UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

EXPLORING LIVED EXPERIENCES OF USERS OF SCHOOL BUILT

ENVIRONMENTS IN THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT OF BASIC

EDUCATION

WISDOM KWAKU AGBEVANU

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EDUCATION

BY

WISDOM KWAKU AGBEVANU

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

AUGUST 2014

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

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

Candidate's Signature:………………………….. Date:…………………

Name: Wisdom Kwaku Agbevanu

Supervisors' Declaration

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

Principal Supervisor's Signature:………………………. Date:……………

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ABSTRACT

School built environments (SBEs) are critical places of human experience. Although disparities in teaching and learning opportunities exist in basic education, it is unclear whether meanings of SBEs communicate to users manifest these disparities. This study explored the lived experiences of SBE users to understand how meanings communicated to them manifest inequality of educational opportunities in the context of Ghanaian basic education. The study collected verbal and visual data from ten participants purposively sampled from two basic schools in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem (KEEA) Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of the textual data included contrasting users' experiences, messages, and meanings emerging from the conversational interviews, close observation of physical spaces, and photographs of the SBEs. Four main themes namely: physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic realities, emerged from the analysis to inform the central theme of realities of being-in-the-world of SBEs. Participants' lived experiences were described as negative and positive. Besides, the SBEs communicated meanings of 'neglect' and 'support' to their users, which perhaps manifested inequality in educational opportunities in the context of social democracy. The study concludes that positive and supportive SBEs are more likely to enhance teaching and learning opportunities and help users fulfil their aspirations than negative and unsupportive SBEs. The results from this study deepen SBE understanding and contribute to the extant SBE knowledge. However, further research is necessary to strengthen the claim that users' meanings of SBEs manifest inequality of educational opportunities.

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DEDICATION

To My Family, Dr. A. L. Dare, and Prof G. K. T. Oduro

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFT	American Federation of Teachers
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
CABE	Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
CfBT	Centre for British Teachers
EFA	Educational for All
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
GES	Ghana Education Service
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
GoG	Government of Ghana
HPBS	High Performing Basic School
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IRB	Institutional Review Board
JHS	Junior High School
KEEA	Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem
KG	Kindergarten
LPBS	Low Performing Basic School
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoESS	Ministry of Education Sports and Science
OTL	Opportunity to Learn
PTAs	Parent Teachers' Associations
SBE	School Built Environment
SMCs	School Management Committees
UCC	University of Cape Coast

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Basic education, particularly in Ghana, is characterized with school built environments (SBEs) which manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities and which can be understood if we explore users' perspective. If we explore users' lived experiences and meanings of SBEs we can gain a deeper understanding, and to gain a deeper understanding is a crucial first step towards equal or equitable educational opportunities: so that the quest for addressing disparities in teaching and learning opportunities is well grounded and inclusive of SBEs users. Thus, this chapter presents the introduction outlining the background to the study, statement of the problem, research purpose, and objectives. The chapter also outlines the assumptions, significance of the study, theoretical frameworks, and overview of the research approach. Finally, the chapter presents the delimitation of the study, definition of key terms and organization of the rest of the thesis.

Background to the Study

School built environments are critical to basic education and integral to users' experiences. As essential places created to house the important task of formal education, SBEs do not only influence the activities of their users, but also provide icons and symbols for the values we hold common as a people (Baker, 2012; Earthman & Lemasters, 2011). Thus, nations and scholars passionate about the condition of SBEs have long been carefully considering

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school buildings not only for the sake of education but also for the sake of building lasting icons of culture, and for the communities that schools served (Baker & Bernstein, 2012; Beynon, 1997). This context, perhaps, has placed SBEs exactly in a position of continuous research, debate, and improvement in the 21st century. Consequently, SBEs as places of human habitation and productivity have become a crucial and continually scrutinized factor of education (Baker & Bernstein).

Theorists have agreed that nature and meaning of place plays an integral part in the lives of human beings (Relph, 1976, 1993; Seamon & Sowers, 2008). As a place, the built environment is created to support the activities, needs, and well-being of their users (Bartuska, 2007; Vischer, 2008). However, the meaning aspect of the built environment continues to be neglected (Rapoport, 1990). This study concentrates on the lived experiences of SBEs from users' perspectives to argue that users' meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities. Exploring the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs would deepen our understanding and knowledge of the disparities in basic education.

Globally, education has been recognized as an indispensable tool for individual and national development. Education is the process by which individuals acquire attitudes, knowledge, and skills enables them to develop their faculties in full (Agyeman, Baku, & Gbadamosi, 2000). Some authors (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Wilkinson, 2005) have argued that people with quality and more education earn more and have higher social status and mobility. Therefore, for education to perform these functions effectively, gaps

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in educational opportunities, achievement, and aspirations at all levels of education should be smaller (Wilkinson & Pickett).

Since the 1987 education reform, more efforts are being made to improve the quality of basic education in Ghana, as it supports the foundation of the nation's development (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2010). Basic education is the minimum period of formal schooling, which gives life to individuals upon which young people who do not continue to higher education develop their work related skill (Ghana Education Service [GES], 2013; Oduro, 2000). Undoubtedly, the strength of any building depends on its foundation. The same is true for basic education as it empowers children and young people to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and values for successful living. Clearly, these outcomes define the fulfilment of every person's being, which is the reason why many nations support the need to provide good quality and equitable basic education.

Basic education also provides the essential building blocks of all higher levels education. In Ghana, basic education is not only free, compulsory and universal but also it is the right of every citizen regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, location, or disability (Government of Ghana [GoG], 1992). The aim of basic education is to equip children and young people with the capacity to understand their surroundings and therefore become key players in their communities or countries. In this light, the University of Cape Coast Alumni Association (2012, p. 1) described it as "where a nation is built". This context makes quality and equitable basic education a critical issue of increasing concern and attention. Hence, there is the need to explore SBEs of basic schools from users' perspectives.

Earlier studies into environmental factors have established that the work environment influence the human activity and productivity (Young, Green, Roehrich-Patrick, Joseph, & Gibson, 2003). These studies demonstrated that improvements in environmental factors as such lighting, ventilation, space utilization correlated with greater productivity and higher employee health, satisfaction, and morale (Young et al.). In education, research evidence shows that important factors such as thermal environment, proper illumination, adequate space, and availability of equipment influence student behaviour, attitude, performance (Bullock, 2007; Cash, 1993; Agbevanu, 2010; Earthman, 2002; Sheets, 2011). This implies that the place where people live, learn, and work influence their activities and outcomes.

In addition, evidence exists that SBEs affect teacher retention, effectiveness, and satisfaction (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005; Corcoran, Walker, & White, 1988; Schneider, 2003). According to the (World Bank, 2004), a strong positive link exists between school buildings and educational outcomes. This study believes that the people involved in and responsible for schooling and educational programmes are critical and have tremendous influence on the nature and quality of basic education. However, as the World Bank suggested, SBEs, the places where people and educational programmes converge, can support or hinder quality and equitable basic education.

School built environments, as essential places, exist to support the activities and well-being of their users (Bartuska, 2007; Vischer, 2008). They are symbols that convey messages about a community's commitment to and expectations about education (Annesley, Horne, & Cottam, 2002; Young et al., 2003). Besides, previous studies (Cash, 1993; Dare & Agbevanu, 2012a;

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Earthman, 2002; Earthman & Lemasters, 1997; Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner, & McCaughey, 2005; Sheets, 2011) have established a significant relationship between the school building conditions and educational outcomes. Nonetheless, as OECD (2000) suggested, equality or equity of educational opportunity is an issue when some pupils, teachers, and head teachers in basic schools live, learn, and work in lower quality, inadequate, and ill-equipped SBEs than others do.

One way through which inequality of teaching and learning opportunities may affect basic education is school facilities inequities. As Dewey (1944, p. 98) stated, "School facilities must … secure to all wards of the nation equality of equipment for their future careers". In this context, SBEs must provide every user equal teaching and learning conditions for effective educational outcomes across basic schools. However, there are disparities in teaching and learning opportunities and outcomes in basic education (Amedahe, 2007; Ankomah, 2002; Djangmah, 2011; UNESCO, 2013). These disparities are likely to be a setback to providing equitable basic education and meeting the nation's goals of quality basic education for all.

In Ghana, children in basic schools have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities. Similarly, adults who teach or work in these schools also have the right to healthy, safe, and satisfactory work condition (GoG, 1992). Importantly, one of Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy goals seeks to improve the quality of teaching and learning to enhance the academic achievement of pupils and provide equitable basic education to all (MoE, 2010). However, interestingly most basic schools operate in sub-standard, dilapidated, and demoralizing SBEs (Ministry of

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Education Sports and Science [MoESS], 2006). Thus, many children and adults in basic schools appear not to have equal teaching and learning opportunities.

In the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem (KEEA) Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana, academic performance at the basic level of education is low. For example, in 2012, an analysis of the BECE results of the Municipality revealed that more than half (51.76%) of the 2245, candidates who took part in the BECE had failed (GES, 2012) and might not progress with their education at the senior high, vocational, and technical levels. While most basic schools continue to perform abysmally, most of these schools do not have good quality, adequate, and well-equipped SBEs. Table 1 shows the average pass rate, in all subjects, for the KEEA Municipality for the 2007-2011 academic years.

Table 1: Analysis of BECE Results for 2007–2011 Academic Years

Year	Number of districts in the Region	Position of KEEA in the Region	Pass Rate in the KEEA (%)	Pass Rate in the Region (%)
2007	13	9th	44.2	50.3
2008	13	10th	40.7	56.3
2009	15	12th	44.1	57.0
2010	15	12th	43.4	51.1
2011	17	15th	42.0	49.1

Source: Ghana Education Service (2012), KEEA Municipal Office

As Table 1 indicates, academic performance in the KEEA Municipality is below the regional average pass rate. While this suggests that the academic

performance in the Municipality is generally low, it is important to recognize that few basic schools are performing extremely better than other basic schools. As Akyeampong, Djangmah, Oduro, Seidu, and Hunt (2007) noted, although access to basic education has increased it appears equality and equity of opportunity as well as academic performance has not improved. Earlier studies on school place (Agbenyega, 2008) and school physical facilities (Dare & Agbevanu, 2012a, 2012b) did not explore the meaning aspects of SBEs in relation to inequality of educational opportunities. The present study expects to contribute to filling this gap in knowledge.

From this background, the importance of lived experiences of SBEs as a medium to understanding inequitable basic education, specifically an interpretive approach to SBEs is clear. Indeed, an exploration of users' lived experiences of SBEs does more than simply shed light on the relationship between school building condition and educational outcomes as previous research mostly sought to do. Exploring the SBEs where users live, learn, and work; and how they experience these places, would create awareness and deepen our understanding of the role of SBEs in teaching and learning. In this sense, studying the lived experiences of SBEs from users' perspectives would offer a better understanding of the disparities in basic education.

Statement of the Problem

There is a growing research interest in the connection between school building conditions and student behaviour, attitude, and achievement; and teacher retention, effectiveness, and satisfaction (Earthman and Lemasters, 2011; Sheets, 2011). Although, SBEs influence users' activities, well-being, and performance, it is unclear how users in Ghanaian basic schools make

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sense of their lived experiences of SBEs. It appears little attention is being paid to SBE users' experiences and meanings and how such meanings manifest inequality or inequity of educational opportunities. This study, therefore, explores the lived experiences of SBEs to argue that users' meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in effective teaching and learning opportunities in the context social democracy.

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana guarantees every person equal right to education opportunities and facilities as well as safe, healthy, and satisfactory work (GoG, 1992). This basic right appears to be deeply rooted in the humanist approaches and social democracy. Yet, it appears not all children and adults in basic schools are enjoying this right. Indeed, the denial of this basic right to some people in basic schools, perhaps, contribute to the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities, academic performance, and self-esteem. This denial appears to be a violation of the some provision in the 1992 Constitution and an affront to the principles of social democracy.

Seen as places for human activities and well-being, SBEs shape users' lived experiences and meanings, which are likely to reflect disparities in opportunities for users to live, learn, and work. The issue confronting this study is whether users' experiences and meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities in the context of social democracy. This study contends that equal teaching and learning opportunities exist for all users of SBEs in Ghanaian basic schools. Therefore, it is essential to explore the lived experiences of SBEs from users' viewpoints to put the right of

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children and adults to equal educational opportunities, facilities, and safe, healthy, and satisfactory work conditions in the right perspective.

Clearly, the rationale for this study stems from the desire to explore the lived experience and meaning aspects of SBEs as research continues to neglect these important aspects of the built environment (Rapoport, 1990). Additionally, there are concerns that the inequalities in opportunities to teach and learn are resulting in wide disparities in outcomes, particularly at the basic school level (Amedahe, 2007). However, Kowalski (2002) raised the issue of how school facilities relate to the concept of equal access to educational opportunities for discussion. This study, perhaps, could be a response to calls to explore users' meanings of the built environment in an attempt to fill the gap in knowledge and to stimulate debate in the area of school facilities planning and management.

In addition, there is the need to gain more knowledge and deeper understanding of a taken-for-granted phenomenon of lived experiences and meanings of SBEs in the Ghanaian context of basic education. In the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana, no empirical evidence exists on the lived experiences of SBEs from the perspectives of users in the context of basic education. It is also unclear whether SBE users' meanings manifest inequality of teaching and learning opportunities in the Municipality. Hence, my desire to undertake this study to contribute to this debate further, with the aim of exploring the lived experiences of SBEs from users' standpoint.

Furthermore, the decision to undertake this study stems from the need to contribute knowledge to area of scholarship. It is my view that knowledge about the lived experiences of SBEs may extend the frontier of existing

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knowledge in field of school facilities planning and management. Besides, there is need to provide evidence-based information and an opportunity to critically evaluate any practice pertaining to SBEs that appear unfair and unjust. There is also the need to provide a boundary between SBE theory and practice to arouse the interest of actors in SBE planning, design, management, and research, and to offer a foundation for those engaged in user-centred studies to generate new knowledge. Thus, there is value and usefulness of potential application of the research's findings to enhance our knowledge and deepen understanding.

Finally, a thorough review of existing literature on SBEs suggests the need for more qualitative studies (Fram, 2008; Uline et al., 2008) to deepen our understanding of whether users' meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities. This qualitative study is necessary because it seeks to provide detailed views of users of SBEs in their own words and images, multiple perspectives, and specific contexts that shape users' lived experiences of SBEs (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the study offers users of SBEs the opportunity to participate as co-researchers, a data collection procedure that can enhance the validity of users' lived experiences (Creswell). Therefore, this qualitative study is expected to contribute to existing body of knowledge in the area of scholarship.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of SBE users in the context of Ghanaian basic education to understand whether users' meanings of SBEs manifest inequality of educational opportunities. Specifically, the study sought to first, describe

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users' lived experiences of SBEs from two basic schools in the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. Second, to find out the messages SBEs conveyed to the users in the basic schools. Third, to understand the meanings users of SBEs make of the messages SBEs sent to them in the basic schools. Finally, to articulate how users' meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning conditions in the context of social democracy.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of users of SBEs from two basic schools in the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana?

2. What messages do users' lived experiences of SBEs convey to them from the two basic schools?

3. In view of research, (1) and (2), what meanings do SBEs communicate to users from the two basic schools?

4. How do meanings communicated to users of SBEs from the two basic schools manifest unequal access to educational opportunities in the context of social democracy?

Assumptions

This study made the following assumptions. First, the study assumed that SBEs influence users' lived experiences who act upon them to achieve their aims. Second, the study assumed that SBEs communicate meanings to their users. These assumptions were based on the idea that places or built environments that are created to support the activities and well-being of their users are integral to human experience and meanings (Bartuska, 2007; Relph,

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1976; Rapoport, 1990; Vischer, 2008). Third, users' lived experiences were unique to them but other users in similar SBEs were likely to have similar lived experiences and meanings about their SBEs. This assumption was because some basic schools had standard SBEs and others substandard SBEs (MoESS, 2006). Finally, the study assumed that SBEs consisted of instructional spaces (e.g., classrooms) and non-instructional spaces (e.g., toilets).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, this study would deepen the reader's understanding of the importance of lived experiences of SBEs and whether meanings SBEs communicate to their users could manifest disparities in educational opportunities at the basic level of education. The study would also benefit the users of SBEs in contributing to improving the equality or equity of the places where they live, learn, and work when they recount their lived experiences of the SBEs. Besides, this study would be helpful to the education system and practitioners in offering them a deeper understanding in the area of SBEs experiences, messages, and meanings.

Additionally, this study would be a significant endeavour in promoting positive and supportive SBEs for all users in basic schools irrespective of their type or location. Indeed, information on positive and supportive or negative and unsupportive SBEs would equip education policy makers, planners, and administrators with a better insight into what the SBEs mean to users and enable them to adopt measures that can ensure positive and supportive SBEs for all. With a better understanding of users' physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic needs of SBEs in basic schools, educational

professionals would be able to address the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities at the basic level of education.

Moreover, this research would enlighten readers in reflecting on whether SBEs were really fulfilling their role to the users or were just there to contribute to the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities across basic schools. The study would also provide recommendations on how to understand SBEs and involve users' experiences and meanings in SBE planning and management to address the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities in basic education. Finally, it would serve as a future reference for educational researchers on the subject of SBEs and equal teaching and learning opportunities. Therefore, it is anticipated that this study would generate a great deal of interest, not only among educational professionals, but also among the public.

Overview of Methodological Approach

This study adopts the interpretive paradigm to research as it seeks to interpret the social world SBEs users (Creswell, 2013). It takes the lived experiences of SBEs as a phenomenon and explores it within its real life context – basic education setting – using multiple sources of evidence. Essentially, the study explores the everyday users' experiences, messages, and meanings of SBEs and how the meanings manifest disparities in teaching and opportunities. Based on this analysis, the study offers insights into how SBEs in practice can contribute to our understanding of the disparities.

This study used hermeneutic phenomenology as a strategy of inquiry informed by the work s of Heidegger (1967), Gadamer (2004) and van Manen (1990). In achieving of these objectives, the study collected and analysed

verbal and visual (textual) data from ten participants purposively sampled from two basic schools. Field note data from close observations of physical facilities or spaces at the basic schools complemented the textual data. The analyses focused on explicating the view endorsed by place theory and empirical research that SBEs are critical places of human experience and meanings. The hermeneutic phenomenology is not only congruent with purpose of this study but also offers a credible strategy to understanding SBE users' meanings in relation to disparities in opportunities to learn and teach.

Delimitations of the Study

First, this study was delimited to the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs as it related to users' experiences, messages, and meanings. The SBEs, consisting of five instructional spaces and five non-instructional spaces, were considered critical in supporting users' activities or task performance and well-being. In addition, the study was delimited to participants consisting of head teachers, teachers, and pupils who on daily basis experience the two SBEs unlike other users such as parents. Finally, the study was restricted to two basic schools – a high performing basic school (HPBS) and a low performing basic school (LPBS) in the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. The choice of this setting was because of its potential to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

Definition of Terms

School built environment (SBE) – In this study, the term 'SBE' refers to places, consisting of instructional and non-instructional (ancillary) spaces, created to support the activities and well-being of users who occupy them.

Instructional space – This refers to any built space directly scheduled or used for instructions. In this study, they are classrooms, library, science laboratory, and information and communication technology (ICT) centre.

Non-instructional (ancillary) space – The term refers to any built space not directly scheduled or used for instructions but rather support instructional activities. In this study, they are dining hall, toilets, sickbay, staffroom, and storeroom.

SBE users – This term refers to a group of individuals who directly or indirectly use or interact with SBEs. In this study, they refer to the direct users, particularly, head teachers, teachers, and pupils in basic schools.

Lived experiences of SBEs – This term refers to SBE users' immediate awareness of Being-in-the-world of SBE or using SBE. In this study, it is a phenomenon referring SBE users' responses or feedback on everyday, living through interactions with, or using their SBEs (Vischer, 2008).

Educational opportunities – This term refers to the circumstances or conditions of SBEs that are necessary to support users' teaching and learning activities, performance, and well-being.

Inequality of educational opportunities – This term is defined in terms of disparities in input, particularly SBEs, to basic education for teaching and learning activities. In this study, the term refers to the conscious or unconscious denial of the right of some SBE users to equal set of conditions of SBEs to learn, teach, or work effectively in basic schools.

Organization of the Rest of the Study

This thesis is organized in seven chapters to provide sufficient description of data analysis process and interpretation of findings to enable

readers make their judgement regarding the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Two outlines the literature review focusing on the research context, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and empirical research. Chapter Three describes the methodology comprising the research paradigm underpinning the research strategy, the research methods used, and the implementation of the study design. Chapter Four presents the data analysis, describing in more detail how themes emerged from the data. Chapter Five presents the first part of the results and discussion, focusing on contextualizing participants' data in their specific research settings. Chapter Six presents the second part of results and discussion interpreting the themes developed and discussing the research findings. Chapter Seven provides the summary, conclusion, and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter One established research on users' lived experiences and meanings of SBEs in relation to inequality of educational opportunities in the context of Ghana basic education was lacking. To provide a solid foundation in support of the research problem, purpose, and questions outlined in Chapter One, this chapter reviews literature on four broad areas namely: the context of basic education in Ghana, the main concepts, theoretical frameworks, and empirical research related to the topic. The chapter further summarizes the emerging issues relating to the research questions. Finally, the chapter provides a conceptual framework to guide the study.

Context of Basic Education in Ghana

Importance, Structure, and Management of Basic Education

Basic education is the first-cycle level of formal education every child needs to acquire basic literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills. It seeks to provide all citizens with relevant "competences, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motivations that are necessary to become fully literate and to have developed the educational foundations for a lifelong learning journey" (Chandra, 2003, p. 59). Additionally, it is essential for building a strong foundation for further education, earning a living, and improving the quality of people's lives, and participating actively in democracy. Besides, basic education is important because it forms the foundation upon which young

people who do not continue to higher education develop work-related skills (GES, 2013; Oduro, 2000).

Until 2002, basic education in Ghana comprised two levels, that is, primary education for a period of six years and junior secondary school (JSS) education for a period of three years. Currently, basic education consists of two years of kindergarten education, six years of primary education and three years of junior high school (JHS) education (GoG, 2008; MoE, 2010b). The current structure of basic education is derived from the Education Act, 2008 (Act 778), comprises eleven (11) years of basic education. The Act, therefore, aims at establishing an educational system that produces well-balanced individuals. However, in absence of good quality and equitable basic education in positive and supportive SBEs, this aim may not be achieved.

McCann (as cited in Henry, Casserly, Coady, & Marshall, 2008) noted that basic schools vary in type by ownership, management, ethos, tradition, and sometimes clientele; however, they have much in common. In Ghana, Government is the main provider of basic education, however, the 1992 Constitution allows for private provision of basic education. Generally, basic schools are classified into public and private schools. Some authors (Ampiah, Davis, & Mankoe, 2008; Etsey, 2007) have also classified basic schools into urban, peri-urban, and rural; deprived and non-deprived; and advantaged and disadvantaged as well as high and low performing schools.

Through its MoE and agencies, Government of Ghana is responsible for the funding and management of public basic schools. Similarly, private individuals and organizations are also responsible for the funding and management of private basic schools. Thus, organization and management of

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public basic education are in the hands of the Directors of Education at the District, Regional, and Headquarters Offices. The head teachers have management responsibility of the schools. District assemblies are responsible for the necessary infrastructure needs and any other facilities for the education of the population in their areas of authority (Government of Ghana [GoG], 2004).

Legal Framework of Basic Education and Social Democracy

Basic education is critical for national development because it forms the first step in human resource development. To this end, Government of Ghana is committed to the development of basic education by providing a strong legal framework for its successful delivery (MoE, 2010). In essence, the framework seeks to ensure that all Ghanaian children regardless of age, sex, religion, tribe, parentage, physical condition, and locality, have the right access to equal and quality basic education (Government of Ghana [GoG], 1992). For instance, the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana guarantees every citizen the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and the right to healthy, safe and satisfactory work condition respectively (GoG, pp. 23-24). Yet not all children and adults in basic schools enjoy these rights.

Besides, the legal framework is in fulfilment of the Education for All (EFA) Goals and Millennium Developments Goals (MDGs) on education – and educational policies. For example, in 1995, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy was introduced. The policy, which took effect from 1996, aimed to (1) increase access, participation, and equity; (2) improve the quality of teaching and learning; and (3) improve

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management efficiency (Akyeampong, Djangmah, Oduro, Seidu, & Hunt, 2007; MoE, 2010b). Arguably, the legal framework and the policy focus of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2010-2020, which commit the state to focus on compulsory fee-free access, equity, quality, development, efficiency and effectiveness appears to be rooted in social democracy.

Social democracy, as a political ideology, is committed to the ideals of social justice, fairness, equality of opportunities and outcomes, inclusion among others, and has two parts (Carlsson & Lindgren, 2007). The first part is the concept of values, which summaries the ideas of which values should form the basis of social life and social development. The second part is the concept of social theory, which covers the thoughts on which mechanisms control social development and what therefore needs to be influenced to build a society that realizes these values.

Hefferman (as cited in Hill & Cole, 2001) outlined the main principles of social democracy. These are: (a) full employment; (b) the welfare state; (c) redistributive taxation as a social good; and (d) a mixed-pseudo-Keynesian economy; that is, an economic mix of public sector and private sector control and provision, together with government reflation during recession. In basic education context, the social democracy requires comprehensive schooling; expansion of educational opportunities and provision, and local community involvement in and control over schooling, further and higher education; and a commitment to policies of equal opportunities.

In addition, it requires a degree of positive discrimination and redistribution of resources within and between schools, as well as an awareness of the impact of the societal context of education and its impact on

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inequalities in achievement. It also requires a curriculum and education system that recognizes issues of social justice and that aims to producing a technically efficient, but fairer, capitalist society; and the aims of education to include the flourishing of the economy and society as well as the flourishing of the individual (Hill & Cole, 2001, p. 14).

Social democracy holds that all human beings have equal value irrespective of gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, or geographical location (Carlsson & Lindgren, 2007). In addition, as the United Nations (1948) stated, all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. However, as Carlsson and Lindgren noted, social democracy is at the same time controversial because of its ultimate aim at many established groups of power. In this study, the demand for equity, equality of educational opportunities and inclusion as espoused in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana is central and deeply rooted in social democracy. As a democratic nation, Ghana is committed to these ideals and the principles of social democracy, yet the delivery of basic educational is equitable.

Disparities in the Quality of Basic Education

The concept of quality of education is a contested and dynamic concept (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012). The concept has evolved from a focus on inputs to the teaching and learning process and the results obtained. In 1990, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) identified quality as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity. This led to a global commitment of to provide quality basic education for all children, youth, and adults. The Dakar Framework for Action, in 2000, affirmed that quality was '*at the heart of education*'. The Dakar forum emphasized that "To

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offer education of good quality, educational institutions and programmes should be adequately and equitably resourced, with the core requirements of safe, environmentally friendly and easily accessible facilities; … available to all learners " (UNESCO, 2000, p. 20).

Indeed, good quality and equitable basic education is necessary for any nation. As Tikly & Barrett, (2010, 2011) noted, a good quality basic education enables all learners the capabilities they require to become economically productive, to develop sustainable livelihoods, to contribute to peaceful and democratic societies, and to enhance well-being. According to them, it arises from the interaction between three interrelated enabling environments as policy, the school, and the home/community, and therefore, needs to be inclusive, relevant, and democratic. However, these objectives appear elusive because of the poor quality and inequitable of basic education in Ghana. Thus, there is the need to address all disparities in basic education.

The issue of educational disparities in the 21st century has become one of the most pressing challenges confronting the basic education system (Amedahe, 2007). He noted that inequality of opportunities to learn (OTL) continues to hinder the delivery of quality basic education. Others (Ankomah, 2002; Djangmah, 2011; Etsey et al., 2009; Etsey, 2007) also reported on the disparities in school infrastructure, self-esteem, and academic performance at the basic level. Basic schools in Ghana follow the same national curriculum and participate in the same national examinations (Amedahe), regardless of the type or location of school.

A critical challenge to quality and equitable basic educational for all is school buildings or infrastructure (Etsey, 2007; Etsey et al., 2009; MoESS,

2006). In Ghana, most children and adults operate in relatively substandard and dilapidated SBEs (Ministry of Education Sports and Science [MoESS], 2006), which continue to deny them access to equal and equitable teaching and learning opportunities. The existing physical infrastructure at the basic level of education is inadequate and lacks quality because of inadequate financial resources, lack of political will, and general lack of maintenance culture (GoG, 2002) in spite of support form government and donor agencies (GoG, 2004).

While access to basic education has increased, equity and equality of opportunity has not necessarily improved (Akyeampong et al., 2007; MoE, 2010a; Rolleston, Akyeampong, Ampiah, & Lewin, 2010). According to UNESCO (2008), national and global education inequalities are undermining efforts to achieve international development goals. However, inequality remains a critical challenge in basic education (UNESCO, 2013/14). Ensuring that all basic schools have equal educational facilities and opportunities can improve the quality of basic education. Darvas and Balwanz (2014) argued that improving the quality of basic education services for all in Ghana could play an important role in reducing broader social inequity.

Referring to several authors, Darvas and Balwanz (2014) noted that improving equitable access to quality basic education promote economic growth and poverty reduction, improve public health, and strengthen democratic participation. They argued that improving equity could greatly strengthen system performance, emphasizing that the existing inequities in basic education significantly depress overall system performance. They noted that inequitable distribution of inputs (for example, school buildings, qualified

teachers, textbooks) by region and urban-rural status tally closely with observed differences in teaching and learning outcomes and test scores (e.g., BECE pass rates) (Darvas & Balwanz).

Research with Children and Adults in Basic Schools

Typically, the views and experiences of children and adults about their SBEs are not included in school facilities planning and decision-making. However, most children and adults is school experience frustration as they feel that they have little control over the SBE (Roberts, Edgerton, & Peter, 2008). Essentially, as a democratic nation, Ghana promotes popular participation in decision-making process, yet teachers and pupils in basic schools hardly participate in SBE decision-making. Indeed, research with children and young people is necessary because of the opportunity to give them voices to contribute their quota in decision-making processes (Lewis, 2004). As active participants in articulating their lived experiences of SBEs, both children and adults in basic schools can help readers understand what it means to be users of SBEs.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has important clauses on children's right to education and participation in decisions that affect them. The UN Convention in Article 12 states: "When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account" (UNICEF, 1989). In this light, Cox, Robinson, Dyer, and Schweisfurth (2010, p. 172) emphasized "the need for children to experience democratic processes and to be able to contribute to social change". Thus, in Ghana there is more opportunity for

children (Cox et al., 2010; UNICEF), as well as adults in basic schools to take part in real life decision-making concerning the improvement of their SBEs.

In basic education, SBEs may affect similarly or differently both children and adults who occupy them. Children are as competent social actors with equal right just as adults to share their lived experiences of SBEs. Some advocates of children's right and proponents of school reform and improvement continue to call for children's voices to be heard and their opinions to be sought in matters that affect their lives (Johnson, 2004). In line with Johnson, children are included in this study to avoid marginalizing their voices and to encourage their inclusion in social research. The dignity for children and adults to speak will give them a greater opportunity to share their lived experiences of SBEs with less emphasis on mediating their information with that provided by the researcher (Boler, 2002; Johnson, 2004; Mayall, 2000). Thus, at the basic level of education, research with both children and adults as users of SBEs is necessary for better understanding.

In sum, the literature reviewed on the context of basic education suggests that the legal framework of basic education is rooted in social democratic principles. However, disparities in teaching and learning opportunities, facilities, and achievement still exist in basic education. It appears research on the lived experiences of SBEs from the perspectives of children and adults in basic education is relatively limited. Again, it is unclear how in the context of basic education, meanings SBEs communicate to users manifest unequal access to teaching and learning opportunities.

Conceptualizing the Study

School Built Environment (SBE)

The term 'built environment' is pervasive, however both the term and its reach and implications as (Bartuska, 2007, p. 5) puts it "are evasive, more comprehensive, and far-reaching than most of us realize, even though we live in it everyday". He defined the term 'built environment' by four interrelated characteristics.

First, it is extensive; it is *everywhere*; it provides the context for all human endeavours. More specifically, it is *everything* humanly created, modified, or constructed, humanly made, arranged, or maintained. Second, it is the creation of human minds and the result of human purposes; it is intended to serve human needs, wants, and values. Third, much of it is created to help us deal with, and to protect us from, the overall environment, to mediate or change this environment for our comfort and well-being. Last, an obvious but often forgotten characteristic is that every component of the built environment is defined and shaped by context; each and all of the individual elements contribute either positively or negatively to the overall quality of environments both built and natural and to human-environment relationships (Bartuska, 2007, p. 5).

Broadly, the term refers to humanly created surroundings that provide the setting for human activity. As a multidisciplinary and multidimensional term, the built environment is described as a human-modified place where people live, work, are educated, eat, and play (Lee & Rubin, 2007; Sallis &

Glanz, 2006; Srinivasan, O'Fallon, & Dearry, 2003). In other words, built environments encompass places created or modified by people to support users' activities, comfort, and well-being (Bartuska, 2007; Vischer, 2008). Thus, it includes places such as buildings, homes, schools, workplaces, parks, transport systems, industrial areas, farms, roads, and highways. However, in this study, 'school built environment' (SBE) refers to the places created to support the activities and well-being of both children and adults.

Although the term 'SBE' has been referred to in the educational facilities literature by several authors (Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Fram, 2010; Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner, & McCaughey, 2005; Wall, Dockrell, & Peacey, 2008), it received little conceptualization. The term has been referred to differently as "school place" (Agbenyega, 2008, p. 52), "school plant" (Beynon, 1997, p. 15), school facilities (Lyons, 2001; Owoeye & Yara, 2011), educational built environment (Fram), and school physical environment (Uline, Wolsey, Tschannen-Moran, & Lin, 2010). In addition, Kuuskorpi and González (2011, p. 2) used physical learning environment and noted; "the concept of the physical learning environment with respect to physical structures relates to spaces, equipment and tools within the school". Thus, the apparent lack of clear conceptualization of SBE creates a knowledge gap in the area of study.

This study conceptualizes SBE as a place of human experience consisting of instructional and non-instructional (ancillary) spaces created to support the educational activities and well-being of users. It includes school buildings, furniture, and playgrounds (Beynon, 1997). As places, SBEs shape the real life experiences of users regarding their needs, wants, and values, in

particular, their safety, health, productivity, and well-being. This understanding of SBE takes into account critical dimensions of place: physical, personal, functional, psychological, social, cultural, and aesthetic as well as artefacts of human experience (Kjævrang, 2003; Maslow & Mintz, 1956; Tuan, 1977; Vischer, 2008). With all these dimensions of place, SBEs are created to support users' needs, wants, and values.

School Built Environment as a Place

Place, as a fundamental concept, plays a key role in almost every field of human endeavour and experience (Bennett & Agarwal, 2007; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Generally, place is considered as mere physical location. This definition of place, according to Filmer (2006) has often unhelpfully obscured more in-depth understandings. However, place is defined as "an area or space that is a habitual site of human activity and/or is conceived of in this way by communities or individuals" (Brey, 1998, p. 240). Although the concept of 'place' has been the subject of significant interest and debate, adopted, and contested by scholars in many fields, it serves as a useful framework for addressing such human-environment interactions (Easthorpe, 2004; Filmer). This study shares Relph (1993) views that understanding of place might contribute to the maintenance and restoration of existing places and the making of new places.

Indeed, the understanding of SBE as a place is essentially guided by the work of Edward Relph who takes a firmly phenomenological, existential, or humanistic perspective (Filmer, 2006). This perspective, similar to that of Jeffrey Malpas, David Seamon, and Edward Casey, is different from that of many theorists who argue the socially constructed nature of place. From

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humanistic perspective, Tuan (1977) incorporated meanings into place as a centre of meaning or field of care. Ryden (1993, p. 38) argued, "A place … takes in … meanings which people assign to that landscape through the process of living in it". This understanding of place suggests that SBE meanings are not intrinsic to physical setting itself, but resides in human interpretations of the setting, which are constructed through experiences with SBEs (Stedman, 2003).

Casey (1993, p. xvii) described place as "the bedrock of our being-in-the-world", arguing that place and human being are inextricably connected, to the extent that "to be is to be in place – bodily" (Casey, 1997, p. 340). The humanistic or phenomenological perspective adopted in this study sees place as grounded in the physical, material reality of the world in which human beings and their lived experiences of a locale create, shape, and make place to exist (Tuan, 1977). He developed four dimensions of concept of place as physical, personal, social, and cultural. However, these dimensions do not exist a *priori,* as a series of abstract categories, but emerge through people's actions and activities, practice, and experience (Ciolfi & Bannon, 2005). Such dimensions are germane to the understanding of SBEs.

Relph (1976) called into question the taken-for-granted nature of place and its significance as an inescapable dimension of human life and experience. Similarly, as places the nature of SBEs and their importance to education are often taken for granted. Arguably, places both constrain and enable people: they offer people structural, cultural, social clues that shape their conduct; and their action and interactions within that place add to its meaning and value (Ciolfi & Bannon, 2005). Referring to Sack, Ciolfi and Bannon emphasized

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"Place constrains and enables our actions and our actions construct and maintain places" (p. 222). Like place human beings physically make sense of, explore, and inhabit SBEs. Thus, like places, SBEs may constrain and enable the activities of users they shelter.

In this study, place and space are equally important concepts for understanding the SBE where education or human activity occurs. Malpas (2004, p. 29) argued that "the investigation of place cannot be pursued but in conjunction with an investigation of the notion of space. Harrison and Dourish (1996) described space as the structural, geometrical qualities of a physical environment. According to Ciolfi and Bannon (2005, p. 219), space is "the physical context of interaction". The authors argued that from our everyday experience, we are aware that the physical environments we inhabit contribute to shaping our experiences and activities in many ways. Often, people are attached to particular environments, because they mean something to them, and evoke feelings and emotions. Thus, for the current study, space is not only a mere setting, a "container" for our experiences (Ciolfi & Bannon, p. 220), but also context where SBE users interact and ascribe meaning into their experiences.

Relph (1976) maintained a close conceptual engagement between place and space, unlike others who treated the two concepts as separate. He saw place and space as dialectically structured in human environmental experience, as our understanding of space is related to the places we inhabit, which in turn derive meaning from spatial context (Seamon & Sowers, 2008). However, Erickson (as cited in Ciolfi & Bannon, 2005) asserted that place should be used to describe environments that people invest with understanding,

meanings, and memories rather than space. While Casey argued that the concept of space is secondary to that of place, (Cele, 2006) also argued place and space are mutually dependent rather than seen as contradictory. Thus, these views are important for SBE as a place as it encompasses spaces that are mutually dependent.

As places of human experience, SBEs engage all the senses of their users, awaken their memories, fuel their aspirations, and shape their meanings (Nivala, 1997; Vischer, 2008). These theorists agreed that built environment should offer users order and variety, stability and progress, the old and the new, working together to create an external environment, which users can see as positively and supportively meaningful. According to Nivala, a responsibly preserved built environment engages more than our aesthetic sense. Accordingly, SBEs are more than just depiction; they are representation, as users ascribe meanings to the significant spaces in their SBEs. Instructional and non-instructional spaces as significant spaces in SBEs enhance not only users' identity and understanding of their educational culture (Nivala) but also embody previous ideas of design, construction, purpose, maintenance and pedagogy (Wall et al., 2008).

This study considers SBE not just as a location in physical space, but as a human foundation and habitual site of human activity, which is constantly changing and shifting (Ellis, 2005). Thus, supportive SBEs may create positive image for the users of that place in the public domain unlike unsupportive SBEs that may espouse and create vulnerability identity forms (Agbenyega, 2008). Indeed, supportive SBEs serve may as "an extrinsic catalyst that cushions the confidence level of students and increases their

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potential and intrinsic urge to learn and succeed" (Agbenyega, p. 53). Thus, as places of human experience, SBEs have meanings for their users as they connect inextricably to users and the things that happen in that location, which are meaningful to them (Rapoport, 1990; Relph, 1993; Tuan, 1979).

In addition, as places of human experience, SBEs take in the meanings, which users assign to their lived experiences of the existing spaces available. Clearly, SBEs are places "where certain activities go on, and where certain consequences are achieved" (Thompson, 1981, p. 157). They allow children and young people to learn things they need to know to be successful in life, and adults the opportunity to teach or work with pupils to develop their knowledge, skills, and competences. Additionally, SBEs support the cognitive, social, economic, and emotional development as well as in the work performance and well-being of their users and the community at large (Sixsmith, Kagan, & Duckett, 2004; Wall et al., 2008). As physical entities, SBEs constitute one of the principal social spaces; providing an infrastructure that supports learning and development and therefore, warrant close attention (Dudek, 2000; Rivlin & Weinstein, 1984).

Spaces in School Built Environments

The SBE is a combination of types of educational spaces. Educational spaces are physical spaces that "support multiple and divers teaching and learning programmes and pedagogies, including current technologies; … and one that encourages social participation, providing a healthy, comfortable, safe, secure and stimulating setting for its occupants" (OECD, as cited in Kuuskorpi & González, 2011, p. 2). Beynon (1997) presented a checklist of spaces in educational buildings for large, general, and technical schools,

grouping the spaces into five categories namely: academic, administration, ancillary, boarding facilities and others. The U.S. Department of Education (2013) identified 31 different types of spaces in a school building, with each type of space having its own qualities and requirements. This study identified ten important spaces in SBEs and categorized them broadly as instructional and non-instructional spaces.

Instructional Spaces

Classrooms. Classrooms are rooms or spaces used primarily for instruction classes that are not tied to a specific subject or discipline by equipment in the room or configuration of the space (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). These include lecture rooms, seminar rooms, demonstration rooms, and general-purpose classrooms. Classrooms are the most important spaces in any SBE because they are where pupils and teachers spend most of their time and where the learning process takes place (Berry, 2002). Solomon and Kendall (1979) argued that the physical condition and organization of a classroom reflect not only the beliefs about it, but also the support for the learning process. In this sense, basic school classrooms should provide positive and effective learning environments for users.

Research has shown that the physical environment of classroom influences the behaviour of both students and teachers (Savage, 1999; Stewart & Evans, 1997). These studies are corroborated by other studies which suggest that classroom windows, floors, ceilings, wall paints, lights, temperature, noise and furniture are all important elements in providing a comfortable and attractive built environment for teaching and learning (Blackmore, Bateman, O'Mara, & Loughlin, 2011; Higgins et al., 2005; Wall et al., 2008). However,

it is important to note that classrooms alone do not make a school (Beynon, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

School library. School library is an important instructional space in a SBE and an essential factor in teaching-learning process. It is a building or room in which collection of books, tapes, newspapers, and other materials are kept for people to read, study or borrow. School libraries greatly influence the lives of pupils and teachers, yet most people ignore the importance of libraries. Udoh-Ilomechine (2008) found that those who use library are academically better than those who do not. Udoh-Ilomechine argued that children and their teachers need library resources and the expertise of a librarian to succeed. Others also claimed that school libraries help teachers to teach children (Francis, Lance, & Lietzau, 2010; Keith, 2004).

School libraries are an essential part of complete school programme, which serve students by providing materials to meet their various needs and encouraging reading and the use of libraries (Clarke, 1999). A school library, Perez (2011, p. 16) argued, is "an equitable, fiscally responsible strategy for sharing resources across grade levels and the curriculum while addressing core reading, information, and technology literacies". Research has shown that the reading scores for students in schools that focus on improving their library programmes are, on average of 8 to 21%, higher than similar schools with no such development (Martin, 1996). However, school libraries do not only support teaching and learning processes and programmes but also convey messages about our commitment to quality education.

Science laboratory. Science laboratory is a facility characterized by special purpose equipment or a specific space configuration that limits

instructional or research activities to a particular discipline or a closely related group of disciplines (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Laboratory activities have special potential as media for learning that can promote important science learning outcomes for students (Hofstein & Lunetta, 2003; Lunetta, 1998). Polette (1995) and Roth (1994) perceived science laboratory as a unique environment for teaching and learning science in a social setting. Thus, science educators have suggested that rich benefits in learning accrue from using laboratory activities (National Research Council, 2000; Tobin, 1990). However, most basic schools in Ghana do not have laboratory spaces for science teaching and learning.

Computer laboratory or centre. A computer laboratory is a critical instructional space needed for a cluster of computers that are usually networked and available for users (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The critical role of information and communication technology (ICT) in the 21st century is not in doubt. While others feel technology is crucial to prepare students to operate in workplaces, some people feel that technology plays a minor role (Georgia Department of Education, 1998). The only way learners and teachers can attain digital literacy is by having hands-on experience with computer equipment. Thus, school's computer laboratory holds huge value, if provided and used properly.

A computer laboratory is important because it allows users to become comfortable in the use of computer technology in teaching and learning in schools. Thus, the presence or absence of ICT laboratory in schools will definitely send messages to users about the importance of working, teaching, and learning with computers. However, despite its important role, many basic

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schools in Ghana still lack good quality, adequate, and well-equipped computer laboratories, or ICT centres.

Playground. A playground is a space or room used by students, staff, or the public for athletic, or physical education activities (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). In school, a playground is necessary because physical exercise is essential to human development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and young people. Thus, research has acknowledged that school playgrounds are a valuable resource (Johnson, 2000; Malone & Tranter, 2003). These authors suggested that the size, design, features of school playgrounds, and how they are used, managed and perceived by users, could have a significant influence on the life and work of the school as well as the quality of education for the children.

School playgrounds are important because they provide spaces that directly serve people for recreational purposes. They convey messages to children about school ethos that can influence children's attitude and behaviour (Johnson, 2000). Malone and Tranter (2003) noted that where the quality of the environment does not reflect the espoused ethos of the classroom, children get the message 'adults say one thing but do another'. They explained that school playgrounds are symbolic because at a macro level they represent the school and its place in the world, whilst at a micro level the playgrounds represent the child and the child's place in the school.

Non-instructional (ancillary) spaces

Canteen. One important non-instructional space, often ignored in schools, is the school canteen meant for food service. It is a space that directly

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serves a facility including kitchens, vending areas, or eating areas (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). School canteens, or dining halls or eating areas, form an integral part of the SBE and an ideal site to encourage healthy eating (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Drummond, 2008; Drummond & Sheppard, 2011). The authors indicated that as an essential component of an effective and supportive education system, healthy eating spaces ensure that users are healthy and able to work and learn. Burke and Grosvenor noted that good health improves enrolment, reduces absenteeism, and improves academic achievements.

Eating-spaces in schools are important educational resources as well as school food services. Such spaces are critical to the health and well-being of both children and adults if they to remain healthy and efficient in school. Thus, eating-spaces should reflect the educational goals of the school by supporting users' needs. When the school system fails to support a decent canteen, healthy menus may be difficult to implement (Drummond & Sheppard, 2011). With the advent of school feeding programme, basic schools cannot ignore the critical role of healthy eating areas in Ghana. However, it appears most basic schools do not have healthy eating-spaces.

Washroom or toilet. School washrooms or toilet facilities are important non-instructional spaces. A school's toilet project gives an image of the school and has serious effects on users' morale, behaviour, attitude, and potentially health. School toilets have a clear and specific intended use and children need easy access to toilets at school (Beynon, 1997). Burke and Grosvenor (2003) argued that poorly maintained, managed toilets could be a source of concern to children, and young students as well as their teachers'

live and work in the SBE. Burke and Grosvenor regretted that in many schools' toilets are in a bad state and this causes distress to many pupils and young people.

Pupils and teachers are concerned about poorly maintained and managed toilets in schools. Vernon, Lundblad, and Hellstrom (2003) argued that many children influenced by negative perceptions of school toilets adopt unhealthy toilet habits during school time, especially children in the higher grades (aged 13 to 16 years). Vernon et al. explained that direct impacts on pupil health might occur if pupils refrain from using toilets for long periods during the day. According to them, not using toilets for long hours might lead to potential urinary and bowel problems, prolonged ill health and missed schooling. For many children and adults in basic schools, a toilet visit away from home could create a psychological strain (Vernon et al.).

Sickbay. Another, important non-instructional space considered in this research is school sickbay, also referred to as school clinic or health unit. Sickbay may be considered as a room equipped with one or more beds, which are used for patient care (NCES, 2006). In other words, it is a facility or space where outpatient ambulatory health services are provided to children with minor sickness such as headache, tiredness and dizziness (U. S. Department of Education, 2013; Virginia Department of Education, 2013). Indeed, noted, "Sickbays" are small units with privacy curtain closures used for students who need to lie down because of illness (Lee, Wester, & Fudge, 2001, p. 50).

School sickbays are important because they provide spaces for children and adults to receive first aid when they fall ill or get injuries in school. Collin, Hockaday, and Waters (1985) reported that attendance at school sickbay

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because of headache was recorded in 3.6% of children aged 5 to 19 (only 0.5% then left school early because of headache) in one 12 week period. In addition, minor related illnesses accounted for a significantly 39.3% of all school absence. Collin et al. concluded that although headache prevalence is high in the age groups studied, it is not a prominent cause of time missed from school. While sickbays are important elements of supportive SBEs, it is unclear if basic schools in Ghana have sickbays.

Staffroom. Staffroom also referred to as workroom or office is another important non-instructional space in a SBE. It is a common room for members of the teaching staff or the institution for a variety of non-class meetings, which supports the work of teachers in school (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). Staffrooms are important because they are places for teachers to work (office), eat, chat, store books and personal belongings, find out information (notice board), and teach, when other rooms are full (classroom). They are part of the school where one can most quickly judge the general atmosphere if one stays there long enough. The absence or condition of staffrooms in schools affects the work and well-being of teachers, hence their experiences.

Teachers have a right to comfortable staffrooms in school (Clandfield & Foord, 2008) as they are always buzzing with activity and good conversation, with teachers exchanging ideas for the next class or the next weekend. The authors were of the view that lack of staffrooms or poorly furnished staffroom cannot support teachers to sit, unwind, relax, recuperate, mark exercises, or just think about the next lesson of the day. As Johnson (2006) stated, supportive working conditions can enable teachers to teach more effectively, enhance their quality, and improve their retention. This

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suggests that basic schools need staffrooms that are equipped with a variety of furniture types in various combinations and arrangements for the comfort of users.

Storeroom. Finally, the last non-instructional space considered is storeroom or storage space. The school storeroom is a space designated for storage of teaching learning materials and equipment that serve as the primary storage area for the school (Beynon, 1997; U. S. Department of Education, 2006, 2013). Accordingly, good storage spaces in schools provide secure, flexible, adequate storage space for teaching and learning materials, sports equipment, playground equipment, surplus furniture, and other things used for down time. Beynon believed that all instructional areas needed to have adjustable shelving to store materials currently in use. This implies that storerooms are essential for protecting instructional materials in basic schools

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the built spaces identified in this study form an integral part of every SBE. Essentially, they combine to provide unique support systems for all users in school. However, in Ghana most basic schools lack quality, adequate and well-equipped built spaces to support them effectively in school. This situation may not only affect educational outcomes adversely but also shape the lived experiences of users of SBEs negatively and convey demoralizing messages to users. Figure 1 shows a visual model illustrating instructional and non-instructional spaces in a SBE.
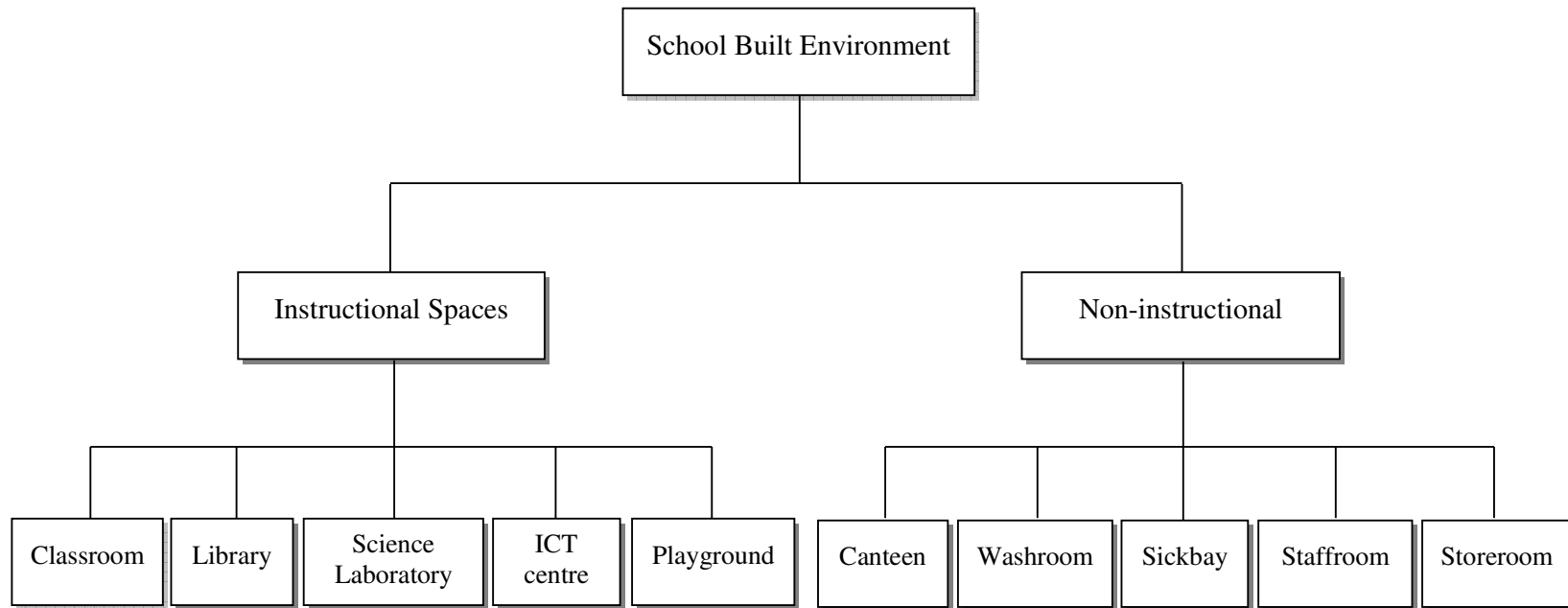
Figure 1. A diagram illustrating key spaces in a SBE. Source: Author's construction

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From Figure 1, creating supportive SBEs requires a mix of built spaces that are required in the right combination and condition to achieve desired educational outcomes. In this study, a supportive SBE is one that enables users to have good educational opportunities and outcomes. It provides users learning and working conditions that enable them to learn and work effectively. Besides, it ensures that users feel accepted, valued, and engaged. On the other hand, an unsupportive SBE is the one that neglects or hinders users' good educational opportunities and outcomes; denying them learning and working conditions that support effective teaching and learning. An unsupportive SBE ensures that users feel less accepted, valued, and engaged. Both supportive and unsupportive SBEs result from the conditions of the two categories of instructional and non-instructional spaces.

This study characterizes supportive SBEs with good quality, adequate, and well-equipped built spaces, and *vice versa*. Here, 'good quality' implies that all users have the opportunity to live, learn, or work in built spaces with acceptable conditions. In addition, 'adequate' implies that the built spaces are sufficient for all users and consistent with national development priorities. Finally, 'well-equipped' means that the built spaces have the needed equipment to enhance effective teaching and learning in the 21st century. Thus, to be supportive, a SBE needs to meet the physical (conducive, and comfortable), functional (useful, practical, and efficient), psychosocial (interacting, motivating, and emotional), and aesthetic (attractive, welcoming, and beautiful) needs of the users it exists to support (Vischer, 2008).

Characteristics of School Built Environments

Typically, SBEs need to be accessible, safe and healthy, conducive to users' activities, and attractive. The U.S. Access Board [USAB] (2004) recommended that built environments should be accessible to all users. Accessible SBEs are user-friendly, available and adequate, and easy to use. To provide equal access to all users is ensure that all individuals can make use of buildings and facilities available. In addition, SBEs need to be safe and healthy, free from natural and human-man hazards (Clark, 1996). Previous studies have shown that safe and healthy conditions in the SBEs both for student and staff directly in physical, functional, and psychological aspects, and consequently, act on the performance of activities (Bernardi & Kowaltowski, 2006; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008; Vischer, 2008).

Research continues to indicate that productive, high performing schools manifest common characteristics. (Berry, 2002) asserted that "A high performance school seeks and provides adequate space and opportunities for students and teachers to spread out, reflect, interact, exchange information, examine and test ideas" (p. 2). In addition, the appearance of the school is inviting making students; teachers and the local community want it to be there. The school also has adequate natural lighting that enhances productivity and strives for student-friendly conditions throughout the building. Furthermore, the school is inviting to good teachers and supports their retention as it designed to reduce stress. It is comfortable, has a consistent temperature, and manages noise. The SBE of high performing school is clean and sanitary with the risk of an adverse health effect very small (Berry, p. 2).

The U. S. General Accounting Office [GAO] (1995) described decent school facilities as structurally safe; contain fire safety measures, sufficient exits and adequate and safe water supply. They also have adequate sewage disposal systems, sufficient and sanitary toilet facilities and plumbing fixtures, adequate storage, and adequate light. Further, they are in good repair; and attractively painted and contain acoustics for noise control. Contrary to these features, most basic schools lack decent, accessible, safe and healthy, attractive SBE and are not conducive to effective teaching and learning. They also lack comfort, privacy, space for social activity and rest, as well as colourful, soft textured inviting interiors and exteriors (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003).

Importance of School Built Environments

Where teachers and pupils live, learn, and work makes a difference in their performance and well-being. The school facility literature documents the important role SBEs play in the delivery of education (Beynon, 1997; Cooper, 1985; Harper & Hedberg, 1997; Nicholson, 2005). For example, Beynon argued that the essence of education is learning, and SBEs, teachers, textbooks, educational technology, and administration are all means to expand and accelerate learning. He referred to these components as interdisciplinary support system. Thus, it is important to note there is an increasing agreement that SBEs play a significant part in the educational performance and well-being of children and adults in school (Burton, 2011; Butterworth, 2000; Frazier, 1993).

Other authors (Beynon, 1997; Cash, 1993; Sheets, 2011) have similarly acknowledged the important role of SBEs by stating that handsome and well-

equipped buildings send a message of political support for education SBEs. However, some people believe that SBE component of the school support system siphons resources away from teacher salaries and learning materials. These people often attempt to underestimate the importance of the SBE by citing the Gandhi position that learning can take place under trees (Beynon). For such people, place does not matter and any good teacher can teach students no matter the setting. In this study, place or SBE matters for understanding users' experiences and meanings of their lifeworld.

In addition, previous research (Bullock, 2007; Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Sheets, 2011) claimed that good SBEs improve the motivation for pupils to learn and facilitate the work of teachers. For example, Cheng, English, and Filardo (2011) reported that the quality of SBEs is a factor in student and teacher attendance; teacher retention and recruitment; child and teacher health; and the quality of curriculum. Cooper (1985) also argued that providing conducive and congenial physical settings in which teaching and learning take place is important. To Cooper, active SBEs intervene in, and perhaps even dictate, how teaching and learning can occur. Thus, while the form and state of SBEs as factors, directly or indirectly, influence the practice of education, little knowledge exists on how SBEs shape users' experiences.

Users of School Built Environments

Traditionally, users of school buildings lacked the opportunity to contribute to the management and planning of the built spaces (Holt, 1974). He referred to users of school buildings broadly as "all those people who have vested interest in the schools" … "everyone whose life is affected by the building" (p. 711). It refers to the community. However, Nave (as cited in

Holt, p. 711) identified two broad categories of users of school buildings. The first is "school community" consisting of teachers, students, administrators, school boards, unclassified and particular specialists directly involved in the schools. The second category of users is "community-at-large" consisting of "all" of the people who are indirectly involved in the schools. In this study, 'users' is operationalized as head teachers, teachers, and pupils who directly interact with their built spaces.

Woolner, Hall, Wall, and Dennison (2007) advocated for the consultation of teachers and pupils as users in improving the school environment. Users of SBEs, according to Baker and Bernstein (2012), can play a central role in generating useful feedback about what is working in schools to improve school-related policy. Kuuskorpi and González (2011) also argued that user-based innovative process should be at the heart of designing the physical learning environment of tomorrow's schools. According to them, the processes should consider the global needs of students, teachers, school administrators and the community.

As users, head teachers, teachers, and pupils in basic schools spend significant part of the day in SBEs, and thus suffer or benefit from the condition of existing built spaces. In this study, head teachers, teachers, and pupils are regarded as the meritocratic users of SBEs (Vischer, 2008) whose everyday experiences and meanings are crucial for understanding where they live, learn, and work. Therefore, it is imperative to consider SBEs from the perspective of the 'users' (Gustafson, 2001) as users' meanings are more important that designers' meanings (Rapoport, 1990). However, other users including the community-at-large are not included in this study.

Concept of User Experience (UX)

Typically, the notion of experience is inherent to our existence in the world as human beings. It covers everything human beings encounter, undergo, or lived through as individuals or groups at a particular time and space (Roto, Law, Vermeeren, & Hoonhout, 2011). The concept of 'UX' is a complex construct and defies a clear-cut definition. However, at the same time, its unanimously shared definition reflects the richness and private character of experiences. Roto et al. referred to the term as the experience(s) derived from encountering systems (products, services, and artefacts). ISO 9241-210 (as cited in Roto et al.) defined UX as a "person's perceptions and responses resulting from the use and/or anticipated use of a product, system or service".

The definition includes users' emotions, beliefs, preferences, perceptions, physical and psychological responses, behaviours and accomplishments that occur before, during and after use, which are influenced by the interactive system, the user and the context (Law, Roto, Hassenzahl, Vermeeren, & Kort, 2009). As a phenomenon, UX is a subset of experience as a general concept; specific; unique; rooted in a social and cultural context as well as includes all encounters, actively or passively, with a system (product, service, and artefact) (Law et al., 2009; Roto et al., 2011). In this context, the phenomenon of UX of SBEs refers to the lived experiences of users derived from using their SBEs. It includes users' responses or feedback on their feelings, emotions, beliefs, and expectations, resulting from their interactions with SBEs.

Roto et al. (2011, p. 4) described three different perspectives of UX that people may take: (1) experiencing, (2) a user experience, and (3) co-experience. According to them, experiencing refers to an individual's stream of perceptions, interpretations of those perceptions, and resulting emotions during an encounter with a system. In addition, a user experience refers to an encounter with a system that has a beginning and an end. In other words, it is either an individual or a group of people encountering a system together. Finally, 'co-experience', also referred to as 'shared experience' or 'group experience', is a situation in which experiences are interpreted as being situated and socially constructed.

Based on Roto et al.'s (2011) classification of the factors affecting user experience, users' day-to-day experiences of SBEs can be put into three main groups as the context of the user and SBE, the user's state, and SBE characteristics. The context of the users and SBEs, here, refers to a mix of physical, social, task, and technical and information circumstances. The users' states refer to people's motivation to use the SBE, their mood, current mental and physical resources, and expectations. The third factor is the SBE characteristics of which users' perceptions naturally influence their UX. In this study, the characteristics of the existing SBE (e.g., physical, functionality, psychological, aesthetics, interactive behaviour, responsiveness), including those added by the users that are important of its use (e.g. broken furniture, graffiti's, broken toilets). Thus, users' everyday experiences of SBEs may change when any of the factors changes.

Finally, Roto et al. (2011) categorized UX into three time spans as momentary, episodic, and cumulative. User experience is said to be

momentary when it refers to a specific change of feeling during interaction; episodic when it refers to the appraisal of a specific usage episode; and cumulative, when it refers to views on a system as a whole, after having used it for a while. Thus, UX can be regarded as a momentary, primarily evaluative feelings (good or bad and pleasure or pain) while interacting with a SBE (Hassenzahl, 2008; Kanhnemann, as cited in Roto et al., 2011). In this study, UX as the user's feedback on their immediate evaluative feelings (e.g., positive – negative; satisfied – unsatisfied) resulting from using SBEs. From this time span categorization of user experience, this study regards cumulative user experience of SBE as a 'lived through' experience.

Users' Lived Experiences of SBEs

In this study, the phenomenon of users' lived experiences of SBEs refers to the immediate awareness and pre-reflective consciousness of using SBE. It includes SBE users' feelings, memories, expectations, intentions, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, responses, and feedback (van Manen, 1990; Vischer, 2008). Dilthey (as cited in van Manen, p. 35) defined lived experience as "our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflective or self-given awareness, which is, as awareness, unaware of itself". Lived experience has a temporal structure, which is impossible to grasp in its immediate manifestation but only reflectively as past presence (van Manen). He noted that lived experience implicates the totality of life, and people's appropriation of the meaning of lived experiences is always of something past that is difficult to grasp in its full richness and depth since.

van Manen (1990) identified four fundamental existential life worlds based on the multiple and different life worlds that belong to different human

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existences and realities as "*lived space*, *lived body*, *lived time*, and *lived human relation*" (p. 101). For him, these life worlds are helpful guides for reflection in the research process; belong to the existential ground through which all human beings experience the world, though not all in the same modality. However, for this study, lived or embodied space is more appropriate because it is felt space. van Manen argued that the experience of lived space is largely pre-verbal and more difficult to put into words, yet people know that the space in which they find themselves affects the way they feel. Thus, SBE reserves special place experience, which has something to do with the fundamental sense of users' feeling or being-in-the-world.

As Kjævrang (2003) pointed out, SBEs provide experiences, which influence the activities, communication, social gathering, and well-being of pupils and teachers. This reflection relates to users' responses or feedback on physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic dimensions of SBEs as places of human experience (McIntyre, 2006; Tuan, 1977; Vischer, 2007). In this study, physical dimension refers to the habitability of SBEs; functional dimension refers performance of tasks and activities; psychosocial dimension relates to emotion and interaction; and aesthetic dimension refers to senses of the body and attraction. These dimensions of SBEs are present at any moment of users' experiences of a place, and shaped by the dynamic interconnections. The dimensions of SBE considered are valuable for this study because they shape users' responses and perceptions, emotions and their ability to work or learn.

In his seminal work, Lefebvre (as cited in Filmer, 2006, p. 30) categorized space into "perceived, conceived, and lived", which Edward Soja

dubbed as "firstspace, secondspace, and thirdspace". While all the three realms are interconnected and cannot be studied in isolation, this study focuses on the lived, or thirdspace. Soja (as cited in Filmer) posited lived space as the locus of a radical openness, transgression, and innovation; quite literally, it is space as *it is lived*. This understanding of lived space requires a focus on events, actions, and practices, which is "essentially qualitative, fluid, and dynamic" (Lefebvre, as cited in Filmer). Thus, in this study, embodied and lived experiences of SBEs are the means through which users' perceived, conceived, and constructed notions of SBEs.

In education, SBE professionals need to know things that contribute to positive users' experiences and those that contribute to negative users' experiences to work on building the former into SBEs and avoiding the latter. As Matz (2012) noted, a positive or good user experience is characterized by the absence of any of the problem factors that contribute to a negative user experience. Typically, SBEs exhibiting a positive or good user experience are generally enjoyable and rewarding to use, enable high productivity and efficiency, and enable users to produce good quality educational outcomes. They also encourage users to enter a "flow state", (i.e., a mental state of focus, concentration, and total immersion that engenders creativity, productivity, and satisfaction; exhibit acceptable performance; are visually appealing; and do not make users feel incompetent, dumb, or embarrassed (Matz).

On the contrary, a negative or poor user experience is the opposite of a positive or good user experience. Generally, SBEs exhibiting negative users' experiences are characterized by poor performance and behaviour not meeting expectation. Typically, users' lived experiences of SBEs can positive or

negative. However, it is important to note that positive and negative users' lived experiences of SBEs are vague, subjective, and not easily measurable (Matz, 2012). Hence, this study lends itself to qualitative analysis of pre-reflective responses from users' experiences of SBEs to determine the degree to which built spaces supports their activities and well-being (Vischer, 2008).

Importance of SBE Users' Lived Experiences

One of the reasons for studying experience is to discover and describe the nature of users' thoughts, feelings, and actions in schools; to portray the social worlds of users' in schools; to examine the relationship between their social worlds and their academic practices and progress (Thiessen, 2007). Additionally, to document and incorporate the experiences of users in decisions and actions designed to improve teaching and learning, as well as the well-being and performance of users. Besides, experiences are important because what matters in schools centres on users, their daily activities, and the ways they make sense of their lives (Thiessen).

Again, there is an increasing evidence to suggest the utility of incorporating users' experiences of SBEs in decision-making for school improvement (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Higgins et al., 2005; Holt, 1974; Wall et al., 2008; Woolner et al., 2007). Indeed, the "process of user involvement must be continually refreshed and iterated to support ongoing change" (Higgins et al., p. 3). Flutter (2006) stated that we gain important insights by listening to users' voices, particularly student voice. However, if educational systems listen to and work with children and teachers they can transform both learning spaces and pedagogical approaches (Blackmore et al., 2011).

Finally, it is essential to note every experience leaves its peculiar impression on the mind of the individual, and all such experiences come through the senses (Coulter & Rimanoczy, 1955, p. 96). These mental impressions, as the authors suggested, last through life. As Vischer (2008) noted, studying users' experiences offers a better understanding not only of how the environment influence behaviour, but also how users act on their environment and how such behaviour redefines the user-building relationship. However, in Ghana, studies on user experience especially in the area of school facilities are lacking. There is therefore need to fill this intellectual vacuum by exploring the lived experiences of SBEs from the perspectives of users.

Concepts of Educational Equality and Equity

Equality and equity of educational opportunities and outcomes are important values of social democracy and most significant issues facing education systems today (Carlsson & Lindgren, 2007; Jacob & Holsinger, 2009). Different and varied definitions of the terms exist, yet they are often used interchangeably or together. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1973) referred equality to quantity and equity to the fairness or social justice of the distribution of education. Hutmacher (2002) described equality as 'an equivalence between two or more terms, assessed on a scale of values or preference criteria and equity as fairness or justice. Similarly, Jacob and Holsinger (p. 4) defined educational equality as "the state of being equal in quantity, rank, status, value, or degree" and educational equity as "the social justice ramifications of education about the fairness, justness and impartiality of its distribution at all levels of education".

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There is no single definition of equal educational opportunity (Coleman & Marjoribanks, 1975). However, scholars based the definition of the term on two broad classes: (i) input to education (facilities, teachers, materials, and curriculum) and (ii) educational outputs (the growth in achievement in basic skills and acquisition of knowledge. Darvas and Balwanz (2014, p. 30) defined equal opportunity as "the outcome of an individual's life should neither be predetermined by his or her characteristics at birth (e.g., gender, household wealth, ethnic/language group, geographic location, orphan status) not by his or her membership in particular groups (e.g., religious, ethno-linguistic, sexual orientation)". Although not a meaningful term (Coleman, 1975), this considers the 'input to education' useful for this study.

Brandsma (n.d.) distinguished three perspectives of educational equality. The first is the meritocratic perspective, which means equal educational rights in the case of equal capacities. The second is the 'equal opportunities' perspective, which means an equal educational investment in each pupil. The third is the egalitarian perspective, which means more investment in less talented pupils to reach equal achievements. (Peters, 2009) also identified four basic aspects of educational equity. These are equity of access or equality of opportunity, equity in terms of learning environment or equality of means, equity in production or equality of achievement (or results), and equity in terms of realization or exploitation of results (Peters, p. 150). Thus, essentially, equality and equity are closely related.

Inequality characterizes a difference, a disparity or a gap in terms of advantage or disadvantage in material and/or symbolic resources, such as wealth, social recognition, prestige, authority, power, and influence.

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Educational inequality of opportunity, as a social problem, remains a critical challenge for many countries and an important focus for sociological research because of its effects on social and income mobility (Foster, Gomm, & Hammersley, 1996; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). The term is, therefore, an important topic for enquiry and a significant public issue (Foster et al., 1996). It has different meanings, and can be defined as "differences in the community's input to the school, such as per pupil expenditure, school plants, libraries, quality of teachers, and other similar quantities" (Coleman, 1967, p. 13). In addition, Change Online (2008) described the term as the lack of equal opportunities that people have because of disparities in quality education or other factors.

In this study, the term means differences or disparities in educational inputs, particularly SBEs for teaching, learning, and working. In addition, it relates to the conscious or unconscious denial of some users equal set of SBE circumstances or conditions for their activities and well-being. In other words, the term refers to unequalizing individuals' access to similar or the same SBEs. This understanding is based on the assumption that similar instructional and non-instructional spaces provide users with similar or equal opportunities to perform specific tasks or activities and *vice versa*. Thus, differences in the conditions of SBEs may well influence SBE users' teaching and learning opportunities, well-being, and outcomes. In Ghana, concerns about disparities in teaching and learning opportunities and outcomes have remained a major characteristic of basic education (Amedahe, 2007; Etsey, 2007).

Several factors limit educational opportunities of individuals and groups in a society. According to Jacob and Holsinger (2009), these factors

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include but not limited to opportunities for educational attainment, disabilities, gender, globalization, HIV/AIDS, language, poverty, privatization, race, social class, societal values and norms, socio-economic status, and standardized tests. In Ghana, SBEs are one of the factors limiting educational opportunities. Despite various kinds of reforms, inequities and inequalities of educational opportunities in the basic education system persist (Rolleston, Akyeampong, Ampiah, & Lewin, 2010). Importantly, inequality or inequity form part of the education experience. However, improving equity or equal opportunity in basic education delivery could greatly strengthen performance in terms of quality, efficiency, and accountability (Darvas & Balwanz, 2014).

Theoretical Frameworks

The focus of this study on SBEs as places of human experience and meanings in relation to disparities in educational opportunities is multidisplinary. Thus, the study uses multidisciplinary theoretical perspectives as lenses in deepening understanding of the phenomenon studied. These frameworks are user-centred theory of the built environment, phenomenology of place, philosophy of being-in-the-world, meritocratic conception of educational equality, and theoretical model of physical environment.

User-centred Theory of the Built Environment

Vischer (2008) developed the user-centred theory as a guide to research on user experience of the built environment locating her theory along the continuum between two extremes of environmental determinism and social constructivism. She argued, "In a given situation, building users' behaviour is influenced not just by the space they occupy but by their feelings, intentions, attitudes and expectations as well as the social context in which they are

participating" (Vischer, p. 233). She postulated, "The built environment exists to support the activities of users that it shelters" (p. 234). Stating that the built environment influences human behaviour and does not determine it, Vischer based her theory on building user's experience. For her, the way to analyse, understand, and evaluate how the built environment supports the user is to explore systematically and in detail the user's experience.

There are three defining elements of Vischer's (2008) theory, namely: users, experience, and the built environment. First, she emphasized the need to agree on who are the users who may be carrying out activities inside and outside the built environment. In a given situation, there is likely more than one homogeneous user group, whose interests may clash. Second, she emphasized the need to agree on 'what is meant by experience' if the users' experience is the route to learning about the built environment. According to her, many studies focus on sensory experiences to the neglect of the whole experience. Her concern here was "to learn about the whole experience, to understand how users experience their environment when they are seeing, hearing, smelling and touching all at once" (Vischer, p. 235). The final element is how to define usefully the built environment, which includes personal, semi-private or shared, social, public, geographical and universal spaces.

In her theory, Vischer (2008) used support to human activities as a measure of built environment effectiveness or quality and thereby assumed that inadequate support to users constitutes a negative situation. She based her analytic framework on three levels of environmental support - physical, functional, and psychological comfort - in rating how well the built

environment performs in a workplace. She applied the three levels of environmental support to three user units as individual, group, and organization. According to her, using feedback from users at given point in time, all built environments can be placed somewhere on the continuum ranging from completely functionally comfortable to completely dysfunctional and stressful (Vischer, p. 237).

In her model, she defined 'stressful' as "the degree to which users have to compensate and expend their own energy performing their activities in adverse environmental conditions" (Vischer, as cited in Vischer, 2008, p. 237). She explained that "in situations where workers do not feel supported, and indeed have to make an extra effort to 'deal' with environmental barriers or problems in order to get their work done, the lack of support may be considered stressful" (pp. 236-237). In her framework, the effectiveness of individuals, groups or teams, and the organization as is influenced by the physical, functional, and psychological comfort of the built environment. Figure 3 shows Vischer's analytic framework for assessing the user's experience of the built environment reproduced with permission.
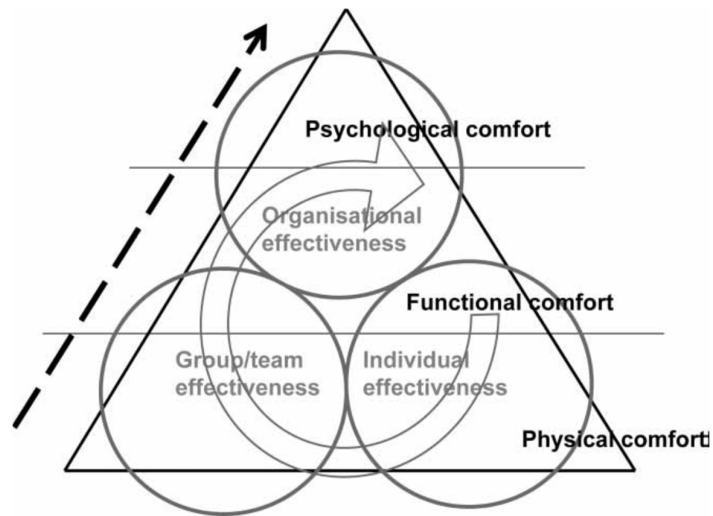
Figure 2. Analytic framework for assessing the building user's experience.
Source: J. C. Vischer (2008, p. 236).

In sum, Vischer's (2008) user-centred theory is judicious for this study because of its focus on user's experience, since a better understanding of how users make sense of their SBEs centres on the "notion of use". Although her theory was based on workplace, it had important theoretical value for this study by throwing light on understanding users' lived experiences of SBEs. Apart from providing a theoretical basis for this study, her framework offers a medium through which to reflect and discuss the SBE needs of users. Finally, the application of the user-centred theory in this study offers an opportunity to change conventional ways of planning, designing, constructing, and managing SBEs (Vischer).

Phenomenology of Place and Space

This study lends itself to phenomenology of place and space as it conceptualizes SBEs as places consisting of instructional and non-instructional spaces of human experience and meanings. Phenomenology of place and space inspired by the ideas of Edward Relph and based on the premise that

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place plays an integral part in the lives of human beings (Relph, 1976). It aims to define space or place in terms of the users experience because users of place conceptualize it based on their experiences (Vischer, 2008). It also offers a useful theory in accounting for open-ended "everyday world of lived experience" (Dovey, 1999, p. 39), and therefore, an important starting point to provide a rich theoretical base for this study (Manzo, 2003). Indeed, proponents of phenomenology of place largely agree on the primacy and centrality of place in human experience (Filmer 2006; Manzo).

In his book, *Place and Placelessness*, Relph (1976) took a phenomenological approach to place because of his interest in human experience of place. He based his approach on the view that "place and sense of place do not lend themselves to scientific analysis for they are inextricably bound up with all the hopes, frustrations and confusions of life" (p. i). Relph, saw places as "the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world" (p. 141) and identified three components of place as: (1) the place's physical setting; (2) its activities, situations and events; and (3) the individual and group meanings created through people's experiences and intentions about that place. Emphasizing the experiential aspects of place, Relph argued that through the human experience of place an understanding of its importance could be formed (Seamon, 1996; Seamon & Sowers, 2008).

Relph (1976) developed the concepts and seven modes of *insideness* and *outsideness* to make his most original contribution to the understanding of place. This study considered only existential insidenesss and existential outsideness. Relph described existential insideness as the feeling of attachment and being at home. It is the strongest sense of place experience – a situation of

deep, unselfconscious immersion in place and the experience most people know when they are at home in their own community or region (Seamon & Sowers, 2008). This mode explains the degree of attachment, involvement, and concern that a person or group has for a particular place. When users feel inside a SBE, they are here rather than there, safe rather than threatened, at ease rather than stressed, and supported rather than hindered. Thus, SBEs may feel welcoming, real, and pleasant.

On the other hand, existential outsideness refers to a situation of feeling separate from or out of place (Relph, 1976). It is a sense of strangeness and alienation, such that a person feels separated or alienated from place. People feel some sort of lived division or separation between themselves and world, for example, homesickness (Seamon, 1996; Seamon & Sowers, 2008). Similarly, in education, SBEs as places of experience may feel alienating, unreal, or unpleasant. Indeed, the two modes for understanding place constitute a fundamental dialectic in human life; implying that different places take on different identities for different individuals and groups, and human experience takes on different qualities of feeling, meaning, ambience, and action (Seamon).

Human experience is the most important element in perception in phenomenology of place (Manzo, 2003). Thus, phenomenology of place explores the ontological character of humankind and considers being-in-the-world as an indispensable part of continuation (Manzo). As Relph (1997) suggested, it is possible to visualize a SBE as consisting of built spaces. A strict observer of the activities of users within this physical context would see their movements. Nevertheless, users experiencing SBEs and activities

observe them as far more than this – "they are beautiful or ugly, useful or hindrances, home, factory, enjoyable, alienating; in short, they are meaningful" (Relph, 1976, p. 47). For a user to feel inside a SBE is to feel safe, at-home, and attached to the SBE. On the other hand, to experience outsideness is to experience the reverse of these states.

This study employs phenomenology of place as a model to understand users' experiences of SBEs. The value of phenomenological approach to SBE brings to the fore users' lived experiences and meanings of SBEs because they are so familiar and close to users that they are difficult to articulate (Seamon, 1996). Relph and Tuan (as cited in Filmer, 2006) grounded the lived experience of place in Martin Heidegger's understanding of being-in-the-world. Indeed, Relph's (1976) discussion of the concepts of existential insideness and outsideness offers a compelling theoretical insight for contextualizing the SBE experience. His dialectic insideness-outsideness is closely linked to Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world discussed below.

Admittedly, Relph's work (as cited in Seamon & Sowers, 2008) has been criticized because it lacks conceptual sophistication because of its use of dialectical opposites as a way to conceptualize place experience. However, it has value for this study. Through the continuum of insideness and outsideness, Relph provides a language that allows for a precise designation of the SBE experiences of users in relation to the basic schools in which they find themselves (Seamon & Sowers). This conceptual language demonstrates a major strength of phenomenological insights into taken-for-granted SBE experience. Finally, this study shares the view that by investigating users' experiences of SBEs, we also investigating their way of being in the world.

Philosophy of Being-in-the-world

In phenomenological thought, a place is an important element of Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world (Casey, 2001). The philosophy of being-in-the-world (Dasein) recognizes that who we are is influenced by our relationship, through our bodies, to the outside world (Heidegger, 1962). He argued that to discover the truth, we must understand the being of an entity in and for itself. His major claim is that the world announces itself most closely and mostly as a useful world, the world of common, average everyday experience (Critchley, 2009). According to Heidegger (as cited in Critchley), what is required is a phenomenology of our lived experience of the world that tries to be true to what shows itself first and foremost in our experiences. Referring to Heidegger, van Manen (1990) noted that to ask for the 'Being' of something or an entity is to enquire into the nature or meaning of that phenomenon. Essentially, 'Being' is the way human beings exist, experience, or make sense of the world. Thus, if users of SBEs are really being-in-the-world, in this context, 'the world' meaning 'the SBE', then this entails that the SBE itself is part of the fundamental constitution of what it means to be users.

In his book, *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962, pp. 102-107) identified two facets of relationship between human being (*Dasein*) and world as "presence-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*) and "readiness-to-hand" (*Zuhandenheit*). As Critchley (2009) noted, present-at-hand refers to our theoretical apprehension of a world made of objects. It is a "self-conscious, perhaps disinterested reflection, or any attitude in which there occurs a feeling of separation from matters" (Relph, 1985, p. 18). Essentially, in seeing an entity as present-at-hand, the beholder is concerned only with the bare facts of a

thing or a concept, as it is present to theorize about it. Thus, when a thing is revealed as present-at-hand, it stands apart from any useful set of equipment but soon loses this mode of being present-at-hand and becomes something, for example, that which must be repaired or replaced. In this light, when a SBE appears to hinder users' activities it loses its usefulness and appears as merely there, present-at-hand.

In addition, the ready-to-hand describes our practical relation to things that are handy or useful (Critchley, 2009). Relph (1985, p. 18) viewed readiness-to-hand as a pre-reflective use that appreciates "the practical value of things"; their immediate use in a given context. As human beings, we are always involved in the world in an ordinary, and more involved, way; doing things with a view to achieving something. For Heidegger (as cited in Relph), a hammer is ready-to-hand when we use it without theorizing. If human beings look at it as present-at-hand, they are likely to make a mistake. In this study, a SBE is ready-to-hand when users see it first, as a useful place created to support rather than hinder their activities before thinking about it. Thus, his basic claim is that practice precedes theory, and that ready-to-hand is prior to the present-at-hand (Heidegger, as cited in Critchley).

The philosophy of being-in-the-world offers a valuable classification and vocabulary for understanding users' responses to SBE experience. In this study, users' relationship with their SBEs is considered practical and instrumental rather than theoretical. Indeed, users find themselves thrown in the SBE and engaged in it before they are able to step back and contemplate it. Heidegger's (as cited in Critchley, 2009) basic claim is that practice precedes theory, and that ready-to-hand is prior to the present-at-hand. This study sees

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Heidegger's distinction between the two ways of approaching the world as an invaluable lens in explicating the lived experiences of SBEs. Indeed, in a SBE, users do not reflect on the essence of SBE but see it immediately as a tool to accomplish some end – learn, teach, or work effectively.

Meritocratic Conception of Educational Equality

Brighouse (2010) developed a theoretical framework for understanding educational equality, which is fairness-based. He put forward two conceptions of educational equality as meritocratic conception and radical conception. According to the former conception, "An individual's prospects for educational achievement may be a function of that individual's talent and effort, but it should not be influenced by her social class background" (Brighouse, p. 28). The latter conception states, "An individual's prospects for educational achievement should be a function neither of that individual's level of natural talent nor social class background but only of the effort she applies to education" (Brighouse, p. 29). Although with these two conceptions, Brighouse saw educational inequality as an issue of unfairness, this study considered the meritocratic conception more appropriate.

First, the meritocratic conception of educational equality is fairness-based. Brighouse (2010, p. 27) argued that "it is unfair, then, if some get a worse education than others do because, through no fault of their own, this puts them at a disadvantage in competition for these unequally distributed goods". For him, this intuitive case of educational equality rests on an intuition about what it takes a competition to be fair. Indeed, he saw educational equality as an important principle of justice – a relationship between individuals, and its connection to justice (Brighouse, 2003). He pointed out

that the character of institutions in which people interact and are raised greatly influences their life prospects. This study agrees with his call for the urgent need to ensure that the institutions, which govern the distribution of the benefits and burdens of social interactions, are governed fairly in accordance with the correct principles of justice.

Again, Brighouse's (2003) theory of educational equality, closely linked to Rawls' principle of fair equality of opportunity, focuses on the unequal quality of resources in school. He described education as a key mechanism for distributing opportunities for goods. For him, "if equality of opportunity is a central principle of justice, as it is on many theories, then there are likely to be reasons to seek an equal distribution of education, whatever that means" (Brighouse, p. 472). He pointed out that "educational equality is typically discussed as a relationship between predefined groups where people's educational equality is assessed by looking at the relative resource inputs devoted to, or educational outcomes by learners" (p. 33). Thus, to be legitimate, inequalities should result from fair procedures.

As Haydon (2010) noted, the meritocratic conception implicitly recognizes differences in actual educational achievements between individuals, but the processes leading to differences should be fair ones. This study shares Haydon's view by emphasizing the need for the principle of equal educational opportunity to be at the core of every educational effort. In the context of this study, the intuitive case of equality of educational opportunity legitimizes a SBE user's opportunity to teach or learn not to be a function of that user's basic school. Importantly, equal educational opportunity requires that all basic schools irrespective type or location should have standards of

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SBEs for users with no or minimal differences in instructional and non-instructional spaces.

Furthermore, there is the need to challenge unfairness in basic education for the sake of strong and meritocratic system of education and to achieve a good quality basic education (Brighouse, 2010). In agreeing with the research literature and everyday discourse, this study reckons that meritocracy of educational opportunities may be an abstract ideal against which educational decision makers and professionals can judge the present imperfection of the basic level of education. However, a meritocratic system of education is just, open, and fair. Therefore, as Brighouse noted, educational justice, progress, and fairness are timeless ideals upon which meritocratic conception of educational equality is presumed to rest.

Finally, the meritocratic viewpoint is judicious for this study because it rejects unfairness and injustice. This viewpoint suggests that SBEs can be a proper measure of inequality of teaching and learning opportunities. It also gives guidance as to the distribution of resources between advantaged and disadvantaged schools. For this study, SBE inequities may potentially contribute to disparities teaching and learning opportunities. Therefore, it is just unfair if some people in basic schools have good quality, adequate and well-equipped instructional and non-instructional spaces than others do, because through no fault of theirs, this puts users them at a disadvantage.

Theoretical Model of Physical Environment

The theoretical model of physical environment explains how the physical environment influences human beings (Earthman & Lemasters, 2011). In particular, the model aims to explain human behaviour in an

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organization and the possible influence buildings have on individuals. One of their propositions is that the condition of the school building directly influences the attitudes of faculty, parents, and students. Moreover, the attitudes students have about their surroundings permeate their feelings about the worth of the school building in which they are housed. Clearly, this attitude, in turn, influences their feelings about their own worth. Besides, the resultant attitudes students have about the school building influence to a certain extent their achievement. Thus, students perform better in good school buildings because their features and conditions assist in the learning process.

In addition, Earthman and Lemasters (2011) claimed that the immediate surroundings and working conditions directly affect faculty members. They argued that the attitude of faculty members who work in a facility that was rundown and lacking in certain features such as thermal control of the environment, adequate lighting and windows, modern science equipment, and controlled acoustical environment, among other features, would not be as positive as that of others in better-kept and modern buildings. They also stated that parents will have a feeling about the building in which their child attends school. Through visits, parents would conclude that the administration of the school system either cares or does not care about the condition of the buildings in which students attend school. Thus, the faculty and parents' attitudes will have a bearing upon the feelings students themselves have about the SBE.

Finally, students form an opinion about how the school system feels about them as learners. If the students' feelings were negative, the attitudes of the parents and faculty would reinforce that attitude (Earthman & Lemasters,

2011). They theorized that all of these factors generate an attitude on the part of the students about their worth and value in society. In this light, students view their SBEs as a judgement the community makes about the value of education. For the present study, if the SBE is not positive and supportive, the faculty, parents, and community may have a negative feeling or attitude about the SBE, which in turn, are communicated to students. This model is valuable for this study as it offers support for understanding how children, adults, and the community-at-large feel and think about SBEs.

Empirical Research on School Built Environments

Educational Outcomes

Today, the quality of school facilities is a growing body of research connecting the quality of SBEs to safety, health, and educational outcomes (Baker & Bernstein, 2012; Cash & Twiford, 2010; Cheng et al., 2011; Earthman, 2008; Rudd, Reed, & Smith, 2008). These and other studies, therefore, concluded that the quality of school facilities influence student behaviour, attitude, and achievement (Berner, 1993; Cash, 1993; Durán-Narucki, 2008; Earthman, 1999; Roberts et al., 2008; Tanner, 2000). Others Higgins et al. (2005) also reported the impact of SBEs on attainment, engagement, affect, attendance, and well-being of users. However, Picus, Marion, Calvo, and Glenn (2005) found no essential relationship between the quality of school facilities and student performance after accounting for other factors known to impact student performance.

In addition, studies have shown that the nature and quality of school buildings directly influence teacher retention, morale, attitudes, satisfaction, personal safety, and performance (Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005;

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Earthman & Lemasters, 2009; Lowe, 1990; Schneider, 2003; Sheets, 2011). Corcoran, Walker, and White (1988) reported that school buildings have effects on teacher morale, sense of personal safety, feelings of effectiveness in the classroom, and on the general learning environment. Evidence also suggested that poor working conditions seriously impinge on the work of teachers, and often result in higher absenteeism, reduced levels of effort, lower effectiveness in the classroom, low morale, and reduced job satisfaction (Earthman & Lemasters, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2000). However, these earlier studies were largely quantitative in design.

Maslow and Mintz (1956) study examined the effect of beautiful, average, and ugly rooms on people. They found that the more aesthetically pleasing the room, the higher the ratings of energy and well-being reported by participants investigated. Similarly, Frazier (1993) reported that teachers and their pupils often work in a physical environment that adversely affects their morale, and, in some cases, their health. Some research reviews (Earthman & Lemasters, 1996, 1997; McGuffey, 1982) focused on how educational facilities affect student behaviour, performance, and self-concept. However, it is essential to acknowledge that most of the studies reviewed were largely quantitative and did not explore users' experiences and meanings of SBEs.

Nonetheless, few qualitative research SBEs exists in the educational literature (Fram, 2010; Fram & Dickmann, 2012; Uline, Tschannen-Moran, & Wolsey, 2009). In a qualitative analysis of staff and teacher surveys, policy documents, and photographs of the SBE, Fram and Dickmann found that the SBE exacerbated bullying and peer harassment. Fram (2010) in a discourse analysis concluded that educational built environments are slowly evolving to

meet the demands and solve the issues challenging communities at a local, state, and global level. In a qualitative case study, (Uline et al.) argued that while scholars had investigated discrete features of the SBE, they had typically paid less attention to understanding how individuals construct meanings from these features and conditions. They found that occupants' stories helped in gaining further understanding of how school buildings influence the occupants. There is the need to pay attention to users' meanings of SBEs.

Users' Experiences, Messages, and Meanings

Typically, people act upon their SBEs, which shape their experiences and meanings. Empirical studies dealing with issues concerning users' experiences, messages, and meanings are relatively rare in the SBE research literature, particularly on Ghana. However, few related studies exist. For instance, Brown, Cole, Robinson, and Dowlatabadi (2010) evaluated user experience in green building relating to workplace culture and context. Through a pre- and post-occupancy evaluation, they reported that there are many other factors beyond the quality of the space, which may play a role in shaping user experience. While their findings drew links between improved occupant comfort, health, and productivity in the new building, how users' meanings manifest disparities in educational opportunities was not explored.

The school is a "physical representation of a public message about the value of education" (Cash, 1993, p. 83). Several authors corroborated the view that SBEs symbolize certain qualities, values, aspirations, and experiences for users (Butterworth, 2000; Young et al., 2003). They argued that SBEs serve a symbolic role in users, communities, and SBE architecture carry a strong message about community values and the importance of education. Hathaway

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(1988) also noted that SBEs send signals to users who inhabit them. However, some claimed that decaying school facilities send the wrong message to students, teachers, and community members (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988; Lackney, 1994). It is important to note that positive and supportive SBEs may send messages to users about society's commitment to education.

Young et al. (2003) noted school buildings send an important message: we value our children. According to them school buildings say to users, "You are a vital part of our community. We want you to feel safe, comfortable, challenged, inspired, and proud - we believe in you and your future" (p. 4). On the other hand, they could also say to pupils and students, "Tough it out and get by - we're not completely committed to your education" (Young et al., p. 4). Earthman (2002) thus cautioned that the failure to improve old, dilapidated school facilities might also communicate a message to low-income students that they are less valued than high-income students are.

The American Federation of Teachers [AFT], (2007) reported that deplorable conditions of school buildings "convey a message to the students: You are not worth the effort of providing and maintaining a good school" (p. 43). This negative message conveyed to teachers and students in school buildings runs counter to public statements on the value of education (Annesley, Horne, & Cottam, 2002). They argued, "The condition of most of our school buildings is a reflection of the low status we ascribe to teachers and young people" (Annesley et al., p. 21). This low status is a tangible symbol of our commitment to education. Failure to invest in school buildings sends a cynical message of indifference to students, rather than showing them that we

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value their education (AFT, 2006; Kozol, 1992). Notably, such messages are not lost on users of SBEs in Ghanaian basic schools.

Concerning meanings of the built environment, researchers have long indicated that human beings ascribe meanings to place and space because of their experiences (Pasalar, 2001; Rapoport, 1990; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). According to Rapoport, people react to environments based on the meanings the built environments communicate to them. However, he argued that the meaning aspect of the built environment particularly users' meanings and their preferences continue to be neglected. Brubaker (as cited in Pasalar, p. 97) stated, "Just as every person is unique, every school building should be unique as well". Thus, each SBE should not only have a character with its unique features but also comprise a variety of formal characteristics such as physical, functional, psychological, and aesthetic expressions that reflect users' values.

Pasalar (2001) supported this view by adding that people interact with their surroundings, making sense of them by giving meanings to them as "good" or "bad", "unique" and "common", "complex" or "simple" (p. 98). In his study on the meaning and perception of school buildings, Pasalar found that participants described preferred school building images as dynamic, attractive, and interesting. They also described disliked images as static, boring, and unattractive. Indeed, people create descriptive and evaluative adjectives out of their own personal daily experiences and attributes to built environments in terms of explicit verbal constructs (Kelly, as cited in Pasalar). However, as indicated, most studies neglect users' meanings of SBEs.

Meek (1995), in her book *Designing Places for Learning*, illustrated ways of looking at schools as places of deep meaning and showed how that

view of schools can "alter our approaches to designing, constructing, and renovating the buildings we inhabit" (p. vi). Her interest was in using architectural planning as a means of school reform, designing buildings that facilitate learning and a positive social environment, and how to revamp older schools. Using many case studies, Meek illustrated the effect that the physical environment has on students academic and behavioural outcomes. Although the architectural setting of a school can "facilitate the transmission of cultural values, stimulate, or subdue, aid in creativity or slow mental perception and cause fear or joy" (Taylor & Gousie, 1988, p. 23), few studies qualitatively explored SBEs in this regard.

Using qualitative interviews, observations, and walking tours with residents, (Skantze, n.d.) explored the architecture of a new suburb near Stockholm to understand what it means to the residents. Using different age groups Skantze found that experiences and representations of the built environment are integrated in an inner dialogue that the people uphold with themselves. Her results suggest that respondents uphold the design of the built environment as an essential part of their dialogue concerning their feelings of belongingness and estrangement. Indeed, the presence of meanings and motivational messages carried by the built environment together with concepts related to physical, functional, psychological, aesthetic, social, and systemic qualities of environment should be considered in any study of built environment experience (Pasalar, 2001; Sixsmith et al., 2004; Vischer, 2008).

Researchers suggested SBEs can have several dimensions as physical, functional, psychological, social, and aesthetic (Sixsmith et al., 2004; Vischer, 2008; Young et al., 2003), which shape the experiences of users, convey

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messages to them, as well as communicate meanings to them. The authors also noted that some of these dimensions are reciprocal and interactive; therefore, they are rather more difficult to define and quantify. Arguably, these dimensions of SBEs are likely to create feelings of ease, comfort, and support or, alternately, create feelings of nervousness, irritation, and neglect. Perhaps, these dimensions of SBEs are critical for effective teaching, learning, or working conditions, yet relatively little is known about how users of SBEs make sense about them.

While the built environment communicates with people at the same time influences their behaviour and experiences, it also provides the cues (Rapoport, 1990). Blumer (as cited in Rapoport) argued that through an interpretive process people make meaning of the built environments they encounter. Importantly, SBEs as civic landmarks reflect a community's values and respect for users and their activities and well-being. Therefore, it is important to explore how similarities or differences in SBE meanings are reflected in disparities in teaching and learning opportunities.

Inequality of Educational Opportunities

There is a growing literature, with debates and counter-debates on educational inequality (Jacob & Holsinger, 2009), yet a very little is known about how SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities. Sheets (2011) argued that equal educational opportunity is fast becoming the new civil rights issue of the 21st century. He made the point that "Excellent facilities for children who need them the least and inadequate facilities for the ones who need them the most violates the principle of equal educational opportunity for all" (p. 63). Sheets' study would have been more useful if he

had considered the meanings SBEs communicated to users contribute to equal educational opportunities.

Chiu and Khoo (2005) reported how resources, distribution inequality, and biases toward privileged students affected academic performance. Through a multilevel regression analyses Chiu and Khoo found that equal opportunity is correlated with higher overall student achievement. Large disparities continue to exist in the educational opportunities available to rich and poor students (Darling-Hammond, 2004). She noted that in pronounced areas of disparities, thousands of students attend school in dilapidated buildings, without textbooks, materials, or qualified teachers. As OEDC (2000) noted, equity of educational opportunity is an issue when some students attend school in poor quality school buildings than others do. Thus, if SBE users in basic schools with poor SBEs perform poorly than other in other schools, they certainly at a disadvantage especially when all basic schools follow the same national programme and participate in the same national examinations.

Evidence has shown that the research on educational inequality has been inconclusive (Foster et al., 1996). They argued that in many cases the studies were not 'neutral'. Foster et al. further argued, "We believe that sociological research must be pursued as a non-political activity, in the specific sense that it should not be directed towards the achievement of any political goal, not even the elimination of educational inequities" (Foster et al., p. 181). Their view does not support the need for the educational understandings, practices, and values of the people involved in basic

education. In basic education context, these claims suggest that equal distribution of educational resources might yield better overall outcomes.

In his classic book *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol (1991) described graphical the inequities in the quality of school facilities. He identified the effects of education inequality in six separate urban areas across the United States of America. His interviews with children in dilapidated schools revealed that the schoolhouse, the one place of hope for a better life, all too often provided no relief from the world of despair that they lived in. This finding is important because it suggests SBEs, which are supposed to be places of hope and can equally be places of despair. However, Kozol advocated for equal funding of schools, by bringing the poor schools up and not good ones down so that all schools are equally good. While these studies are relevant, their focus was not on how users' meanings of SBEs manifested the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities.

Issues Emerging from the Literature Review

In this study, the review has drawn on and examined a broad range of literature on basic education including its importance, legal framework, disparities, and research with children and adults in basic schools. As indicated earlier, formal basic education is crucial for the development of the individual and the nation at large (MoE, 2010b), yet disparities teaching and learning conditions and outcomes exist. However, from observation, most basic schools in Ghana do not have good quality, adequate, and well-equipped SBEs. The current evidence for SBEs suggests at the basic level of education no study on lived experiences of SBEs exists. It is also unclear, for example, whether users' meanings of SBEs manifest the disparities in opportunities to

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teach and learn. This study argues that in basic education, social democracy requires fairness, equal educational opportunities, and inclusion.

In addition, it seems current research does not adequately address the way in which SBEs of basic schools convey messages to their users, even though few earlier studies suggest that the school physical setting send signals to their users (AFT, 2006; 2007). This has meant that as educational planners, architects, and administers, we do not fully know the messages that our SBEs convey to children and adults who live, work, and learn in them. The SBEs in which users spend significant amount of time signal to them our commitment to their well-being and performance and education in general. For example, dilapidated, inadequate, and ill-equipped SBEs may send a wrong signal about our commitment to basic education and well-being of users and *vice versa*. Although physical settings send messages to their users, no research evidence exists in the Ghanaian context of basic education.

Furthermore, the literature reviewed strongly suggests that the users' meanings of place or the built environment are important (Rapoport, 1990; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). As places of meanings, SBEs reflect how users feel or think about 'being-in-the-world'. If users feel inside a SBE, they are here rather there; they are supported rather than hindered; safe rather than threatened; and at ease rather than stressed (Relph). The more profoundly 'inside' users feel about a SBE the more positive and supportive that SBE will be for them and *vice versa*. Many of the studies and materials reviewed did not indicate how SBEs communicate users' being-in-the-world. However, educational research has paid little or no attention to the meaning aspect of SBEs, particularly in the Ghanaian context of basic education.

Finally, as previous studies suggested SBEs affect the health, well-being, and teaching and learning outcomes of teachers and pupils as users. Obviously, not all users in basic schools operate in positive and supportive SBEs; hence, disparities are likely to exist. However, it is unclear whether meanings users make of their SBEs relate to the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities. In basic education, it appears some SBE users have rights to equal educational facilities and opportunities, safe, healthy, and satisfactory work conditions. Earlier studies focused on whether particular SBE factors, such as temperature, air quality, and ventilation, affect teaching and learning directly to neