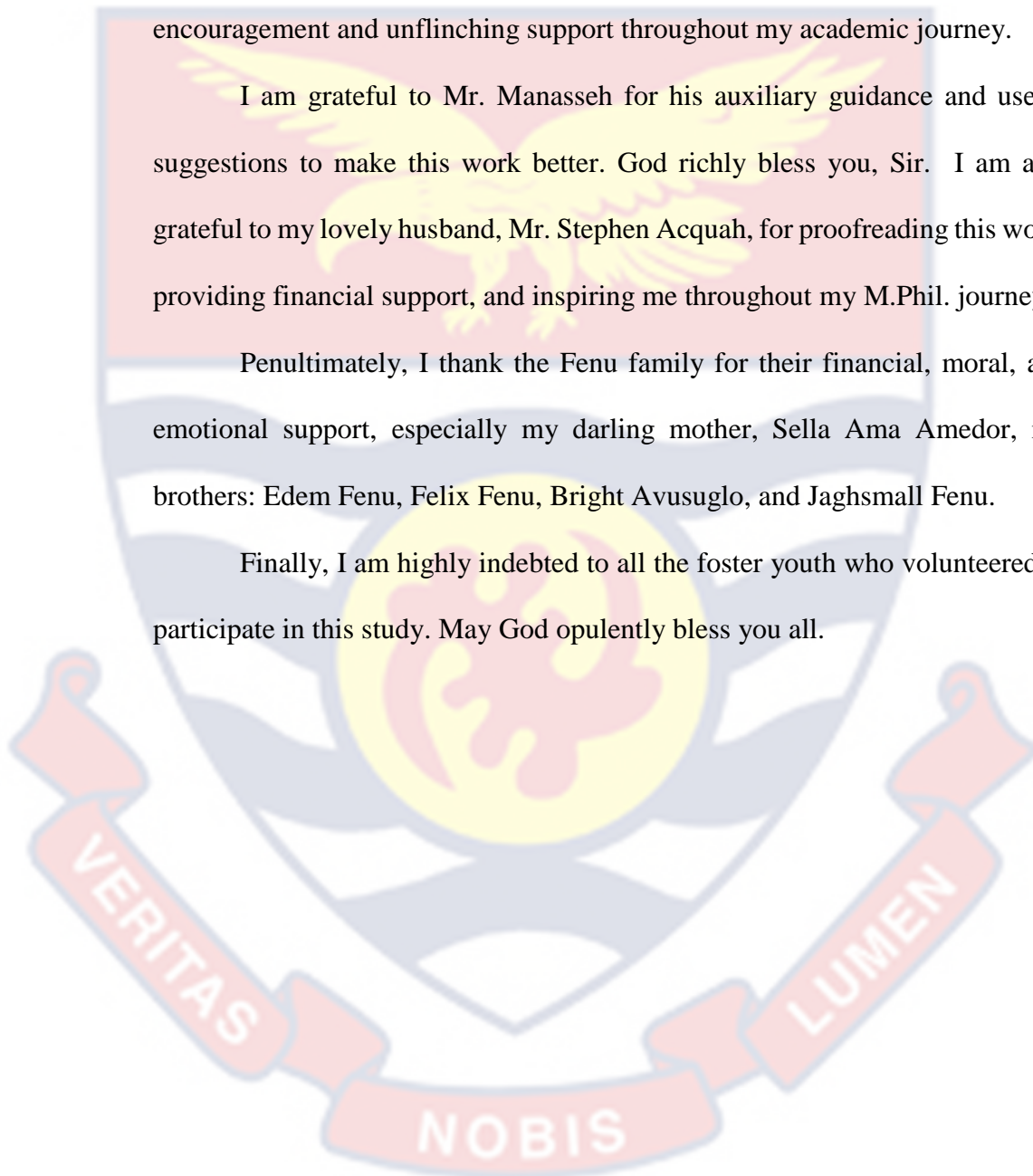
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DEDICATION

To my mother, Sella Ama Amedor, and my brothers: Felix, Edem, Bright and

Jaghsmall



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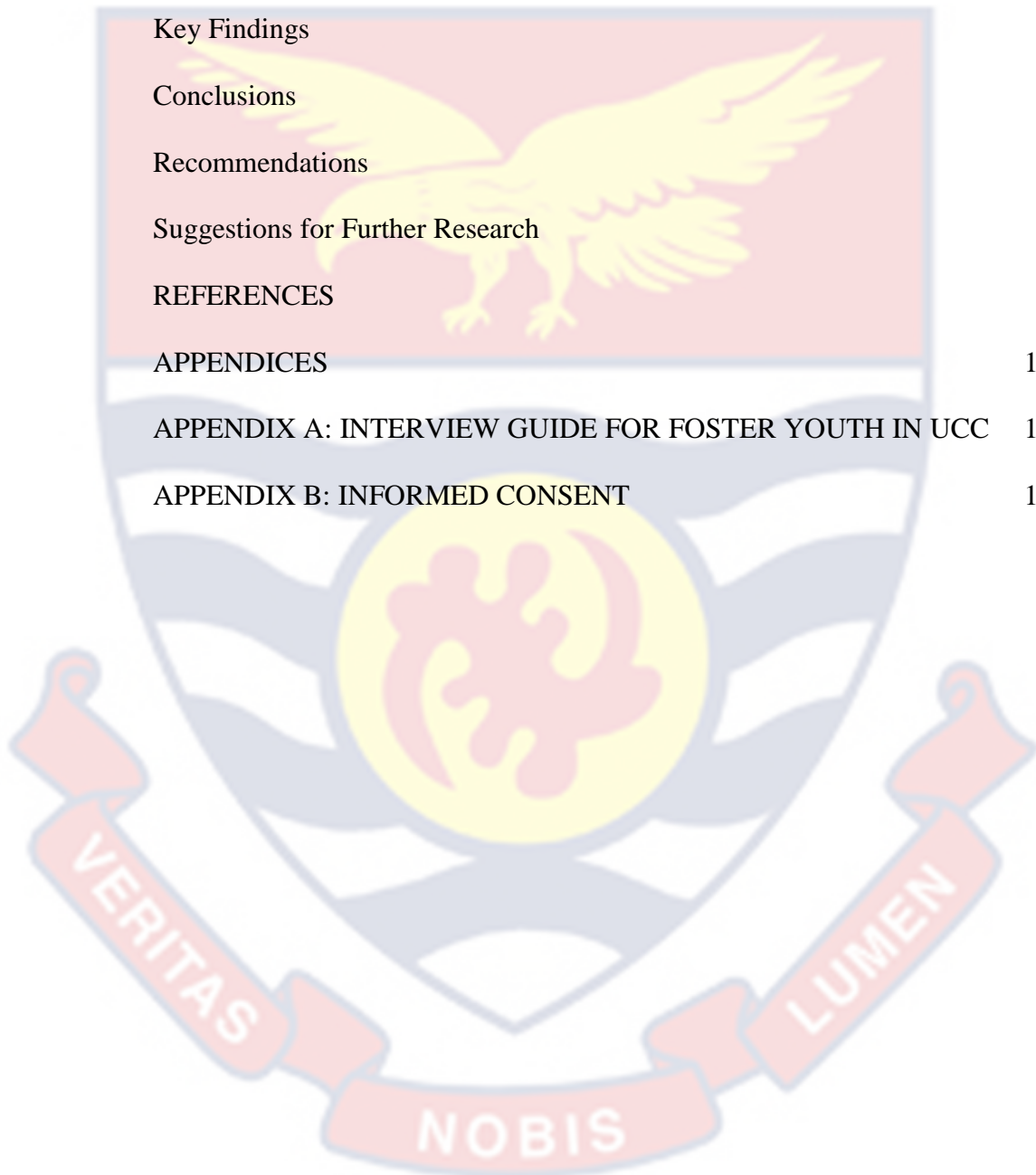
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Generally, issues concerning students from foster homes are less known by educators and administrators in most educational institutions (Wolanin, 2005). Due to lack of attention given to students of foster background, educators are not adequately trained to meet the unique needs of these students (Wolanin, 2005). Hence, teachers and administrators are often unaware of foster children in their schools and classrooms and are sometimes unable to meet the needs of this population (Barth, 1990; Bruskas, 2008; Wolanin, 2005). This begins to explain why foster youth graduate from high school at substantially lower rates than their non-foster peers.

Of those that graduate from high school, approximately 33 percent will go on to pursue post-secondary education (Barth, 1990). Like cases of many other countries, it can be anticipated that a similar situation exists in Ghana, although this claim lacks substantial evidence. Therefore, finding evidence about foster youth in universities in Ghana with focus on their financial, academic, psychological and emotional challenges, adjustment strategies, and whether or not there are support systems in place for them is inevitable. In view of this, this study was conducted to uncover the support systems, challenges, and adjustment strategies of foster youth pursuing varying undergraduate degree programmes in the University of Cape Coast.

Background to the Study

It is incumbent upon every society to protect and nurture its young generation. Foster care has proven to be an effective way by which functioning societies protect and nurture the vulnerable children population and orphans.

Foster care is categorised into kinship foster care (i.e., relative foster care) and non-kinship foster care. In each of these two major categories, other variants such as short term and long term foster care exist. In Ghana, both kinship and non-kinship foster care whether short term or long term are being operated.

According to O'Higgins, Sebba and Luke (2015), different countries use different terminologies to describe the status of children in foster care. It is known as 'out-of-home care' in the USA, Canada and Australia, and in England, it is referred to as 'children looked after'. Terminologies such as fosterage, fostering, adoption, child relocation and transfer, child circulation, child migration are used among English speaking African countries including Ghana (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985).

In Ghana, there is evidence of fosterage as indicated by the Ghana Statistical Service (2021). Using the 2021 Population and Housing Census data, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) estimated that about 5-7 percent of children in Ghana are living in alternative care, such as with relatives or in institutional care, due to various reasons including poverty, conflict, and abuse.

In line with traditional customs, most of these children live with extended family members in informal foster care arrangements (Twum-Danso, Imoh & Ame, 2012). In support of Twum-Danso et al., the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (2017) advanced that in Ghana, only a small number of children are placed in formal child care system while majority (99%) are placed in residential care (Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, 2017).

According to the Way Forward Project (2011), children who are placed under formal residential care facilities are aged 10 years or younger, and they

stay for an average of 10 to 12 years. Several reasons account for the presence of children in foster care. Notable among these reasons are poverty, maternal mortality and poor parenting (Csáky, 2009; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985; Manful & Badu-Nyarko, 2011). Generally, over 80 percent of children in orphanages have a living parent or both parents alive and are in care because of poverty and limited access to education (Csáky, 2009). This is contrary to the view of Isiugo-Abanihe (1985) who suggested that parental death is an important reason for the practice. In addition, other children enter care because they are abandoned, orphaned, rescued from trafficking or other forms of domestic abuse (Manful & Badu-Nyarko, 2011).

It has been reported by Zetlin (2006) that children placed in foster care do not always enjoy constant stay at one residence. By implication, foster children, who have been removed from their matrimonial homes or separated from their biological parents and placed into foster care are often moved from one foster care placement to another. As they are shuffled through life, they become the most educationally vulnerable population of students (Zetlin, 2006).

Though exact estimates are unavailable, some young people leave care annually when they reach 18 years of age (Way Forward Project, 2011). For the majority of youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood, achieving higher education is a goal toward which they aspire (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004; Reilly, 2003). However, reaching this goal can be quite complicated for this population for a variety of reasons, some of which include not graduating from high school, lack of supportive adults and encouragement to pursue higher education, insufficient financial resources and housing, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of postsecondary and independent living preparation, physical and

mental health challenges, lack of connection with resources and services, lack of support with academics and school/career planning, becoming a parent, and lack of campus involvement (Batsche et al., 2014; Day, Riebschleger, Dworsky, Damashek, & Fogarty, 2012; Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Graham, Schellinger & Vaughn, 2015; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Manful, Takyi, & Gambrah, 2015; Rios & Rocco, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Unrau, Font, & Rawis, 2012; Wolanin, 2005).

These challenges result in substantially lower higher education enrolment, lower academic achievement, low retention and completion rates for foster care alumni compared to youth in the general population, as well as low-income, first-generation students (Casey, 2011; Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, & Raap, 2010; Davis, 2006; Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011; Morton, 2012; Pecora et al., 2006; Wolanin, 2005).

Moreover, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 2004) reported that foster youth are considered one of the most vulnerable population of students, having experienced many adverse life circumstances, including the loss of their birth families, homes, and neighborhoods. Many foster youth have trauma histories and more serious emotional problems than noted in the past (Owens, 2007).

A large body of knowledge exists on the academic and behavioral difficulties experienced by foster youth (Altshuler, & Poertner, 2003; Blome, 1997; Emerson & Lovitt, 2003; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Kimm, 2003; 2005). However, the Ghanaian context of child fosterage has not been much represented. Based on this backdrop, this study explored support systems that the University of Cape Coast offer to students

from foster care, challenges these students go through in pursuing higher education, and how they adjust amidst their challenges to survive.

Statement of the Problem

Child fostering and its impact on foster children's welfare, particularly their educational needs appear to have conflicting outcomes based on a critical assessment of the existing literature (Garcia & Gonzalez, 2021; Kuyini, Alhassan, Tollerud, Weld & Haruna, 2009; Pilon, 2003; Smyth, Whelan, McCoy, Quail & Doyle, 2009; Zetlin, 2006). This is because the outcome of child fostering is dependent on several factors such as the social context of fostering, the motives for fostering, the existence of biological parents and the relationship that exist between biological and foster parents (Serra, 2009). Thus, individuals from foster homes may have access to education, however, household demands, sometimes prevent them from enrolling in school, especially, post-secondary education.

In the views of Charmes (as cited in Pilon, 2003) and Zetlin (2006), the schooling of individuals from foster homes are often more vulnerable and unpredictable as compared to non-fostered individuals. Specifically, according to Agblorti and Tanle (2011), fostering in Ghana is detrimental to the educational outcomes of the fostered individual. Agblorti and Tanle maintain that even in instances where individuals were fostered by relatives, the negative impact of fostering on education was evident.

In Ghana, many youth dream of pursuing higher education due to its numerous benefits. Ghanaian youth who have experienced or continue to experience foster care, similar to their non-fostered counterparts, have ambition to obtain university degree in order to better position themselves to attract their

dream jobs and optimize their chances of becoming independent and successful in life. Both foster youth and non-foster youth who aspire to obtain a university degree are likely to encounter certain challenges. The unique social, emotional and psychological challenges that foster youth face could possibly have adverse effects on their academic success, thereby, making it more difficult for them to enroll on a university programme and successfully complete than that of their non-fostered counterparts.

Hence, stakeholders of higher educational institutions must specifically recognise foster youth, put measures in place to orient them on career pathways, offer unique opportunities for them to apply for programmes of their choice, and design lasting policies that will ensure their retention and successful completion. However, based on the researcher's own observation, it appears stakeholders of higher education institutions do little or nothing to specifically support ambitious foster youth in pursuit of an undergraduate degree.

The negative impact of marginalizing foster youth in pursuit of higher education can be envisaged in both short-term and long-term. For instance, the short-term effects will be decrease in foster youth enrollment and increase in foster youth dropout in higher education, while the long-term consequences will include increase in social vices and decrease in human capital. That is, if most foster youth who qualify to pursue varying degree programmes are denied, they may engage in prostitution, arm robbery, gambling, ritual killing, cybercrime, among others, for survival. Additionally, human capital in the form of able and resilient foster youth who would have contributed their quota to national development will be conspicuously missing in action.

It is based on the foregoing assertion that the current study singled out one higher education institution in Ghana (i.e., University of Cape Coast) and studied the foster youth enrolled in its various programmes, with the focus of obtaining in-depth information on their experiences such as support systems available to them, challenges they encounter, and adjustment strategies they employ to solve challenges.

Many studies (Agblorti & Tanle, 2011; Garcia & Gonzalez, 2021; Kuyini, et al., 2009; Pilon, 2003; Rivera & Lopez, 2021; Smyth, et al., 2009; Thompson, 2017; Zetlin, 2006) have used varying qualitative research designs to explore the phenomenon of child fostering in education. However, it appears most of these studies exist at the international setting, although Agblorti and Tanle, and Kuyini et al. have conducted studies on the phenomenon of child fostering in the Ghanaian context. Agblorti and Tanle for instance, focused on exploring the relationship between child fostering and education using data from two agro-ecological zones – coastal and forest, while Kuyini et al. focused on traditional kinship foster care in northern Ghana. Due to cultural and contextual variations regarding the phenomenon of child fostering, this study sought to bridge the identified contextual and geographical gaps in literature by exploring the experiences of undergraduate foster youth in the University of Cape Coast.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, the challenges they encounter, and the adjustment strategies they use to overcome their challenges. Specifically, the study sought to explore:

1. The support systems that are available for University of Cape Coast students who have experienced foster care.
2. The challenges that students who have experienced foster care face in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast.
3. The adjustment strategies that students who have experienced foster care employ to overcome challenges encountered in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast.

Research Questions

1. What support systems are available for University of Cape Coast students who have experienced foster care?
2. What are the challenges that students who have experienced foster care face in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast?
3. What adjustment strategies do students who have experienced foster care employ to overcome challenges encountered in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast?

Significance of the Study

The significance of a study, denotes how relevant a research study is, within its field of study and the contributions it makes to both theory and practice in that area (Bryman, 2012). As such, this study is significant to policy makers (i.e., the University Council) in the University of Cape Coast, academic counselors and lecturers, social workers, non-governmental agencies, foster youth who aspire to attain higher education, and other researchers.

Policy makers in the University of Cape Coast can base on the findings of this study pertaining the support systems available for foster youth in the university, assess and evaluate the existing support systems provided, and aim

at enhancing available support systems as well as create new ones to sustain and retain foster youth, and increase their completion rate.

Again, the findings of this study inform administrators, counselors and lecturers of the challenges that foster youth encounter. This to an extent will aid administrators, counselors and lecturers to establish an individualised comprehensive approach to offer the needed emotional, psychological and material support to deal with the problems foster youth encounter.

Moreover, the findings of this study provide information to assist social workers in formalised foster care institutions as well as both kinship and non-kinship foster parents in non-formalised institutions to orient foster youth under their care, build their interest and propel them for future academic attainment and success.

Additionally, the findings of this study serve as supplementary knowledge to spark new approaches and policies to incorporate efforts of non-governmental agencies to provide accessible programmes and services that support academic success of foster youth.

Furthermore, the study presents findings on the adjustment strategies employed by foster youth in the University of Cape Coast to overcome their challenges. To this effect, other foster youth can adopt these adjustment strategies to deal with similar challenges they face or those that they are likely to face. Similarly, students from foster care who aspire to obtain a degree in higher education would have enormous information about adaptive strategies that foster youth in higher education use to overcome challenges and learn from. This can contribute to increase in enrollment of foster youth in higher education.

Lastly, findings of this study will contribute to the burgeoning literature on the experiences of university students from foster homes. A relevant attempt to explore the phenomenon of fostering has the capability to unearth its hidden dynamics. As such, future researchers can dwell on this study to conduct other studies in different geographical limits, formulate varying research questions, and use other appropriate research methods to find solutions to research questions.

Delimitations

This study focused on the support systems that are available for foster youth in higher education, challenges they face, and adjustment strategies they employ to overcome challenges they encounter. It was delimited to University of Cape Coast undergraduate students who were receiving care in either kinship, non-kinship, formalised or non-formalised foster care institutions (i.e., current foster youth) and those who had exited foster care (i.e., former foster youth). That is, the study precludes current or former foster youth enrolled in universities other than the University of Cape Coast, University of Cape Coast alumni, and current or former foster youth offering postgraduate programmes.

Again, the study adopted the qualitative research approach with the hermeneutic phenomenology design, and was delimited to a sample size of four current foster youth and 14 former foster youth sampled through the snowball sampling technique. Hence, it is necessary to be cautious when generalizing the findings of this study to the foster youth in the whole university community.

Limitations

Respondents were selected using the snowball sampling technique. As such, the representativeness of the sample is not guaranteed. The researcher had

no idea how many current and former foster youth are enrolled in undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. In addition, sampling bias is likely to have occurred, since initial subjects in the snowball process tend to nominate people they know well. Hence, there is a greater possibility that the data collected reflect the experiences of just a section of the entire population of current and former foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, who share the same traits.

Moreover, interview data were collected to answer the research questions formulated to guide the study. Interview, a solitary approach to data collection for this study could have been corroborated with observation data in order to strongly confirm the findings of the interview data. In this current study, observation data were not sought due to time constraints and participants' busy schedules. Additionally, the interview data gathered provide less anonymity. As such, in three instances, respondents expressed their dislike for being interviewed one-on-one and recorded. They feared that they could be stigmatised if their foster status was disclosed. Hence, the respondents were assured of confidentiality in the entire data collection, analysis, and dissemination processes.

Definition of Terms

Key terms used in the study have been operationally defined as follows:

Adjustment Strategies: The activities that foster youth in the University of Cape Coast do to overcome challenges they encounter and strive to pursue their undergraduate degree.

Current foster youth: Young adult who are less than 18 years old and receives care from a foster caregiver.

Formal foster care: “A statutory placement requiring the involvement of the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) and refers to the provision of planned, time-limited, temporary, substitute family care for a child when his/her birth family cannot provide care either temporarily or permanently” (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNICEF, 2018, p. 15).

Former Foster Youth: Young adults who have left foster care because they have reached the age of 18 years old, or have been emancipated prior to age 18 through a court order.

Kinship Foster Care: This is when a child is looked after by a family member or others with whom the child have a relationship other than their own biological parents.

Non-Formal foster care: Foster care that does not require the involvement of the DSW, and it could be based on either kinship or non-kinship relations.

Non-Kinship Foster Care: This is when a child is looked after by non-relatives or biological family members. It could be in a formal fostering context, as regulated by the DSW or an informal fostering context.

Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into five chapters. Chapter One covers the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitation, limitations, definition of terms and ends with organisation of the study. Chapter Two reviews theoretical, conceptual, and empirical literature for the study. Chapter Three covers the methodological approach of the study. It describes the research design, study area, population, sampling procedure, data collection instruments, methodological rigour, data collection procedures, data processing and analysis,

and chapter summary. Chapter Four presents the study's results and discussion of findings. Finally, Chapter Five highlights the summary, conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This study focuses on the support systems that are available for foster youth in higher education, challenges they face, and adjustment strategies they employ to overcome their challenges. This chapter reviews literature related to the study with emphasis on the theory that underpins the study, the conceptual literature, and the empirical literature. The literature review follows the order as listed:

1. Theoretical Review
2. Concept of Foster Care
3. Overview of Contemporary Trends of Fostering in Ghana
4. Educational Aspirations of Foster Youth
5. Support Systems Available for Foster Youth
6. Barriers Contributing to Academic Challenges of Foster Youth
7. Adjustment Strategies
8. Success Stories
9. Empirical Literature

Theoretical Review

The study adopts systems theory, attachment theory and self-determination theory to better understand the experiences of foster youth in the University Cape Coast. The systems theory provides theoretical framing for the supports systems available for foster youth in the university. The attachment theory best explains the challenges that foster students in the university encounter as a result of negative impacts of the relationship between foster care

givers and foster care receivers. The self-determination theory projects avenues through which foster youth adjust amidst their challenges to pursue higher education.

Systems Theory

Several factors affect how university systems function (Rios & Rocco, 2014). The requirements of 21st century learners in higher education has led to an increasing need for resources in universities in order to address the needs of these assorted students' population. It is, therefore, indispensable for lecturers and administrators to possess adequate skills that address the needs of minority students' population such as the foster youth, international students, and students from economically poor backgrounds. The systems theory implies that when a person demands support to overcome a certain problem, "the target system and the client systems overlap" (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2012, p. 14).

The systems theory offers important ideas for conceptualising relationships that exist between complex organisations, individuals and occurrences in the organisations (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2012). The organizational structure of the university presents a complex system in which a set of orderly elements are interrelated to compose an operationally functional whole (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2012). The systems theory guides the understanding of how a university's campus system divided into various colleges, faculties, and departments demonstrate interconnectivity and serve the needs of each student.

The systems theory suggests that change in one part of a system usually influences other parts of the system. For instance, for the purpose of this study, a positive change or improvement in support systems that exist in the University

of Cape Coast for students of foster care background will positively influence these students' outcome. As such, the current study projects the viewpoint that the systems theory offers useful justifications of different phenomena that ought to be recognised as foster youth pursue higher education in the University of Cape Coast.

Attachment Theory

The attachment theory draws on the work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (Shemmings & Shemmings, 2011). It explains the special bond and the lasting relationships that young children form with one or more adults who can be found in their developmental space. It also denotes a child's sense of security and safety when in the company of a particular adult (Wittmer, 2011). Naturally, every child is born with an instinct that drives them to seek protection from an adult closer to him or her. Children are dependent on the physical and emotional availability of the key adults who take care of them. Their relationships with adults are crucial to their trust of other people – their understanding of relationships generally and their feelings about themselves (Schrader-McMillan, & Herrera, 2016).

The attachment theory posits that, lack of a permanent emotional relationship of a child with a mother or mother substitute results in the child lacking affection and also unable to make permanent friends. They mostly appear to be highly indifferent to what others thought of them (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Van Dijken, 1998). As stated by Shemmings and Shemmings (2011), Bowlby and Ainsworth who proposed the attachment theory believe that a child is influenced by the multi-disciplinary environment of his or her guidance, and so, every child is part of a dynamic relationship of a society.

According to Bowlby and Ainsworth's (1970) proposition, the biological function of the attachment system ensures that infants seek out a stronger, wiser, and protective attachment figure for proximity maintenance and protection, support, and care, especially during dangerous or difficult situations.

Attachment theory is useful to understand when working with foster children as many of them enter the system without having experienced a secure attachment within their family of origin. Thus, impairing their overall development. Since they are in foster care, most of them lack a secure attachment from their family and their biological parent. Expanding on the attachment theory, Schrader-McMillan and Herrera (2016) identified four attachment styles, namely, secure attachment, insecure avoidant attachment, insecure ambivalent attachment, and disorganised attachment.

Secure attachment occurs when the child is cared for by sensitive and responsive caregivers. This implies that securely attached children are able to regulate their distress and know they can show their needs and feelings and will not be rejected. Young children who have sensitive and responsive attachment figures develop trust. This allows them to explore their world while knowing that if they need help, they can return to their 'secure base (the attachment figures they can turn to as a safe haven when upset or anxious) (Schofield & Beek, 2014).

Insecure avoidant attachment tends to occur when the caregiver finds it difficult to accept or respond sensitively to the infant's needs. These children tend to experience parenting that is hostile, rejecting and controlling. They come to see themselves as neither loved nor loveable. Children respond to this by

shutting down on their feelings because of their anxiety that any display of need or emotion may drive their caregiver away.

Insecure ambivalent attachment tends to occur when the caregiver responds inconsistently to the child's demands. These children exaggerate their attachment behaviour to attract attention. They are not always successful at being noticed and their ambivalence reflects their simultaneous need for and anger with their attachment figure.

Disorganised attachment occur in children who are cared for by people who are frightening. Children may fear approaching their caregiver because they cannot predict whether they will respond positively (e.g., with cuddles) or negatively (e.g., shouting, smacking). Consequently, these children are not able to 'organise' their own behaviour and have difficulty regulating their emotions.

Research based on the attachment theory shows that within the school setting, children who have developed insecure attachments are at risk for lower social competence and self-esteem. They tend to show elevated levels of aggressive and hostile behavior in pre-school through to higher education (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). For the purpose of this study, it is, therefore, projected that understanding the aforementioned attachment styles can help lecturers, counselors, and administrators of the university to comprehend the intensity of attachment needs and serve foster youth better.

Self-Determination Theory

The self-determination theory focuses on the belief that human beings have the characteristic to be generally motivated in overcoming barriers that they face. The theory cautions that this motivation for overcoming barriers, could be hindered by outside factors such as the individual's social environment

(Salazar, Haggerty, & Roe, 2016). In higher educational institutions, several interventions exist that can address the challenges of students. Some of these interventions are the support systems and frameworks that guide in working with foster youth by empowering their self-determination skills (Salazar et al., 2016). Teaching foster youth skills that can help them overcome challenges can be helpful in assisting them achieve their goals such as pursuing higher education.

Thus, this theory is hinged on the fact that self-determined foster youth are likely to overcome challenges they encounter as they pursue higher education, and strive to complete successfully while those who are not self-determined are likely to abandon their dream of obtaining a degree with or without complex support systems available in the higher education institution.

Concept of Foster Care

According to Child Welfare Information Gateway (2017), foster care refers to 24-hour substitute care for children outside their own homes and this may include, but are not limited to, nonrelative foster family homes, relative foster homes, group homes, emergency shelters, and pro-adaptive homes. Foster care is a complex service. It serves children who have experienced abuse or neglect from their birthparents and families, and their foster parents. Children in foster care may live with unrelated foster parents, with relatives, with families who plan to adopt them, or in group homes or residential treatment centers. Foster care provides a family-based setting for children whose biological family is unable or unwilling to care for them. Foster care is the least restrictive formal alternative care option for children in need of care, providing a family life for

children who cannot live with their own parents. They can either be under the care of the government or individual foster parents.

The Institute for Research on Poverty reported that between 75% and 80% of foster children come from homes that the parents are unable to take care of them adequately. Also, children may find themselves in foster care as result of a sudden calamity, such as death of biological parents, physical or mental illness or imprisonment of the care-giving parents as well as abuse, neglect, and abandonment by their biological parents. The outcome of their research revealed that between 15 and 20% of foster children find themselves in child care systems because they have problems such as physical handicaps, mental illness that their parents cannot cope with. The Institute for Research on Poverty further noted that about five percent of the causes of fostering are attributable to environmental factors such as financial need, inadequate housing, or chronic unemployment. Therefore, poverty is also a major factor that frequently contributes to the crises that require children to be placed in foster care (Pilon, 2003; Al-Hassan & Abubakari, 2015).

As with all alternative care arrangements, the goal of foster care is reunification; returning the child to their home as soon as the problems that caused them to come into foster care have been resolved and it is clear that their parents are able to look after them safely. However, in some cases where the children are under the state custody, children may need to stay in long-term foster care, be adopted, or move on to live independently.

The Children's (Amendment) Act, 2016 strengthens legislative provisions pertaining to formal foster care arrangements in Ghana. Because foster care is designed as a temporary service that responds to crises in the lives

of children and families. An expectation exists that children who enter care either will return to their parents as soon as possible, or will be provided with safe, stable, and loving families through placement with relatives or adoption. Some children, however, remain in foster care for extended periods of time. Many age out and go on to live on their own. (Al-Hassan & Abubakari, 2015).

According to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNICEF (2020), the number of children cared for in the host family does not exceed the approved number of children on the placement agreement. The maximum number of children cared by the foster parent should not exceed seven, including biological children and other children. However, in case of emergency, additional children can be admitted through Department of Social Welfare (DSW) as and when the capacity allows. Youth in foster care can experience a number of psychosocial concerns ranging from histories of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, family instability, health problems, multiple placements, substance use or abuse, behaviors and increased risk for mental health problems (Elze, Auslander, Stiffman, & McMillen, 2005).

Foster Care System in Ghana

In many instances in the developed world, children are taken from the care of their parents and provided care by state agencies, charities or private organisations because they have been maltreated, orphaned or because their parents are absent, and neglected due to bad behaviours (Thoburn, 2010; Fernandez & Barth, 2010). Two categories of fostering have been identified in the literature – kinship and non-kinship (Kuyini et al., 2009). According to Scannapieco, Hegar, and McAlpine (1997) kinship foster care involves sending children to blood relations to be catered for, while the foster parents in non-

kinship foster care are not blood relations (fostering under the state custody or not under state custody). In the case of Ghana in particular, kinship foster care might not necessarily be regarded as the relegation of parental responsibilities as noted by Vandermeersch and Chimere-Dan (2002). This is because kinship foster care is culturally accepted within the extended family system.

The practice of parents placing their children in another family is an old phenomenon in many Africa countries including Ghana. Several studies (e.g., Isiugo-Ibanihe, 1985; Pilon, 2003) found that the practice was especially common in West Africa. Majority of the people in the rural areas give out their children to relatives or other family members in the urban areas to take care of (Owusu & Adjei, 2009). This traditional way of fostering was practiced in Ghana until the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child globally in 1990 indicating the interest to advance the rights of children (OHCHR, 2015).

Fostering in Ghana has different connotations. Fostering can be used to denote the exchange of children between families for the purposes of children being cared for by other family members to provide these children with education, or in exchange for provision of services (Grant & Yeatman, 2012). These services provided by children include provision of domestic labour and performing of house chores. Demographers in Ghana and many other African countries have consistently reported high rates of child fostering although these do not necessarily have state interventions or regulations (Isiugo- Abanihe, 1983; Owusu & Adjei, 2009). Ghana has had a long-standing tradition of kinship fostering since the pre independence era (Frimpong-Manso, 2014).

Informal fostering has been a common phenomenon in Ghana and across West Africa until recent times where the trends are shifting due to migration, social change, industrialisation and economic pressures. The Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2014 (2015 pp.21-23) describes foster children as “children under age 18 living in households with neither their mother nor their father present”. According to this survey 16 percent of all households in Ghana have foster children. Informal foster care is often a buffer for children in poor families to be rescued from the shackles of poverty by other well to do members of the family (Child and Family Welfare Policy, 2015; Grant & Yeatman, 2012).

According to Frimpong-Manso (2021), the major reasons accounting for children in need of state care in Ghana include factors like poverty, HIV and AIDS and archaic and harmful traditional practices. These factors often lead to stigmatization of children in care (Frimpong-Manso, 2021). The number of children in out-of-home care placement in Ghana has increased (Badu-Nyarko, 2011). In Ghana, the government has developed an ambitious programme of care reform and family strengthening since 2007. This programme is rooted in Ghanaian cultural values, which place a strong emphasis on family care. Interventions have included legislative reform, strengthening the social welfare workforce and developing alternative family-based care option for children in need of alternative care (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNICEF (2020).

After the Amendment of the Children’s Act, and the passage of the Foster Care Regulations in 2018, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection together with the decentralized structures have embarked on the

implementation of the programme by recruiting, training and licensing foster parents across the country. The foster care system in Ghana is regulated by the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), the Children's (Amendment) Act, 2016 and the Foster Care Regulations, 2018.

As stated by the Children Amendment Act, 2016 (Act 937), foster care in Ghanaian context is a temporary alternative measure for children with the goal of family reunification or adoption. Research shows that children in foster care are cared by foster parents through a relationship based on affection, understanding and respect and which promotes healthy spiritual, emotional, physical, sexual and intellectual development of the child. Potential foster parents should be at least 21 years old, of high moral character (no criminal record) and in good health. Foster parents are trained, have a valid license and can be entrusted with the care of children unrelated to them (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNICEF, 2020). Applicants can be married or single, but an unmarried male applicant cannot foster a female child (Frimpong-Manso, 2021). Foster parents can be assigned to one or more children (maximum of 7) who are not related by blood, marriage or adoption.

It has been reported that, foster parenting in Ghana is purely voluntary, and there is no provision for direct financial support to foster families unlike other countries (Boafo, Norman, & Frimpong-Manso, 2017). The qualification of becoming a foster parent is based on the morality of the person and their financial ability to take care of children. The Care Plan should be developed by Department of Social Welfare (DSW) Officers within four weeks of the child's placement. The DSW Care Plan template should be used to guide the

development of this Care Plan with the involvement of the child, the foster parents and the child's biological family where possible and appropriate.

It is sad to know that, while the focus should always be on reintegrating children or placing them in adoption within the shortest possible time, children are continuously prepared for independent living throughout their stay in foster care and empowered to cope and adapt to life's challenges in the outside world. Every year a group of young men and women who reach the age of 18 leave these residential facilities to begin independent adult life. Similar to the international research evidence, the few published research studies on care-leavers in Africa have found that many are unprepared for adulthood. They face numerous challenges including poverty, unemployment and low educational attainment (Byers, Sheeran, Mlodzianowski, Meyers, Nassisi, & Bruce, 2008).

In reaction to the challenges faced by many care-leavers, most advanced countries have put in place legislation that provides funding and mandates the provision of services that aim to prepare and support young people in out-of-home care for their transition to adulthood. Such a situation, however, is non-existent in many African countries including Ghana.

In other matters, research has shown how institutionalization of children affects the child's wellbeing (Petrowski, Cappa, & Gross, 2017). In 2007, Ghana embarked on a reform of its care system dubbed the Care Reform Initiative (CRI). The CRI was aimed at addressing the excesses in the residential care system in Ghana and to provide children who needed alternative care a more stable and loving family.

By concentrating on integrated family and community systems; CRI in restructuring the alternative care system for children focused on

deinstitutionalization like many other countries in line with the United Nations Guidelines for Alternative Care of Children and the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UN guidelines call on all state parties to limit the use of residential facilities. Where large residential care facilities exist alternatives should be provided whilst putting into due consideration the best interest of the child and expediting actions in eliminating these facilities (UNICEF, 2017).

In Ghana, formal foster care is underutilized and a report on findings from 10 priority districts of foster care indicated that thirty-two (32) children were in formal foster care placement as at 2014 with ninety-eight (98) approved registered foster parents across the country (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2018). Formal foster care is only practiced in a few districts in Ghana and mostly executed through NGO's which are classified as Foster Care Agencies. The two main NGO's facilitating this process in Ghana is the Bethany Christian Services and Orphaned Aid Africa. (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2018).

The Ghanaian culture places so much importance on family and preservation of family ties. In Ghana, a child is seen as a product of the society and is raised by the larger society and extended family rather than just the nuclear family. Due to this, in cases where the immediate family lacks the capacity to cater for the child members of the extended family and sometimes the community at large steps in to help with the upbringing of the child (Imoh, 2012; Frimpong-Manso, 2014; Hickmann & Adams, 2018) without necessarily resorting to any formal procedures in protecting the child. Most often in situations where children have been harmed, community structures are resorted

to, and in these situations, emphasis is on restoration of peace in these homes rather than upholding the rights of the child (Child and Family Welfare Policy, 2015).

Overview of Contemporary Trends of Fostering in Ghana

The Children's Amendment Act 2016 (Act 937) provides clear guidelines on foster care and adoption in Ghana (Republic of Ghana Children's Amendment Act, 2016). A major goal of foster care in Ghana is family reunification (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNICEF, 2018). According to Section 62 of the Act, poverty (financial and material) should not be the basis for a child's placement in foster care. In Ghana a person with a high moral integrity, who is above the ages of 21, can be a foster parent. Notwithstanding a person can foster a child if he/ she is at least 18 years and a relative of the child, or at least 21 years when he/she is not related to the child (Republic of Ghana Children's Amendment Act, 2016).

Currently, there are two types of foster care arrangements that can be provided by a family in Ghana. These are either short term (6 months or less) or long term (over 6 months up to a year or more) depending on each child's unique situation. Foster children are entitled to have all the rights of children who live with their biological families. Foster care placements must consider the preservation of family ties and non-discrimination. Every child in need of care and protection can be put into foster care regardless of disabilities. Foster parents cannot foster more than 7 children including their own biological children (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNICEF, 2018).

At present, there is no official data indicating the number of foster children in Ghana. However, unpublished reports from the foster care services

unit of the DSW indicate that as at May 2020 the number of children placed in foster care is 115 with 213 certified foster carers. Another set of 260 foster parents were yet to be certified at the time this study was conducted. The recruitment of foster carers involves awareness creation through community-based groups and talks at religious centres, which leads to the screening and scrutiny of interested prospective foster parents. After this process prospective carers are provided a pre-service training before children are subsequently placed (Mawutor, 2015). DSW does not provide direct financial support to foster parents but may provide in-kind support' and additional expenses foster parents may incur in discharging their role (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNICEF, 2018).

Educational Aspirations of Foster Youth

Foster youth have university aspirations similar to non-foster youth (Geiger, Hanrahan, Cheung, & Lietz, 2016; McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, & Thompson, 2003). However, the path to a post-secondary degree is arduous and foster youth exhibit comparatively poor outcomes each step of the way (Gilliam, Lindsay, Murray, & Wells, 2016). Research shows that foster youth experience trauma on many fronts. Removed from their home, separated from their parent(s), placed in the care of strangers, and assigned to a child welfare worker, these children experience trauma and stress that non-foster individuals cannot begin to comprehend. Foster youth are less likely to graduate from high school, less likely to enroll in higher education, and if they enroll, are less likely to graduate with a post-secondary degree than other young adults (Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, & Damashek, 2011).

Specifically, Day, et al. (2011) estimated that about 65% of foster youth graduate from high school, compared to 87% for all youth ages 18–24. Removal from the home quite often also means a move to a new neighborhood, a new community, and a new school without the benefit of time to acclimate to these new surroundings. When the state assumes the role of the parent for children in care, the safety of that child is the first objective. It is very important, however, that the education of the child is not overlooked (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer 2004). Although foster youth are worse off than their peers in regards to educational attainment at the high school and post-secondary level, there are several studies that show foster youth have a strong desire to achieve educational goals.

Courtney, Terao, and Bost (2004) conducted a study about foster youth in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin. In the study, it was estimated that approximately 80% of foster youth had the desire to attend higher education institutions or additional training after secondary school. In conformity to that, McMillen et al. (2003) surveyed a sample of 262 youth in the foster care system about their educational aspirations. In this study, 70% of the participants stated they planned to attend university after secondary education and 19% wanted to continue their education beyond a bachelor's degree. Overall, their data showed significant concerns for foster care at the secondary school level, but the students still had a strong desire to continue their academic careers after secondary school.

According to Blome (1997), foster youth and their peers both hoped to complete a university degree, but the non-foster care youth are more likely to plan a four-year bachelor degree while the foster youth are more likely to

consider other options immediately after secondary school such as working, vocational school, or homemaking. In a study conducted by Fernandez and Barth (2010), foster youth who desired university education often had to choose a community university or vocational school because they reported working an average of 26 to 31 hours per week and it was a better financial option than a four-year college.

Support Systems Available for Foster Youth

Many universities have developed campus support programmes. Campus support programmes are quite diverse, but they generally include some combination of mentoring/coaching, academic support, social networks/activities, and financial assistance (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Geiger, Piel, Day, & Schelbe 2018; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). Years of research on what makes college students successful points to a key factor that is resilience – the ability to bounce back and pursue your goals while encountering challenges and obstacles. Having a strong support system at school is extremely important not just in the form of friendships, but through services offered by the school (Hass & Graydon, 2009). This is because there are so many challenges that foster youth may encounter, especially, in their first few years of university experience. These include being away from close friends and care givers, pursuing rigorous academic programmes and courses, battling with financial constraints and so on.

Most universities have well-established student support systems to meet the personal and academic needs of their students. According to McInnis, James, and Hartley (2000), the support systems available for students include, financial aid, pastoral care, English language support services, counselling

services, health services, library support service, employment services, study skills assistance, student union, sport facilities and catering services. McInnis et al. advanced that the belief that students come to university to achieve academic aspirations and personal development has expanded the range of student support systems in higher education.

As a community, universities are more aware of the need to satisfy the social and emotional needs of their students. Among the support services available to students at universities, those which are pertinent to the academic, self-development and emotional needs of students such as financial aid, learning support, employment services, and counselling are the most important (McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000). These services go a long way to make students comfortable on campus, especially foster youth. For instance, students counselling services have been recognized as one of the services that cater for emotional and development needs. According to Lea and Farbus (2000), student counselling center provides a safe place for students to talk throughout the academic year with professionals about a variety of personal issues, stress, time management, relationship issues, anxiety and depression.

Even though most universities can give a long list of their student support services, it does not necessarily mean that all the services are actively functioning and benefiting the students effectively. Nevertheless, these services can be improved. To improve the effectiveness of student support systems, university managers need to champion the importance of such services in enhancing the experience of being at university. They need to develop support that promotes the intellectual, personal and academic development and achievement of students from diverse backgrounds (Lea & Farbus, 2000).

Challenges of Foster Youth in Higher Education

Excessive distress on being separated from parents is prominent in adolescents (Last, Francis, Hersen, Kazdin, & Strauss, 1987). Despite the good intentions of foster care agencies and other service providers, many children placed into the system experience additional mistreatment (Harden, 2004). As a child enters this system without parental or family support, problems with educational achievement, mental and physical health, substance abuse, and poverty tend to emerge (Harden, 2004). Specifically, many youth from foster care experience several elementary and secondary school placements, behavioral problems, unemployment, homelessness, incarceration, emotional disorders, compromised brain development, high levels of depression, social phobia, panic disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder throughout their childhood (Altshuler & Poertner, 2003; Barth, 1990; Chipungu & Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Several studies have shown that foster children frequently missed a substantial number of school days and therefore record higher school absence rates than their non-foster care peers. For instance, Castrechini (2009) found an average absence rate of about 12% among children in foster care compared to only 6% for non-foster children in San Mateo County of California. The percentage of foster children leaving school at mid-year was also found to be 17% compared to only 2% for non-foster children. According to Berger (2015), children in foster care, on average, perform worse in school than other children, and this phenomenon raises concerns about the effectiveness of child welfare and educational policy for vulnerable groups, particularly foster children across the world. In addition, estimates reveal that among foster youth who complete

secondary school, 42% enroll in university compared to 69% of the young adult population (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010).

For foster youth that enter university, studies find that they have lower GPAs and are less likely to graduate than the general student population or even a subsample of first-generation students from low-income families (Day et al., 2011; Davis, 2006; Pecora et al., 2006; Unrau, Font, & Rawis, 2012). And, foster youth progress more slowly through higher education than first generation and low-income students, even as they exhibit good academic standing (Day, Dworsky, & Feng, 2013). These educational disparities accumulate until only 1–11% of foster care alumni obtain a bachelor's degree, compared to 32.5% of the general population (Courtney & Hook, 2017; Pecora et al., 2006; White et al., 2015; Wolanin, 2005; Ratcliffe, Burd, Holder, & Fields, 2016).

A number of barriers can make it difficult for foster care youth to succeed in higher education. One is the level of emotional and social stress that is associated with fosterage from primary caregivers, siblings and other family members. Sawyer et al. (1994) opined that, even though some other factors contribute to low educational attainments of foster children, separation of children from their biological parents (fostering) may usually place the child in an environment where she/he suffers abuse and over-working.

Several research works have also established that majority of foster children have suffered emotional challenges which have affected their academic performance. Foster youth tend to struggle with social, emotional, and behavioral health issues and often receive no or poor-quality behavioral health services (Longhofer, Floersch, & Okpych, 2011; McMillen et al., 2005). The

emotions that these children go through as result of poverty, abuse, neglect in both their biological parental and foster homes turn to contribute to a sense of abandonment and low self-esteem among foster children (Calix, 2009; Owusu & Adjei, 2009).

These youth lack instrumental and emotional supports which are critically important for young adults seeking a college degree (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Hass, Allen, & Amoah, 2014; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; Wolanin, 2005). The emotional and social stress experiences of these children turn to have everlasting effects on their learning abilities in school. These experiences have the tendency of affecting their ability to develop smart relationships with their lecturers and peers in schools as well as other people they come into contact with (Seyfried, Pecora, Downs, Levine, & Emerson, 2000). These translate in poor academic performance and low educational attainment/achievement.

Students who had been in foster care may also fail to graduate because student services personnel at most post-secondary institutions are neither familiar with nor prepared to address their unique needs (Dworsky & Perez, 2010). Consistent with this explanation, students in Merdinger et al. (2005) study reported not being able or not knowing how to obtain student services was one of the main reasons for dropping out of school. Previous studies have identified deficiencies in established student support systems. McInnis, James, and Hartley (2000) suggest a discrepancy between the most important support services identified by the students (employment service, counselling and learning support) and the most frequently used support facilities (student union café and libraries). The gap between the importance of the support service and

the frequency of the services being used by the students demonstrates some of the problems with university support systems.

Even if youth in foster care graduate from high school, they may not academically prepare for post-secondary education. Studies have shown that foster youth are much less likely to take University preparatory courses in high school than their peers (Blome, 1997) even when the two groups have similar test scores and grades (Blome, 1997). The education of former foster youth may also be disrupted once they enter universities (Merdinger et al., 2005). Youth in foster care have disruptive family, school, and neighbourhood experiences and this lack of continuity undermines their academic achievement and college readiness (Clemens, Lalonde, & Sheesley, 2016; Okpych & Courtney, 2019; Trout et al., 2008; Unrau, Font, & Rawis, 2012).

Moreover, mental health issues create substantial barriers for foster youth in higher education. Most youth involved in the child welfare system experience a series of traumas that affect their mental health (Kerker & Dore, 2006). The abuse and neglect experienced prior to engagement with the system for most children in the system is a series of traumatic events often over a period of months or years.

Likewise, most children in the system are removed from their homes and separated from their parents. This separation frequently extends beyond the home and parents, including separation from siblings, extended family, pets, friends, neighbours, teachers, etc. Sixty-five percent of children in the child welfare system experience multiple placements, during which the children repeatedly suffers from both the separation and a loss in security. Change of

schools may present its effects depending on the setting of the new school the foster child has been moved to (Kerker & Dore, 2006).

Youth in foster care may experience numerous placement changes and those placement changes may interrupt their post-secondary education (James, 2004; Trout et al., 2008). Frequent school changes are daunting challenge for foster children which do not only result in poor academic performance but results in dropping out of school (Smithgall, Gladden, Yang & Goerge, 2010) which accounts for mental health issues. That is, a child moved to a high- or low-quality school will result in better or worse academic performance of the child respectively. Sixteen percent of children experience six or more placements while in care (Smithgall et al., 2010). It is important for institutions and individuals to understand these multiple interrelated factors so as to plan appropriately towards improving the performance of foster youth in university (Burley & Halpern, 2019).

Adjustment Strategies

Building awareness around the barriers and outcomes for foster youth is a critical step in narrowing achievement gaps and attainment disparities for current and former foster youth in higher education. Hass and Graydon (2009) conducted a research which focused on foster youth with positive outcomes points to resiliency as a major factor in the lives of those who have been successful. Resilience is a context-specific process in which protective factors interact with risk factors to reduce the potential for negative outcomes (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Resilience involves protective factors which incorporates resources across personal, relational, and environmental domains (Schoon, 2006). Research that focuses on resilience can identify means to

improve the postsecondary outcomes of foster youth. Resilience is not a fixed personal attribute held by some and not others (Ecclestone, & Lewis, 2014). Instead, resilience is a process both temporally and contextually bound wherein the individual adapts to adversity with a successful outcome (Greene, Galambos, & Lee, 2018).

Resilience in any given instance is the result of a complex interplay of the individual's characteristics, social and familiar supports, and systematic support systems that are available when the individual is faced with adversity or trauma (Green et al., 2018). Benard (1991) defined resiliency as a set of environmental protective factors in the family, schools, and community, and identified specific categories: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, sense of purpose and further expanded through the lens of family, school, and community.

Interventions designed to promote resilience processes among foster youth have been shown to empower foster youth with new behavioral models and increase access to important support structures. These interventions targeted at youth in early childhood through adolescence in the university and have resulted in fewer placement disruptions, increased pro-social behaviors, increased positive affect and reduced rates of depression, reduced substance use, reduced likelihood of running away, and lower rates of teen pregnancy (Leve, et al., 2012). Similar interventions that promote the intentional development of protective factors at the family, school, and community levels have shown to lead to improved primary, secondary and post-secondary educational outcomes for foster youth (Morton, 2016).

Additionally, practitioners have encouraged foster youth in actions designed to build resilience by developing foster youth' personal strengths, including building their autonomy, sense of purpose, social competence, problem solving, and achievement motivation (Morrison & Allen, 2007). Under the heading of family, factors identified include having a caring and supportive person in their lives, and high expectations for success by a supportive and respected person. These same two factors were also found in the school and community contexts, in addition to participation in the school or community setting and participation in activities (Benard, 1991).

Hass and Graydon (2009) conducted research on the potential sources of resiliency in foster youth identified as successful. When asked where they received most of the help or support in their lives, 84% indicated that an individual or individuals (foster parents, authoritative and biological relatives) were responsible for helping them the most. Foster youth who do well academically and are motivated to attend university frequently cite having a mentor or role model as being a critical component to their success so it is important that they continue to have these supporting individuals on a college campus (Morrison & Allen, 2007). There are multiple studies that emphasize the importance of a foster parent or other role model that influences foster children to continue their education. (Hass & Graydon, 2009). Not only were these role models significant, but they often intervened or advocated for the foster youth in place of a caregiver that kept the foster youth on the path towards college.

Universities and colleges worldwide are developing new and expanding existing services tailored to support foster youth (Fried, 2008). While these

programmes vary to reflect the local context, they primarily focus on foster youth outreach, housing, financial aid, and mentoring (Fried, 2008). Additionally, these programmes typically utilize a designated coordinator, have external champions, utilize external resources (both fiscal and otherwise), and tap external expertise and guidance (Fried, 2008). Specifically, these programmes provide students with academic and career advising, tutoring, mentoring, housing assistance, scholarships and tuition waivers, and referrals for mental health and other services (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). This notion is evident in the research conducted by Hass and Graydon (2009), Merdinger et al. (2005), and Rios (2008).

Recommendations from the research offer many suggestions to help foster youth in post-secondary education and increase the likelihood that they will persist. One of the key factors was having access to faculty members, advisors, and staff that can serve as support for foster youth while they are adjusting to college (McMillen et al., 2003).

Foster youth indicate that some of the challenges with accessing resources at the institution of higher education they attended were lack of time, not knowing how to obtain the services, and not knowing where to obtain the services (Hass & Graydon, 2009). The transition to universities can be overwhelming for any student. Foster youth often feel unprepared and attend college without guidance so it is important for them to be made aware of services and resources early in their transition.

Again, social and community support is critical for foster youth to be successful in post-secondary education. This is due to a number of reasons including, “students who had been in foster care may also be less likely than

their peers to have informal networks of social support to which they can turn to when problems arise or they are feeling stressed” (Day et. al, 2013, p. 7). Hass and Graydon (2009) found that mentors in the community were identified as important sources of support for successful foster youth. Of the 44 in the study, 23 or 63% identified a mentor in the community. Mentoring has been shown to improve the outcome of foster youth in higher educational institutions including overall performance, critical thinking skills, self-confidence, grade point average, persistence, expectations, and future aspirations (Crisp, 2010).

In another study where foster youth were interviewed for several years after being discharged from the foster care system, 40% stated they spoke with previous prominent individuals in the community once a week and 20% of the foster youth stated the foster family continued providing emotional support and guided their decision making (Courtney, et al. 2001). Support networks are critical in the transition to higher education and there should be an emphasis on helping foster youth establish these relationships prior to exiting foster care.

Success Stories of Foster Youth in Higher Education

Like many youth in the university, youth transitioning out of foster care tend to have very poor postsecondary education and training enrollment and completion outcomes (Geiger et al., 2018). They are less likely to take college preparatory courses; have access to special programmes, advanced placement courses, and extracurricular activities; and pursue postsecondary education. However, with 70% of youth in foster care reporting a strong desire to go to college (Morton, 2016), the barriers to college access and success facing these students need to be better understood and addressed by policymakers and practitioners alike. All young people, including foster youth and youth with

disabilities, can succeed academically given adequate support and advocacy from educators, professionals, and their caregivers.

Lovitt and Emerson (2008) conducted a research and interviewed eight former foster youth who recently graduated from college. Their perspectives of going to college and obtaining a degree despite numerous barriers presents an opportunity on how other young adults like them might be better supported. One or two adults consistently supported these youth.

According to Lovitt and Emerson (2008), for two students, the essential persons were their adoptive parents. For two others, it was an aunt: a biological aunt in one case and a foster aunt. One young man identified his grandparents with whom he was placed when his foster parents were killed, as having the most influence. A young lady among them identified a group-home supervisor who encouraged her to attend college and supported her until she graduated. Another young man said he depended on a coach. Lovitt and Emerson indicated that most of the students participated in extracurricular activities while in high school. Those who didn't have time in high school because of a part-time job came to see this as a deficit and actively changed their approach in college. All these students have a set plan and told themselves that they would attend and graduate from college.

Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualises foster youth as young adults who are being cared for by a caregiver (i.e., kinship or non-kinship) in either a formalised or non-formalised care facility, and those who have exited a care facility because they have reached 18 years or have been legally emancipated from a foster care facility prior to age 18. Like their non-foster youth counterparts, every foster

youth deserves quality education at all educational levels once all admission criteria are met. However, there are several hindrances that curtail the educational achievement of many foster youth.

As such, researches (Dworsky & Perez, 2010; Geiger et al., 2018; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010; McInnis et al., 2000) have shown that with the appropriate support systems, foster youth can achieve desirable outcomes in higher education. Hence, the current study sought to identify the support systems available for foster youth pursuing various undergraduate degree programmes in the University of Cape Coast by formulating the research question: *What support systems are available for University of Cape Coast students who have experienced foster care?*

A number of challenges can make it difficult for foster youth in higher education to meet their educational outcomes. These challenges include, but not limited to financial constraints, emotional and social stress (Longhofer, et al., 2011; McMillen et al., 2005) which have the tendency to cause poor academic performance, school drop-out, and delayed completion, among others. The kind of challenges common to foster youth in a specific educational setting influences the kind of support systems and adjustment strategies that need to be put in place to mitigate such challenges. Hence, the research question: *What are the challenges that students who have experienced foster care face in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast?*

In order for foster youth to achieve their educational targets in higher education, the onus lies on them to adopt effective adjustment strategies towards their financial, academic, psychological and social behaviours. That is, developing awareness of the barriers that foster youth are likely to encounter,

as well as a clear focus of what they want to achieve in life is a key step in narrowing achievement gaps and attainment disparities for foster youth in higher education. Based on this assertion, the current study formulated the research question: *What adjustment strategies do students who have experienced foster care employ to overcome challenges encountered in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast?* Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework for the current study linking all the variables of concern.

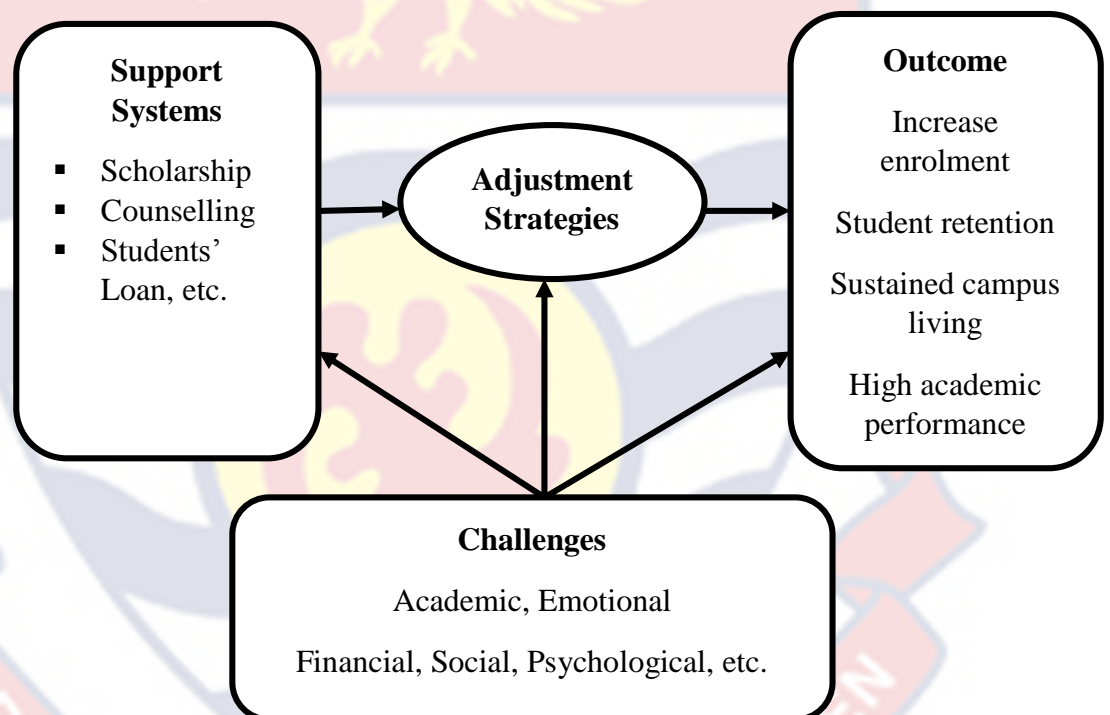


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for foster youth in higher education

Source: Author's Construct

From *Figure 1*, support systems together with undergraduate foster youth adjustment strategies influence educational outcome. For instance, the availability of effective support systems can result in high academic performance, sustained campus living, among others, if foster youth apply useful adjustment strategies such as making strong efforts to learn hard and

reduce spending cost. The availability of support systems does not mean the absence of challenges but underscores the relevance of employing adjustment strategies. As such, challenges induce adjustment strategies and support systems, and negatively affect educational outcomes.

Empirical Review

This section reviews empirical evidence that are related to the phenomenon under study such as studies that explored the support systems available for foster youth in higher education, barriers to academic success among foster youth in higher education, and adjustment strategies employed by foster youth in higher education to overcome their challenges.

In the USA, Garcia and Gonzalez (2021) conducted a study to identify the supports available for foster youth that have helped them to pursue higher education and the challenges they encounter. The qualitative case study design was used. The snowball sampling technique was used to select 10 former and current foster youth pursuing a 4-year degree programme. A semi-structured and open-ended interview guide items were developed by the researcher to collect qualitative data. The qualitative data were analysed using the inductive thematic analysis approach while the background data of the respondents were analysed using frequency and percentage.

The study found that former and current foster youth received financial counseling support from school staff. Again, there was the Guardian Scholars Programme that provided scholarship opportunities, priority registration, personal counseling, academic counseling and career guidance for foster youth. The study also revealed that foster youth lacked support from their social worker in pursuing higher education.

In the USA, Rivera and Lopez (2021) investigated the barriers encountered by foster youth at the higher education level through the qualitative case study design. The snowball sampling technique was used to select 11 participants for the study. The researchers developed open-ended interview guide which was used to gather qualitative data and analysed using the inductive thematic analysis approach. The study found that financial instability and lack of mental health services were the barriers that foster youth encounter as they pursue higher education.

In the USA, Burwell and Leeker (2020) examined the factors that account for foster youth obtaining higher education. The purpose of the study was to identify both positive and negative factors that contributed to foster youth obtaining higher education. The qualitative design was employed. The convenience and the snowballing techniques were used to sample two former child welfare social workers and seven former foster youth offering undergraduate degree programmes in a state university respectively. Interview guide that consisted of open-ended items was used to gather data. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis.

The study found that negative factors that militate against foster youth in sustaining higher education were financial constraints, and lack of support. In contrast, positive factors that influence foster youth to pursue, be retained and obtain a degree were having a mentor or a good support network, self-determination and funding.

In the USA, Thompson (2017) examined factors that influence college success for foster youth through the cross-sectional descriptive survey design. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select a total of 41 college

staff and administrators in California community college. Researcher developed questionnaire was used to gather qualitative data on the programmes, services, and resources that influence the academic success of former foster youth. The data gathered were analysed using frequency and percentage. The study found that the Guardian Scholars Programme (GSP) provided access to stable housing and financial aid for all foster youth. Additionally, the study found stable housing for foster youth and financial aid as the two factors that influenced college success for former foster youth.

In the USA, England (2017) studied the different factors that empower foster youth to be successful in higher education. The study utilized the qualitative case study design. The snowball sampling technique was used to select five participants for the study. A semi-structured interview was used to gather data. The data gathered were analysed using the thematic analysis and the constant comparative analysis. The study found that having a mentor to assist foster youth empowers them to be successful in obtaining higher education. Again, the study revealed that workshop and conferences empowered the foster youth to be successful in obtaining higher education.

In the USA, Brenda (2015) explored the barriers that former and current foster youth encounter towards their academic achievement. The study employed the qualitative case study design and purposely selected 11 foster youth in the state of Oregon who were pursuing a post-secondary education and had applied for the Chafee Education and Training Scholarship. Open-ended interview items developed by the researcher were used to collect qualitative data. The inductive thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. Findings of the study identified high mobility, disempowerment, self-defeating

attitude and mistrust of social workers or care givers as the barriers to academic achievement of the foster youth.

In the United Kingdom, Jackson and Ajayi (2007) explored supports and challenges that foster youth experience in pursuing higher education through a longitudinal case study design. The purposive sampling technique was used to include 129 current and former foster youth pursuing a 4-year degree programme in England and Wales. Semi-structured interview guide was used to gather data. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study found foster parents as an important source of support to the foster youth. Again, it was revealed that the foster youth struggled in their academics because they lacked basic study skills, had difficulty organizing their course work, and demonstrated slow reading ability.

Chapter Summary

The theoretical underpinnings of the current study are the systems theory, the attachment theory, and the self-determination theory. The systems theory provides theoretical framing for the support systems available for foster youth in the university. It implies that a person's demands for support to overcome a certain problem is accomplished when the available support facilities interacts (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2012). If support systems in the University of Cape Coast work effectively, foster youth who are beneficiaries of these supports will be retained to curb school drop-out and increase their completion rate.

On the other hand, the attachment theory explains that foster youth who were happily attached to their care givers throughout their development will be able to link-up effectively with their university lecturers, counselors, and

administrators to share their challenges for solutions without keeping to themselves. Also, the self-determination theory projects the viewpoint that self-determined foster youth are likely to overcome challenges they encounter as they pursue higher education, and strive to complete successfully while those who are not self-determined are likely to abandon their dream of obtaining a degree with or without complex support systems available in the higher education institution.

It is worthwhile to note that several researchers (Burwell & Leeker, 2020; England, 2017; Garcia & Gonzalez, 2021; Rivera & Lopez, 2021; Thompson, 2017) have studied the phenomenon of foster youth pertaining support systems in higher education that are available to them, challenges they encounter as they seek tertiary education and how they adjust to overcome these challenges. The widely used approach to most previous studies have been the qualitative research approach as characterised by the case study design. It has also been revealed by most previous studies (Garcia & Gonzalez, 2021; Rivera & Lopez, 2021; Thompson, 2017) that effective support systems abounds in higher education institutions for foster youth. The present study, among other valuable reasons, however, attempted to represent a developing setting in order to contribute to contemporary trends of literature on foster youth in higher education.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS

Overview

This study explored the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, their challenges and the adjustment strategies they use to overcome their challenges. This chapter discusses the research methods which include research approach, research design, study area, population, sampling procedure, data collection instruments, methodological rigour of the qualitative data, data collection procedures, data processing and analysis procedures, and chapter summary.

Research Approach

This study adopted the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is inductive in nature, and it is generally used to explore meanings and insights in a given situation (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017). It is the observations and interpretations of people's perception of different events, and it takes the snapshot of the people's perception in a natural setting (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin, 2015). Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations to social phenomena. It seeks to find answers to questions relating to how events, programmes and interventions affect people (Trochim, 1985).

The qualitative approach provides a unique opportunity to explore the opinion of participants in a naturalistic inquiry. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Razzavirh (2010), qualitative research focuses on understanding of social phenomena and providing thick verbal description of settings, situation and participant. The qualitative approach was chosen to provide in-depth

understanding into the experiences of foster youth enrolled in undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast.

Research Design

The phenomenological research design was adopted to explore the experiences of foster youth enrolled in undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. This design focuses on descriptions of what people experience, and how they experience it (Patton, 2002). According to Christensen, Johnson and Turner (2010), the primary objective of phenomenological research is to explicate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people, around a specific phenomenon.

There are different variants of the phenomenological research design. These include; descriptive (transcendental) phenomenology, naturalistic phenomenology, existential phenomenology, generative historicist phenomenology, genetic phenomenology, hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology, and realistic phenomenology (Embree et al., 1997). Based on the purpose and the nature of the current study, hermeneutic phenomenology was employed.

The hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on subjective experience of individuals and groups (Friensen, 2012). It is a research design that best unveils the world as experienced by the subject. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) emphasised that the best interpretation of a phenomenon can be ascertained by employing the hermeneutics phenomenological design. It is a “research methodology aimed at producing rich textual interpretations of the experiences of selected phenomena in the lifeworld of individuals” (Smith, 1997, p. 9). Smith continued

that this occurs through increasingly deeper and layered reflection by the use of rich descriptive language.

The hermeneutic phenomenological design was adopted for this qualitative study because the research questions formulated could be better explored through this design. Specifically, the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, the challenges they encounter, and how they adjust to overcome their challenges and achieve their goals were thoroughly interpreted based on how they lived it.

Study Area

The study was conducted in the University of Cape Coast. University of Cape Coast is the first university established in the Central Region and it is a leading university in teacher education in Ghana. It is located in the Central Region of the Republic of Ghana. It is five kilometers west of Cape Coast, on a hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. It operates through her southern (i.e., old site) and her northern (i.e., new site) campuses. The university was established in 1962 as an affiliate to the University of Ghana. The overarching purpose for the establishment of the University of Cape Coast was to train manpower in education. Currently, the university has added to its aforementioned function the training of education planners, administrators, counsellors, psychologists, agriculturalists, health care professionals, and a host of other valued professionals. It trains students both at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

In pursuance of its mission, the university is organized into five colleges, namely, college of agriculture and natural science, college of distance education, college of education studies, college of humanities and legal studies and the college of health and allied sciences. Each college entails faculties,

departments, and/or institutes. Due to the important role the university plays in national development, its human resource is structured in ranks, including senior members, senior staff, and junior staff. Most of the senior staff act as academic counselors who help students to overcome their educationally related challenges. Figure 2 gives a pictorial view of the map of the University of Cape Coast.

The choice of the University of Cape Coast as the study area for the current research was influenced by the researcher's encounter with an undergraduate student of the aforementioned institution, who happened to be a foster youth (hereafter referred to as key informant). Upon hearing the plight of the key informant, the researcher sought to gather information from other undergraduate students who share similar characteristics. Hence, the need to also unearth the support systems in the institution that are available to the identified population became inevitable.

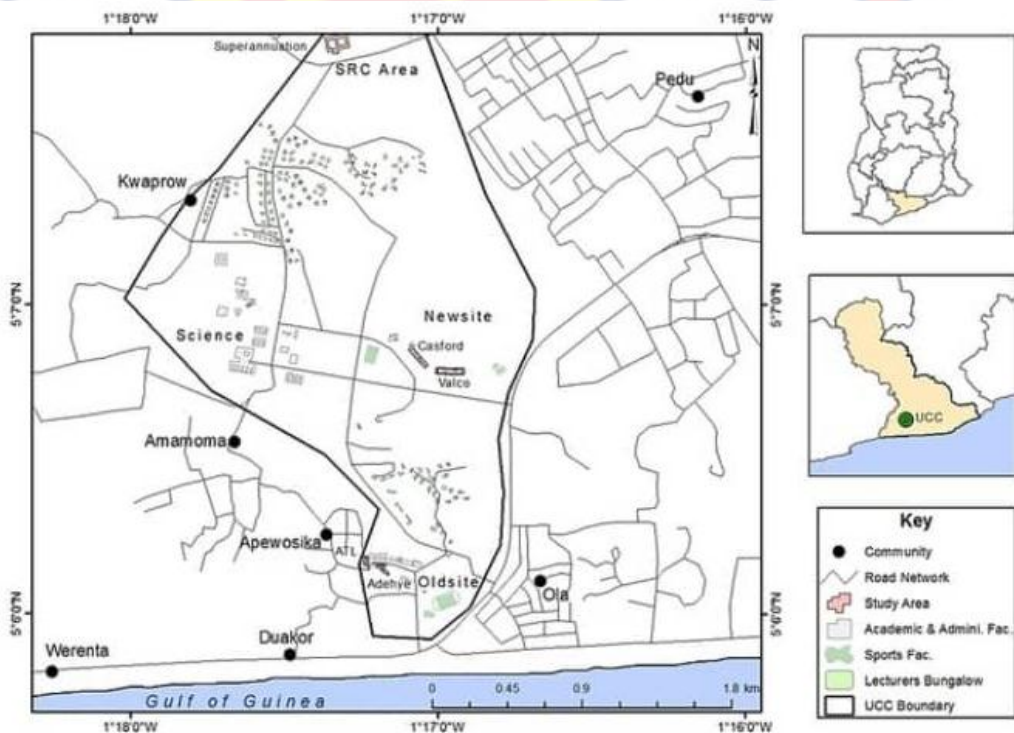


Figure 2: Map of the University of Cape Coast

Source: Department of Geography and Regional Planning, UCC (2019)

Population

The target population of this study was all current and former foster youth enrolled in undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. A total of 18 students who met the study's criteria formed the accessible population. The study's criteria were; all participants must have been placed in foster care for a period of at least six months between the ages of 14 and above and is currently in foster care (i.e., current foster youth) or had been in foster care for at least six months after their 14th birthday and exited foster care (i.e., former foster youth). Most of the participants ($n = 14$) were former foster youth, while few of them ($n = 4$) were current foster youth.

Sampling Procedure

Snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique was used to select the participants of this study. This sampling technique has been described as a technique where a researcher identifies a small number of participants who possess the traits that the researcher is interested, and use these participants as key informants to identify and connect others who qualify for inclusion to the researcher (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). This process continues until data saturation (Burns & Grove, 1993; Cohen et al., 2007). Dudovski (2018) identifies three patterns of the snowball sampling technique – linear snowball sampling, exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, exponential discriminative snowball sampling.

In linear snowball sampling, formation of a sample group starts with only one participant who then provides only one referral for him or her to also provide only one new referral. On the other hand, in exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, the first participant selected provides

multiple referrals. Contrary, in exponential discriminative snowball sampling, the first participant selected provides multiple referrals, but, only one new participant is recruited among them (Dudovskiy, 2018). As such, the pattern of snowball sampling adopted for the current study was the exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling.

First, the researcher identified and selected only one foster youth in the University of Cape Coast and solicited this respondent's support to recommend other foster youth in the university for inclusion. The first participant was able to identify three new participants who met the selection criteria for inclusion. Two out of the three selected participants also referred three participants each, while the other one, referred two participants to conclude the third phase of the snowball process. That is, at the end of the third phase of the snowball process, eight respondents were identified and included in the study's sample. As sampling continued, each of the participants selected at the third phase, except two of them (who referred none), referred one participant each, who met the inclusion criteria. Sampling was terminated after the fourth phase. In all, a total of 18 participants were recruited.

The justification for the sample size of 18 participants was anchored on the principle of saturation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative sample size determination should be guided by the criterion of informational redundancy. That is, sampling can be terminated when no new information is acquired by sampling more participants. In addition, the more information power the sample provides, the smaller the sample size needs to be, and vice versa (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016).

The exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling technique was employed because it was difficult to access former and current foster youth enrolled on undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. By using this technique, the participants who met the selection criteria were identified and included to gather data in a cost-effective manner. However, the representativeness of the sample cannot be guaranteed since the researcher could not obtain the size of the total population who met the selection criteria. In an attempt to curtail this setback, the study operated within the limits of qualitative research approach, with the intent of providing in-depth data of the experiences of the foster youth in the University of Cape Coast without making statistical inferences and testing hypotheses.

Data Collection Procedures

The data in this study were collected within a period of one month. The data collection was conducted in August, 2021. The data was primarily collected by the researcher without any assistance from research assistants or other data collection personnel. First, an introductory letter was sought from the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (I.E.P.A.), University of Cape Coast in order to enable participants to substantiate the status of the researcher and the purpose of the exercise.

Additionally, the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted permission to the researcher to collect interview data from foster youth pursuing undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. Permission was sought from the aforementioned institutions because respecting the site where research takes place, disrupting it as little as possible, and gaining

permission before entering a site is very paramount and ethical in research (Creswell, 2014).

Upon gaining the needed permission to collect data, the participants were visited individually, obtained their consent, and made known to them their right to participate or redraw. Before each interview session started, the intension of the study was first explained to the respondents. Interviews were conducted during the free periods of respondents. Depending on the participants' lecture period, some of them granted the interview in the morning, while others in the evening. There were no afternoon sessions of the interview since all the participants indicated their unavailability at that time.

The researcher opened the interview by first introducing herself; second, taking permission to engage participants; followed by orderly asking questions on the interview guide. The interview sessions lasted for a minimum of 24 minutes and a maximum of 28 minutes. The researcher recorded each interview for transcription and data analysis purposes.

Data Collection Instrument

Interview guide was used to collect data. Interview is a popular and widely used means of collecting qualitative data. To this end, the researcher sought firsthand information directly from university of Cape Coast students who have experienced foster care. This approach to data collection was employed because the researcher could not observe the participants feelings and thinking, so interviewing was key to understand what and how the respondents perceived and interpreted the phenomenon understudy.

The interview guide was designed by the researcher based on existing literature on the experiences of foster youth in higher education context. The

interview guide comprised seven closed-ended items and nine open-ended items. It comprised four sections; Section A, Section B, Section C, and Section D (see Appendix A). Section A focused on participants' background characteristics. It comprised nine closed-ended items that gathered data on the respondents' pseudonym, sex, age, faculty, current level, foster status, type of foster system, and major source of finance.

Moreover, Section B focused on gathering data to answer Research Question One which sought to provide in-depth information on the support systems available for University of Cape Coast students who have experienced foster care. It comprised three open-ended items. Furthermore, Section C gathered data to answer Research Question Two which sought to provide the challenges that foster youth encounter in acquiring higher education. It comprised one open-ended item. Lastly, Section D gathered data to answer Research Question Three which sought to reveal the adjustment strategies employed by foster youth to overcome challenges encountered in acquiring higher education. It comprised one open-ended item.

The interview guide allowed good interpretative validity and provided in-depth information of the experiences of the foster youth in the University of Cape Coast (Johnson & Turner, 2003). However, the use of the interview guide was time-consuming. That is, most of the open-ended nature of the items required participants to speak at length and support their perceptions with real life situations.

Before collecting the main data of this study, the interview guide developed was pre-tested. Pretesting of interview guide is the process of interviewing a few participants who share similar characteristics as participants

in the main study's setting to ensure appropriateness of the interview guide (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). The interview guide was pretested at the University of Education, Winneba. The snowball sampling technique was used to sample eight participants for the pre-test. Each participant was interviewed individually and recorded for analysis purposes. The interview for the pre-test session took an average of 25 minutes. Pretesting ensured that questions were clear, understandable and fit for purpose.

Data Processing and Analysis

To address the research questions formulated to guide the study, the analytical processes in phenomenology were used. These processes include bracketing (setting aside any preconceived notions or assumptions about the experience being studied in order to approach it with an open mind), intuiting (the researcher immersing herself in the experience being studied in order to gain a deep understanding of its essential features), describing (carefully and systematically describing the various aspects of the experience being studied), and analysing (identifying patterns, themes, and structures within the data collected).

The inductive thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. This is the process of identifying patterns or themes that are important and the use of these themes to address research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The qualitative data was first transcribed and read through, followed by coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, composing the write-up. Other than the three research questions formulated, frequency and percentage were used to analyse the data gathered on the background characteristics of the participants.

Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. This allowed the researcher to explore emerging issues deeper in subsequent interviews. Codes that connote the same idea was labelled as sub-themes. This was done according to each research question. Sub-themes that suggested an idea were also grouped as themes. Most codes were associated with one sub-theme whilst others were associated with more than one. The researcher read data associated with each theme and considered whether the data indeed supported it. There were a total of five themes with twenty-eight sub-themes. The researcher then identified the essence of what each theme is about. Themes were then defined and meaning was made of participants' narration through interpretation. Quotes from participants were used to support sub-themes in reporting the findings of the study.

Methodological Rigour

Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Pilot & Beck, 2014). It ensures that findings accurately represent exactly what participants intend to say and that finding can be trusted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The quality criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to judge the validity of the qualitative data gathered. This was necessary to build readers' confidence in the qualitative evidence provided on the experiences of foster youth in the University of Cape Coast.

First, credibility is achieved when the findings from the data reflects reality (Shenton, 2004). Credibility is achieved through establishing confidence in the truth value of the data and by truthfully interpreting the data (Polit &

Beck, 2014). In this study, referential adequacy (checking interpretations against raw data), member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), direct quotes (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011), and probing questions were employed to ensure credibility of the follow-up qualitative data. Probing questions were asked to enable participants to give examples to support their expressions.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Given that accuracy in the transcription and interpretation of participants' meanings are important aspects in establishing credibility, all transcripts were read whilst listening to audio recordings. Afterwards, the transcribed data was given to participants to validate. Lastly, direct quotes have been presented at the results section of the Chapter Four of this paper.

In addition, transferability of the qualitative data was ensured. Transferability is the extent to which the findings of a study can be applicable in other settings (Shenton, 2004). It is when the degree of the research can be generalized or transferred to other settings or contexts. The researcher provided a detailed description of the participants, setting, sample size, sampling technique, and method of data analysis. These were provided to equip readers with appropriate knowledge of the context to determine the transferability of the study's findings to a broader sample of participants other than those who participated in this study. All data and field notes were transcribed and kept for audit trail.

Moreover, dependability of the qualitative data was considered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that if the credibility of a qualitative data is established, then its dependability is proven. There is a greater possibility that interpretation by two or more naturalistic enquirers will differ in a naturalistic enquiry. This

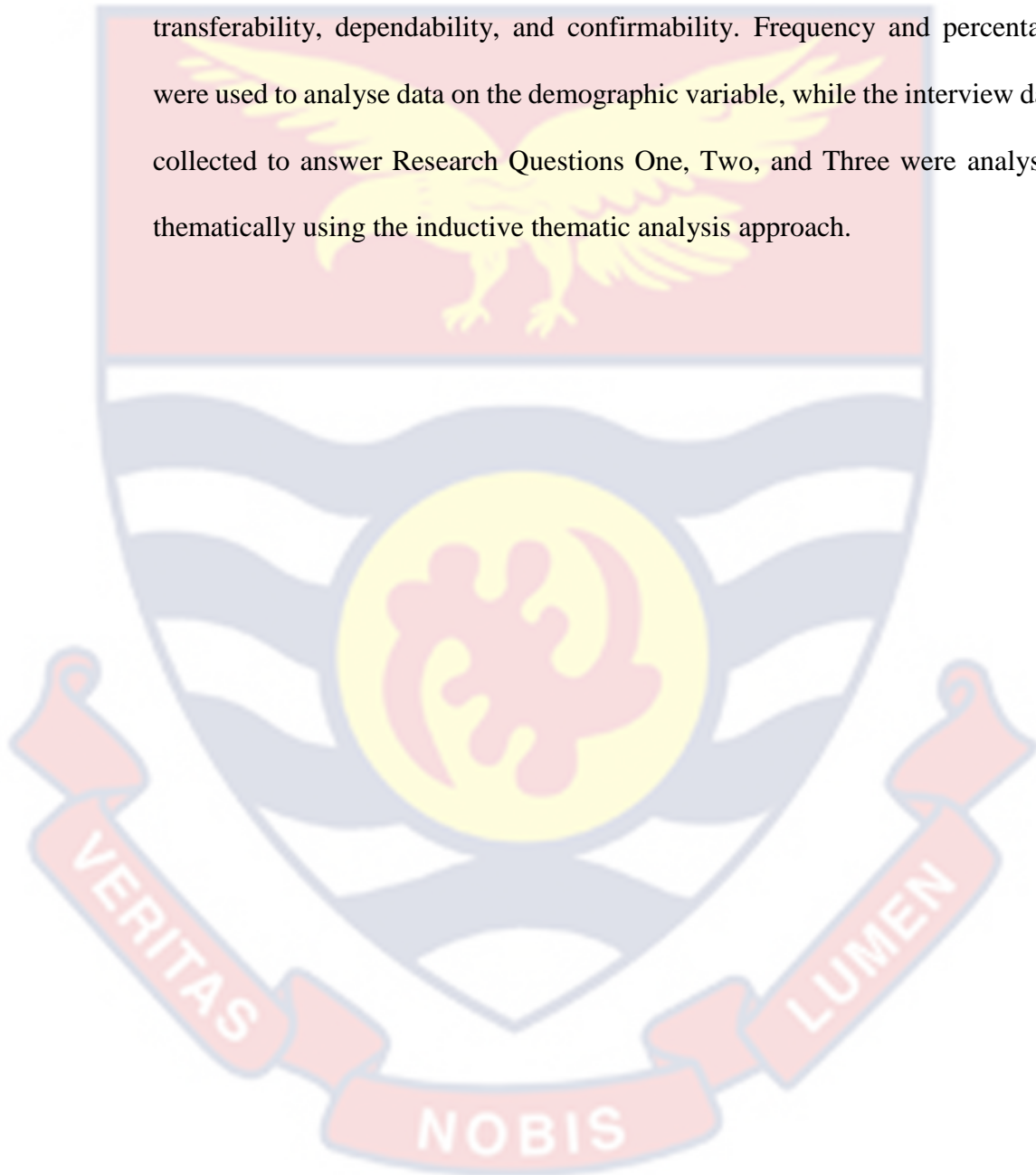
can however be curtailed by describing the purpose of the study, sample size and sampling technique, data collection methods, findings, and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To achieve dependability, the researcher provided detailed description of the research setting, methodology and background characteristics of the study's participants. All participants were interviewed with the same interview guide. Each transcript was subjected to the same method of arriving at themes and sub-themes.

Finally, measures were put in place to ensure confirmability of the qualitative data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that confirmability may be achieved through the triangulation of different sources and perspectives. To achieve confirmability, the transcribed data together with its audio recording was subjected to member checking by the researcher's peers and the participants. The researcher sought in-depth experiences of foster youth and ensured reflexivity by making any biases known or declared. The researcher strived to understand the realities foster youth face. In addition, interviews were transcribed immediately to prevent mixing of information.

Chapter Summary

The study is a qualitative study that adopted the phenomenological research design. The exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling technique was used to sample 18 foster youth pursuing undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. Interview guide that comprised open-ended items were used to gather data to answer the research questions formulated. The open-ended interview guide elicited data on both background characteristics of the respondents, and gathered data to answer all the three research questions formulated.

The interview guide was first pilot tested on a sample of eight foster youth in the University of Education, Winneba. The items were further adjudged fit for purpose and were used to gather data for the main study. Trustworthiness of the interview data was ensured with focus on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Frequency and percentage were used to analyse data on the demographic variable, while the interview data collected to answer Research Questions One, Two, and Three were analysed thematically using the inductive thematic analysis approach.



CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

This study explored the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, their challenges and the adjustment strategies they use to overcome their challenges. It followed the qualitative research approach and employed the phenomenological research design. The exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling technique was used to sample 18 current and former foster youth pursuing undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. Researcher developed interview guide items were used to gather data for the study. Data on the participants' background characteristics were analysed using frequency and percentage while the qualitative data gathered were analysed using the inductive thematic analysis approach.

This chapter of the study presents the results obtained from the qualitative data and discusses the results in reference to relevant literature on the experiences of foster youth in pursuing higher education regarding the support systems that foster youth enjoy in higher education, challenges they encounter and strategies adopted to encounter challenges. Hence, this chapter is organised in three sections. The first section presents the background characteristics of the participants and discusses it. The second section presents the main results in line with the research questions. The third section presents the discussion of the main results.

Background Characteristics of the Foster Youth

This section of the chapter presents and discusses the biological, experiential, educational, and financial background of the foster youth in terms

of their pseudonym, sex, age, faculty, current level, foster status, type of foster system, and major source of finance. These characteristics of the foster youth were relevant to enable readers to appreciate the manner of persons who provided data for this study. The results of the foster youth's background characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Background Characteristics of the Foster Youth

Variable	Subscale	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	10	55.6
	Female	8	44.4
Age	18-20 years	3	16.7
	21-25 years	11	61.1
	26 years and above	4	22.2
Faculty/School	Faculty of Arts	2	11.1
	Faculty of Social Sciences	4	22.2
	Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Education	5	27.8
	Faculty of Educational Foundations	3	16.7
	School of Nursing and Midwifery	3	16.7
	School of Business	1	5.6
	Current Level	Level 100	4
	Level 200	9	50
	Level 300	2	11.1
	Level 400	3	16.7
Foster Status	Current	4	22.2
	Former	14	77.8
Foster System	Formalised Non-Kinship	11	61.1
	Non-Formalised Kinship	7	38.9
Source of Finance	Self	3	16.7
	Guardian	2	11.1
	Family	4	22.2
	Scholarship	7	38.9
	Religious Organisation	2	11.1

Source: Field Data (2021)

The majority of the foster youth were males (n = 10, 55.6%). This implies that male foster youth could have had a better chance of enrolling on

undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast than their female counterparts. Most of these foster youth were between the ages of 21-25 years ($n = 11$, 61.1%) while four of them were 26 years and above. Few of the foster ($n = 3$, 16.7%) youth were between the ages of 18-20 years. Most of the foster youth ($n = 5$, 27.8%) who were recruited for this study had enrolled in courses from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Education while the least number of participants ($n = 1$, 5.6%) were recruited from the School of Business. The foster youth who were in their second year ($n = 9$, 50%) outnumbered their colleagues in the first year, third year and the fourth year. That is, exactly half of the foster youth who participated in this study were second year (level 200) students.

The participants were also asked to indicate their foster status. The majority of them ($n = 14$, 77.8%) had exited the foster care system while few ($n = 4$, 22.2%) were still attached to a foster care. Again, majority of the foster youth who participated in this study ($n = 11$, 61.1%) were placed in a formalised non-kinship foster care. This suggest that most foster youth are placed out of their kin setting to the care of social workers for nurturing. Most importantly, scholarships were found to be the source of financing for the education of majority of the foster youth ($n = 7$, 39.9%). The family ($n = 4$, 22.2%) contributed as the second source of financing. Some ($n = 3$, 16.7%) of the foster youth had reached a stage in life where they could cater for their own educational needs without relying on scholarships, family, guardian or religious organizations. Additionally, the education of some of the foster youth were financed by guardians ($n = 2$, 11.1%) and religious organisations ($n = 2$, 11.1%).

Main Results

Research Question One: What support systems are available for University of Cape Coast students who have experienced foster care?

The first research question was formulated to discover support systems available at the University of Cape Coast for the current and former foster youth pursuing varying undergraduate courses in the university. This research question was addressed by collecting interview data and analysing the data through the inductive thematic analysis approach. The data have been presented based on emerging themes including, counselling support, support through extracurricular activities, support through students' loan, scholarship for brilliant students who cannot afford paying fees, support from lecturers and other university staff, and support from religious organisations.

Counselling Support

Generally, most of the foster youth mentioned that they enjoyed free counselling services on campus. Although support through counselling in the university is a general service for all students and not limited to only foster youth, the foster youth took advantage of its existence. The participants detailed how they utilised the counselling services to their advantage:

I am assigned to a counsellor. I am not the only one, so to speak. It is a university routine for all students. I discuss my academic issues with my counsellor and seek for advice or best ways to cope in achieving my dreams. I remember how useful a counselling session has been to me throughout my stay from level 100 to date – my counsellor suggested best ways to learn and I tried it. She suggested I start learning once the semester begins and not to wait till quizzes or exams approach. This

leaning style has helped me so much and I could see improvement in my results gradually (Juan).

Another participant also detailed the existence of counselling services at his department and how useful it has been in relation to his academic improvement:

Counselling is available at my department so I make use of it. I have once met my academic counsellor in a group counselling where the lecturer introduced himself to us as our academic counsellor. From that moment, I have had the opportunity to share certain challenges I face in my academics. Counselling at the department has been fruitful because I have had solutions to certain academic challenges that I couldn't have shared with even my closest friends (Baba).

I think counselling has been a tremendous support for me. I'm able to balance my financial problems a lot more with studies ever since I took the counselling seriously. It's not to say my financial burdens are curbed but at least I'm able to focus lately a little on my studies not allowing my problems to hinder my educational progress (Gifty).

Equally important insight was a narrative from a participant who mentioned that counselling at the department level is not necessarily meant for only foster youth but a general service for the entire students at the department who have varying academic needs. She also added how she has benefit from the counselling service by helping shift her focus from learning only the subjects that interest her, to learning all subjects with the intent of gaining decent employable skills:

I sometimes visit my assigned counsellor for support. This is not because of my foster status but because everyone has been assigned to a counselor for academic support. My counsellor never know that I was raised by a foster parent. I will say counselling has been good because I no more focus on courses that I have interest in, but I try to learn all-round to make good grades and better position myself for the job market as advised by the academic counsellor (Akos).

Other foster youth reiterated the fact that the counselling service that students are privy to is only academic counselling and not absolutely personal counselling. This is what some foster youth said:

Yes, I enjoy counselling services at the university but it touches on only academic issues. I have met my counsellor a couple of times but for academic issues only. I feel reluctant to open up on my personal issues because he introduced himself as our academic counsellor (Maggie).

I have a counsellor but that is for academic purposes. I know she won't reject personal issues but I always stay within my limit since she is my academic counsellor. We meet in groups, and you know, certain personal issues cannot be disclosed in public during such group counselling encounter (Emma).

Support through extracurricular activities

Some of the foster youth mentioned varying extracurricular activities as means of support in the university. Participants who cited extracurricular activities as support systems gave reasons why they see it as such. The following quotes project some extracurricular activities that foster youth participate in,

and how these activities support them on campus to battle their stress and emotional displeasures:

I will say that I enjoy some sort of support through campus activities and games such as interhall football and basketball games, and etcetera.

When I participate in any of these sporting activities, I release stress and do away with boredom (Peter).

I join a prayer ministry on campus. I feel elevated and blessed when I join hands with my colleagues to worship and pray. Although I sometimes feel bad for not having the opportunity to see my real Mum and Dad, campus religious fellowship had given me godfathers and caring mothers who advice and support me in diverse ways. I must say that apart from Antie Vic, a social worker at the foster home who cared for me, these guardians I have had through joining campus prayer ministry remain my all (Vic).

Support through students' loan

Student loan is a key support system on various campuses in Ghana. Empirical findings of the current study confirms the existence of students' loan on the campus of UCC. Some of the beneficiaries of the students' loan facility shared how it is relevant to their survival as students:

Madam, as a foster youth pursuing my undergraduate programme in UCC, I don't enjoy any support apart from the government students' loan and the benevolence of friends and my pastor, which is always not sufficient. The loan, even though inadequate, it has provided a lifeline in many situations. It helped in the payment of the cost of some study

materials that are sold on campus by lecturers and I also sometimes use it for my personal upkeep (Nic).

Aside the inadequate student loan, there is nothing I enjoy. Not even during my vacations since I have to over work to get a little to feed me and uncle Judjo, and also save for my hostel and up keeping on campus.

I use the loan [students' loan] for my school fees and since it's not enough, I add up with any little thing I get from vacation for my hostel, practical, projects, handouts, and upkeep. (Eli)

Another foster youth who benefits from student loan indicated how student loan keeps him physiologically and psychologically balanced to learn and continue enrollment on his programme of study:

Financially, I rely on student loan to provide my basic needs on campus.

As a student, I need a sound mind in order to focus, learn and succeed.

I can't really achieve this if I have a lot unattended needs. So the supports I receive really helps me to focus and learn (Selorm).

Additionally, the respondents emphasized that the support through student loan do not only exist for students with foster care experiences but also for all students in the university:

The Students Loan facility is available for all Students, irrespective of your financial status. I have no support because of my status as a foster youth. I'm not aware of any such support on campus (Nic).

Actually, I had access to the student loan not because I am a former foster child. It is obvious – students' loan are meant for all students who are interested. Everyone goes through the same eligibility criteria and ones you meet it, so you get (Selorm).

Despite the importance of the students' loan to the foster youth, it was recorded that some foster youth found it difficult to access the facility due to certain terms and conditions attached. A respondent lamented how he could not access students' loan although he needed it and strongly believed that it could have relieved him: *The remote nature of my condition made it impossible for me to even qualify for any of such benefits. The issue of a guarantor was one major hurdle. I never got any* (Zekiel).

Scholarship for brilliant students who cannot afford paying fees

Scholarship for the brilliant but needy students is a kind of support service that is envisaged as a way of getting students who are brilliant but could have dropped out due to financial constraints on board. Data gathered from the foster youth enrolled on various undergraduate degree programmes in the University of Cape Coast indicated that scholarship for brilliant but needy students is not a major support system for them. Out of the total participants (N= 18) only one of them mentioned this kind of support. This respondent detailed how she accessed this support, as well as how it has benefited her in pursuit of her degree:

In my second year, there was this time that my course rep [course representative] presented a form in class and explained that students who are brilliant but needy are to fill the forms. I thought it was not real initially, but I decided to try it out. I filled the forms, I was called for a scholarship interview, where I had the chance to tell my foster story aside several other academic questions that were asked. Surprisingly, I won this scholarship and my full school fees was paid in the third year. I am now entering my final year. This one time scholarship opportunity

had really helped me because I had no hope of paying fees in that academic year. My uncle had lost his job. It was a timely intervention. I am grateful for that (Juu).

This respondent went ahead to state clearly that the kind of scholarship she enjoyed in her third year is not limited to only foster youth. She indicated that her foster status and her inability to pay her fees as justified to the interview panel might have worked the magic for her, yet, other students who have had no foster experience but brilliant managed to grab the scholarship. She said: *I think they help needy students that are not foster youth as well. Maybe my foster story influenced the panels' decision, but I know students who have no foster experiences who had the scholarship (Juu).*

Support from lecturers and other university staff

The data gathered revealed that lecturers and other staff members of the university assisted some of the foster students. Although, according to the participants' narratives, these university staff did not only single out their support to only the students of foster care background but extended their benevolence to students who approached them or students they encountered who really needed critical support. Some of the participants narrated how some lecturers and other university staff had helped them financially, emotionally and psychologically:

Some of the lecturers are really helpful. I remember when I was once on the verge of dropping out, some of them encouraged me to push beyond my limit. In fact, I opened up to few lecturers on what I was going through and they really helped me out. Some of them supported me financially while others gave words of encouragement. I clearly

remember the instance where an Accounting lecturer gave me a course book for free. Indeed with these supports from lecturers I didn't drop out. I took advantage of the counselling services rendered in the university too because I got depressed at a point where I needed help (Gifty).

I receive no support from UCC. But then the only support I received was from one counsellor on the school who was like a father to me. He is a Roman father [Catholic Priest]. I call him Daddy. He advised me to keep going and mostly provide my needs. Aside that, I receive no other support (Annett).

Similarly, another participant detailed how some benevolent university staff, for example, lecturers and an administrator helped her financially, emotionally, and psychologically:

By the Grace of God and through the benevolence of some two lecturers and an administrator in the school, I was able to get some learning materials that were needed. There is this administrator who has been of great help to me. I remember one day that I nearly gave up and decided to quit school. His call came through like a miracle and he was there for me. He counselled and gave me some financial help that I needed at that time. Honestly if not, I will not have been where I am today. When things feel like I can't move on again, a helper comes in. I was able to secure my accommodation, pay my fees and have a sound mind on campus through these supports (Abi).

Support from religious organisations

Some of the foster youth who belonged to religious organisations on campus enjoyed emotional, psychological and financial support. Support from religious organisations on campus was not a dominant narrative, however, such a support cannot be overlooked. Two respondents shared the support they receive from religious organisations on campus:

I fellowship with AG [Assemblies of God] on Campus and the church leadership is aware of my foster status. On two occasions, the church has made financial contributions towards my survival on campus. The church has been my biggest support. They don't only support me financially, they advise me on personal, religious and social issues as well (Vic).

I am a member of one religious organisation on campus. I will say that help too. The leader being aware of my situation do suggest some contributions on my behalf. It has not been easy but I will say God use some people to come through for me. Today I can say that I am on the verge of completing a four year programme which I started without reliance on a family member. You can imagine that (Abi).

Research Question Two: What are the challenges that students who have experienced foster care face in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast?

This research question was formulated to find out the challenges foster youth in the University of Cape Coast encounter as they pursue undergraduate degree programmes. Qualitative data were gathered through face-to-face interview and recorded for analysis purposes. The interview data gathered were

transcribed verbatim and analysed based on the emerging themes through the thematic analysis approach. Themes that emerged from the data include: academic challenges, financial challenges, and emotional and psychological challenges. The data presentation follows the aforementioned themes.

Academic challenges

Academic challenges were identified as part of the challenges that the foster youth encountered. The academic challenges had stemmed mainly from financial constraints. The participants described the academic challenges they face. One of them detailed how he had poor results in his first year and the first semester of the second year due to the fact that he concentrated more on working to improve upon his finance than concentrating on his books. He said:

In the first year I had a couple of grade D and one E. Similarly, in the first semester of year two, my results were not good but I knew the cause. I wasn't concentrating on my academics. I had to engage in some minor jobs like selling dresses on the street and also visiting a friend who owns a mechanic shop to assist him so I can get some money. I know if I give more attention to learning, I'll be good but that's a kind of a difficult agenda to pursue. Honestly, I only find space to learn during examination period (Uncle O').

Other foster youth also shared similar experience. In all, about 11 foster youth disclosed that they have been facing academic challenges leading to poor results. The following quotes provide evidence of academic challenges that the foster youth in the University of Cape Coast faced:

I hardly get chance to learn. This situation has prevail even during my high school days. I had to run errands, sell water on the street, and do

all kinds of house hold chores. It had an adverse impact on my academics, I didn't get the results I desired at high school so I had to abandon my dream of pursuing degree in nursing and focus on Home Economics. The story had not changed since I have not come of age to take care of myself fully. I still rely on my foster parent and I do all kinds of activities at home for her. I seldom get the chance to learn for long hours. So I understand all these have accounted for my inability to get better grades (Akos).

I experienced academic challenges on several occasions. When I first entered the university, I was doing well until I couldn't get money to buy books and other learning materials. Sometimes I had to beg friends and collect theirs to learn. No lap top to do assignments and no money to purchase past questions frequently. All these hindered my success academically (Daniel).

One participant narrated how he struggle to access lectures that take place at different parts of the university campus due to financial constraints, as well as, how he manages to access reading materials for his course of study:

I find it difficult to attend some lectures, specifically those that require taking car from old site to new site or from new site to old site. Lectures for my programme are being attended at both campuses. Although the two campuses are quite closer, if I had to attend continues lecture at a different campus after I had completed a lecture at another campus, I had to walk if I don't get the shuttle because I cannot consistently afford taxi. So I miss lectures sometimes. Additionally, I mostly rely on friends to use their textbooks due to my inability to buy for myself. What this

means is that, if a friend fails to lend his or her book to me, I will be deprived of it because I can't buy most of these books (Gabi).

Likewise, another participant lamented how his financial standing has negatively impacted his academics:

I face a lot of challenges because no one seem to be there for me. One of them is academic challenges. I had gone through a lot of dramatic and difficult challenges. During my 1st semester in level 200, I was depressed and that actually affected my studies. I barely went to class because I had no food to eat. I got sick at some point in time so learning became one of my major problems. Due to this, I had some re-sit that semester. It's sad but I will sail through (Abi).

Financial Challenges

Financial challenge was a dominant challenge that the foster youth encountered. Some of these challenges that the foster youth talked about include challenges in paying fees, purchasing course materials, paying accommodation fees, and purchasing basic needs such as food. Almost all the foster youth had a kind of financial challenge as evidenced through the following quotes:

Firstly, I don't always get money to pay fees. So last semester I had to make part payment of my school fees. Secondly, I don't usually buy learning materials which will help me in my studies. So I have to sometimes fall on my friends to help me out with their learning materials. Thirdly, I always faced accommodation problems. This is because I don't have the money to pay for the hostel fees. So I have to fall on some of my friends again to allow me stay with them till the time I get the money to pay for my own room (Baba).

Despite the financial support offered by some benevolent lecturers and what I raise myself, I still find it difficult paying my fees. Money for upkeep and other learning materials too is quite difficult to obtain (Gifty).

Most of the participants spoke about challenges they face in obtaining accommodation on campus due to their inability to pay. These are what some participants said:

A major challenge for me has to do with accommodation. I'm mostly housed by friends who are sometimes 5 or 6 in a room. I have a challenge buying some important handouts or books to support my studies. (Daniel).

The in-out-out accommodation policy nearly marred my education. It normally takes a whole month into reopening of school before I will get settled as a result of my inability to raise funds early to cater for my accommodation needs. (Zekiel).

Additionally, another participant shared his challenge in purchasing course materials. He said:

My most challenges is buying handouts and feeding. Most at times, I am not able to raise money for feeding not to talk of buying handouts. I have to be chasing my course mates to borrow their handouts sometimes (Uncle O').

Finally, raising funds to navigate the university environment for the purposes of attending lectures, seminars, and other important academic occasions remained a challenge. A participant disclosed:

Another serious challenge I face here on campus is movement or transportation between classes. The university is structured under two campus that is the old site and the new site. Sometimes, you are forced to attend lectures on the two campuses at a short interval, a distance which could averagely take about 40 minutes to walk (Nic).

Emotional and psychological challenges

The foster youth indicated that they sometimes go through certain emotional and psychological disturbances. Their foster status, being separated from their biological parents, inability to pay fees and make certain financial obligations do call for mis feeling. Some narratives that indicate the emotional and or psychological challenges of the foster youth include:

I feel emotionally disturbed whenever I reflect on what I have been through from my days in foster care and the fact that I cannot relate to any known blood line. But I will say that all is good maybe that's my destiny. I think a lot, but I believe that after completing school and I find some work to do, and I get married, my family will be my hope and I will one day forget all my terrible memories (Juan).

It's sad to say that I have become a weak student today due to my condition. But honestly, I use to be a good and brilliant student. I went through a lot of emotional turmoil. It got to a point I almost took my own life but my roommate saved me that night. Anxiety took over my life. I was confused, sad and lonely. I will say depression is real because I experienced it myself. Life is hell sometimes to people like us (Juu).

Even someone to talk to is something else. I have gone through a lot of physical and emotional trauma to the extent that, I nearly took my life. I

remember a day a lecturer disgraced me in class in front of my course mates because I couldn't afford his handout. My course mates laughed at me, hmm. I cried and couldn't go to class because of the disgrace for a whole week (Maggie).

Another participant expressed her emotional challenges by speaking of the fact that she gets demeaned and psychologically disturbed when she reflects on his life as a foster youth:

My roommate insults me several times because I couldn't pay water bill and light bill. She discuss me with her friends and they called me names. Male students and lecturers tried to take advantage because of my situation. I feel demeaned and psychologically disturbed when I think of all I go through simply because I had no chance to be raised by my own [biological parents] (Abi).

The life of an emotionally disturbed foster youth is also characterised by low self-esteem. This was evidenced in a participant's speech:

Foster youth don't need just material things, we also need a lot of emotional support because we face a lot of stigmatisation which lead to low self-esteem. This situation doesn't go well with our studies. As boys-boys, my male friends ridicule me that where are my parents, I had to brash over it but indeed it hurts (Selorm).

Research Question Three: What adjustment strategies do students who have experienced foster care employ to overcome challenges encountered in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast.

This research question was formulated to identify the adjustment strategies employed by the foster youth to solve their challenges on campus.

Qualitative data were gathered using interview. The interview session was tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the transcribed data based on emerging themes. The themes that emerged under this research question were strategies used to overcome academic challenges, strategies used to overcome financial challenges, and strategies used to overcome emotional and psychological challenges.

Strategies used to overcome academic challenges

The foster youth had their individual ways to overcome challenges that they face in their academics. They mainly resort to academic counselling services in their departments, and demonstrate determination towards completion of their respective programmes. One participant detailed how she utilized the academic counselling service offered by her department to overcome her academic challenges.

After having some re-sit, I lost confidence in myself. I spoke to my academic counsellor and she helped me a lot. She restored my confidence and suggested some learning styles that could help. She also tracked my academic progress by monitoring and further discussing my quizzes and exams scores. Taking her advice and suggestions into consideration I had no re-sit in the subsequent semesters (Abi).

Other than academic counselling, some of the participants demonstrated determination and the zeal to obtain a degree. One participant said: *Although it has not been easy, I always stay focus and determined. With determination, I try to learn almost every midnight after toiling for bread and butter during the daytime (Uncle O’)*. Another participant said:

The willpower to obtain a degree also keep me in focus. I don't get discouraged even if I had to write re-sit. I do my best to learn to improve upon my performance and attend lectures as well. I know the only key to my emancipation and success in life is education (Daniel).

Strategies used to overcome financial challenges

The foster youth disclosed several strategies they used to overcome their financial challenges. These strategies included engaging in minor jobs outside instructional period, reducing transportation expenses to lectures, perching, and reliance on the benevolence of foster parents and some university staff. These are what some participants said:

I sometimes prepare some local drinks like "sobolo" and ginger drink and sell to raise money to support what my foster parents offer. I also fall on some of my lectures and course mates who are aware of my situation for assistance in the case of learning materials (Akos).

One sure way is trying hard to seek other avenues to get extra money so as to cushion myself. I try to sell some stuffs on campus and also outside to make money for myself and my educational needs (Juu).

I always try to help myself while receiving support from others. I do this by engaging in some small online businesses and also do some part-time jobs during vacation periods (Selorm).

This is what another participant who believed in hard work had to say:

My hardworking habit too helped me. I took up every small job that will generate money for me. In fact, these things were the bus of hope that kept me going (Zekiel).

Several other varying adjustment strategies were employed by the foster youth to overcome their financial challenges. Some excerpts of the participants' narratives reflecting various adjustment strategies include:

In the situation whereby I may not get help from anywhere, then when school reopens, I have to stay back home for some weeks to do some menial jobs to get money to help myself out (Uncle O').

Mostly, I trek to class even if the lecture hall is far from my destination (Gabi). For the sake of time management, I wake up early and walk so that I could make the time to lectures (Eli).

Mostly, I seek for the support of friends to handle my challenges. I regularly perch to get a sleeping place for myself, I depend on friends for handouts and textbooks (Nic). I rely on what I get from my foster parents, some lecturers and what I raise myself. It's not been easy though (Gifty).

Strategies used to overcome emotional and psychological challenges

The foster youth had indicated certain emotional and psychological challenges they encounter. Based on that, the strategies they used to overcome these challenges were sought. Generally, it was revealed that most of the foster youth lacked the ability to overcome their emotional and psychological challenges. However, one participant indicated her reliance on her own determination, motivational speakers, inspirational songs, as well as some lecturers for personal counseling services. She said:

I get over my psychological challenges when I think of my goal. I also listen to motivational speakers and inspirational music when I'm down.

Sometimes, I disclose my emotional displeasures to certain lecturers I am closer to for their advice and counsel (Gifty).

Another respondent who also believed in motivational sayings as a strategy to boost his drive to overcome emotional and psychological challenges said: *I rely on the popular saying of Kwame Nkrumah, that we face neither east nor west, but forward. I had to emotionally stick to this to keep me going (Zekiel).*

Discussion

This section of the chapter discusses the findings and interpret them with reference to previous findings. It starts with the discussion of the support systems that the University of Cape Coast provide for foster youth as they pursue higher education. Subsequently, the challenges that the foster youth face in the university, and the adjustment strategies they use to overcome these challenges are discussed.

Support systems for foster youth in the university

The study discovered academic counselling services, extracurricular activities, students' loan, scholarship for brilliant students, support from lecturers and other university staff, and support from religious organisations as the support systems and services available for the foster youth in the University of Cape Coast. Notably, it was revealed that none of the aforementioned support systems and services was specifically meant for foster youth only. This finding could account for the assertion that the University of Cape Coast have marginalised students from foster homes as one of the minority group of students on campus. Consequently, there were no direct policies that create support systems and services for the foster youth.

The current study's finding that financial and counselling support were provided by the university's staff for the foster youth to access, confirms the finding of Garcia and Gonzalez (2021) who discovered that foster youth in a university in the USA received financial and counselling support from school staff. This similarity could have stemmed from the fact that university staff, irrespective of the kind of institutions that employ them, their financial standings, or economic status of the countries within which their institutions exist, have various social responsibilities that they willingly perform out of benevolence.

On the other hand, finding of the current study that the support systems available in the University of Cape Coast are open for all students, with none being specifically limited to the foster youth contrasts findings of the studies conducted by Garcia and Gonzalez (2021) and Thompson (2017). Both Garcia and Gonzalez, and Thompson found that the Guardian Scholars Programme is a support system available in universities in the USA for only students from foster homes. Additionally, Garcia and Gonzalez found that foster youth in universities in the USA enjoy priority registration of their courses and career guidance, while Thompson found that foster youth were provided stable housing and financial aid.

Differences in these previous studies and the current study could be attributed to contextual variations such as vast differences in economic standings of the current and the previous studies. The current study was conducted in a developing country (i.e., Ghana) whose economic standing appears to be comparatively poor as against the previous studies which were both conducted in the USA, a developed country who is economically buoyant.

As a result, it is expectant that certain support systems that are limited to only foster youth in the higher education institutions of developed countries may be lacking in the higher education institutions in developing countries.

Challenges foster youth encounter in the university

Challenges the foster youth encountered in the University of Cape Coast included academic challenges, financial challenges, and emotional and psychological challenges. It was further discovered that most of the foster youth have faced or continue to face academic challenges emanating basically from financial constraints. These financial constraints included challenges in paying fees, purchasing course materials, and paying accommodation fees. Findings on the challenges that foster youth face confirm the findings of Rivera and Lopez (2021) who found that financial instability and lack of mental health services were the barriers that foster youth encounter as they pursue higher education, and Burwell and Leeker (2020) who found financial constraints as the challenges that foster youth encounter in pursuing higher education. Similarities among the current findings and the aforementioned studies is due to the fact that in all these studies no specific financial support meant for only foster youth was identified.

In contrast, findings of Brenda's (2015) study digress from the findings of the current study. Brenda's study indicated high mobility, disempowerment, self-defeating attitude and mistrust of social workers or care givers as the barriers foster youth face. The differences in the findings of the current study and Brenda's study can be attributed to differences in research focus and characteristics of research participants. That is, while the current study focused on general challenges that foster youth encounter in pursuit of undergraduate

degree, Brenda's study focused on specific challenges that hinder academic achievement of foster youth in the state of Oregon. Additionally, the current study recruited participants who have experienced either kinship foster care or non-kinship foster care from formalised and non-formalised fostering systems, but that of Brenda sampled only participants from formalised non-kinship foster systems.

Adjustment strategies used to overcome challenges

The study found that the foster youth resorted to academic counselling, and personal determination towards completion of course in order to overcome academic challenges they encounter. Again, the foster youth engaged in minor jobs outside instructional period, reduced transportation expenses to lecture halls, perched on friend's accommodation, and relied on the benevolence of foster parents/caregivers and some university staff to overcome their financial constraints. Moreover, few foster youth indicated that self-determination, motivational sayings, inspirational songs, and personal counselling from closed lecturers were the strategies they used to overcome emotional and psychological challenges. However, most of the foster youth lacked the ability to deal with emotional and psychological challenges. This could be as a result of non-existence of support system that specifically empowers foster youth to deal with the emotional and psychological challenges they encounter.

Findings of this study confirm Burwell and Leeker (2020) who found self-determination as a strategy utilised by foster youth to overcome their challenges. Self-determination is not limited to geographical or contextual differences. One's a person is determined, circumstances are less likely to hinder efforts. As such, irrespective of the contextual variations between the

setting of Burwell and Leeker's (2020) study and the setting of the current study, determination, in both cases, was a key strategy adopted by foster youth to overcome their challenges.

Summary of the Key Findings

The study found that foster youth in the University of Cape Coast had access to support systems such as counselling services, students' loan, scholarship for brilliant students, extracurricular activities, support from lecturers and other university staff, and support from religious organisations, but none of these support systems was specifically meant for the foster youth. This finding explains how foster youth have been marginalised in the university.

Again, the foster youth encountered academic challenges, financial challenges, and emotional and psychological challenges. It was further discovered that the academic challenges encountered by the foster youth emanated from financial constraints which included challenges in paying fees, purchasing course materials, and paying accommodation fees.

Lastly, the study discovered that the foster youth resorted to academic counselling. They were determined towards completion of their course in order to overcome academic challenges. Also, the foster youth engaged in minor jobs outside instructional period, reduced transportation expenses to lecture halls, perched on friend's accommodation, and relied on the benevolence of foster parents/caregivers and some university staff to overcome their financial constraints. Additionally, few foster youth indicated that self-determination, motivational sayings, inspirational songs, and personal counselling from closed lecturers were the strategies they used to overcome emotional and psychological

challenges. However, most of the foster youth lacked the ability to deal with emotional and psychological challenges.



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The last chapter of this study presents the summary of the study, research methods employed, key findings of the study, conclusions based on the findings and recommendations for stakeholders to integrate into policy and practice. Additionally, the chapter provides suggestions to inform further research.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, their challenges and the adjustment strategies they use to overcome their challenges. The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What support systems are available for University of Cape Coast students who have experienced foster care?
2. What are the challenges that students who have experienced foster care face in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast?
3. What adjustment strategies do students who have experienced foster care employ to overcome challenges encountered in acquiring higher education in the University of Cape Coast?

The study employed the phenomenological research design. The population of the study was 18 current and former foster youth pursuing undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. The population was drawn using the exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling technique. Researcher developed interview guide items were used to gather qualitative data for the study through one-on-one interview sessions. Data

gathered on the participants' background characteristics were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage), while the main data gathered were analysed using the inductive thematic analysis approach.

Key Findings

The key findings of the study based on the research questions formulated have been outlined:

1. There were no support systems specifically meant for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast. However, the foster youth had access to general support systems such as counselling services, students' loan, scholarship for brilliant students, extracurricular activities, support from university staff, and support from religious organisations.
2. The foster youth encountered academic challenges, financial challenges, and emotional and psychological challenges. Their academic challenges stemmed from financial constraints which included challenges in paying fees, purchasing course materials, and paying accommodation fees.
3. a. The foster youth relied on counseling services, engaged in minor jobs, reduced transportation expenses to lecture halls, and perched on friend's accommodation as adjustment strategies to overcome their challenges in the university.
b. The foster youth lacked the ability to deal with emotional and psychological challenges, although, a few of them indicated self-determination and motivation from others as ways of dealing with their emotional and psychological challenges.

Conclusions

The university had no support systems specifically meant for the foster youth but there were general support systems such as counselling services, students' loan, scholarship for brilliant students, extracurricular activities, support from university staff, and support from religious organisations. Ideally, if the university had recognised their students who have had foster care experiences, they would have created specific support systems purposely to cater for the financial, educational, and emotional and psychological needs of the foster youth. This finding implies that the assertion that most administrators and lecturers in the university knew little or nothing about the existence and wellbeing of foster youth is viable.

Also, academic challenges, financial challenges, and emotional and psychological challenges were the key challenges that the foster youth encountered. Their academic challenges stemmed from financial constraints which included challenges in paying fees, purchasing course materials, and paying accommodation fees. This means that in the absence of financial constraints, the foster youth are likely to have stable mind and can study assiduously for academic success. As a marginalised group of students on campus, the challenges of these foster youth who do not have complex financial standings looked highly predictable. Most of the challenges the foster youth faced can be attributed to the unavailability of support systems meant for them only.

Finally, the foster youth relied on counseling services, engaged in minor jobs, reduced transportation expenses to lecture halls, and perched on friend's accommodation as adjustment strategies to overcome their challenges in the

university. They relied on the aforementioned strategies to curtail their financial and academic challenges. On the other hand, they lacked the ability to deal with emotional and psychological challenges. This could mean that the foster youth are not empowered and oriented towards solving their own emotional and psychological challenges. In as much as the foster youth endeavored to overcome their financial challenges by resorting to minor jobs and selling of items during non-lecture periods, the opportunity cost will be their academic performance. This is because if enormous financial supports exist for the foster youth, they will consequently have enough time to learn and make greater academic impacts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to the policy makers, the University Council of the University of Cape Coast, administrators, counselors and lecturers, social workers, non-governmental agencies and foster youth who aspire to attain higher education:

1. Policy makers in the University of Cape Coast should make policies to create support systems specifically meant to address the needs of foster youth in the university. Also, non-governmental agencies should support the university to provide accessible programmes and services that support academic success of foster youth. Again, the existing support systems meant for the general students' population must be examined and enhanced to ensure that all foster youth in the university can easily access.
2. Administrators, counselors and lecturers in the university should establish an individualised comprehensive approach to offer the needed

emotional, psychological and material support to deal with the problems foster youth encounter.

3. Foster youth must endeavor to adapt the adjustment strategies identified in this study to deal with similar challenges they face. Similarly, pre-tertiary foster youth who aspire to obtain a degree in higher education should analyse the adjustment strategies identified by this study and adapt those in line with their thoughts.
4. Social workers in formalised foster care institutions as well as kinship and non-kinship foster parents in non-formalised institutions must orient foster youth under their care on useful strategies to overcome challenges, empower them to deal with emotional and psychological issues, build their interest and propel them for future academic attainment and success.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study explored the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, challenges they face, and adjustment strategies they employ to overcome their challenges. The elements that were studied include both former and current foster youth who were studying various undergraduate programmes in the University of Cape Coast. It is therefore suggested that future researchers should:

1. Explore the transitional support systems available for foster youth of formalised foster care systems in Ghana from the pre-tertiary education sector to the tertiary education sector.

2. Examine the perspectives of lecturers and administrators in the University of Cape Coast on the support systems available for foster youth in the university.
3. Explore the support systems available for foster youth in other higher education institutions in Ghana, their challenges and how they adjust to overcome their challenges, so as to provide adequate empirical evidence for policy and practice.



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APPENDICES**APPENDIX A****INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOSTER YOUTH IN UCC****SECTION A: BACKGROUND DATA OF RESPONDENTS**

1. Please provide a pseudonym
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your current age in years?
4. What is the name of your faculty?
5. What is your current level?
6. Are you a former or current foster youth?
7. Which type of foster care/foster system did/do you experience?
(formalised non-kinship foster care system/ non-formalised kinship foster care)
8. What is your major source of finance for your higher education programme?

SECTION B: SUPPORTS FOR FOSTER YOUTH

9. What supports do you enjoy as a former/current foster youth currently pursuing undergraduate programme in UCC?
10. How have this/these support(s) helped you?
11. Are these supports limited to you due to your foster status or not? Why?

SECTION C: CHALLENGES FACED BY FOSTER YOUTH

12. What challenges do you face in pursuing higher education in the University of Cape Coast?

**SECTION D: ADJUSTMENT STRATEGIES TO SOLVE
CHALLENGES**

13. How do you overcome challenges in pursuing higher education?



APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

PURPOSE: This study seeks to explore the support systems available for foster youth in the University of Cape Coast, the challenges they encounter, and the adjustment strategies they use to overcome their challenges.

DESCRIPTION: Your participation would consist of completing an interview with Abigail Fenu (the sole researcher). This interview will be audiotaped, transcribed, and analysed to provide empirical evidence on the support systems you enjoy as a foster youth, challenges you encounter in pursuit of your degree, and how you develop strategies to overcome those challenges. You have been identified to participate in this study because you are either currently receiving foster care services or you have been in foster care in the past.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw or leave the research at any point in time regarding the administration of the instruments without any fear or panic for any consequence. If you refuse to participate, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled to.

ANONIMITY: All documentation will be recorded as anonymous. Only your preferred pseudo name will be required to distinguish one participant's narrative from the other in the analysis.

DURATION: The interview will be conducted at your convenience in a risk free environment and it will last for 26-30 minutes. You can be contacted for clarification as needed, however, this is not expected.

RISKS: There are no known risks or discomforts to you in participation in this research. However, some questions may be of a sensitive nature, and may elicit an emotional response to you. If these questions make you upset in any way, you can refuse to answer the questions or redraw.

BENEFITS: The findings of the research will assist in identifying the support systems available for you in the university and call for their enhancement if necessary. Also, your challenges will be made known to stakeholders of the university which will be evidence of support in future if appropriate. Lastly, how you adjust to overcome certain challenges will educate or motivate other foster youth in dealing with similar challenges.

CONTACT: If you have any question about this research or your right as a participant, please contact the researcher via email: abigailfenu@gmail.com.

SIGNATURE OF AGREEMENT: Kindly sign to indicate your agreement to participate in this study if you have read, understood, and agreed to the conditions stated.

Sign: Date: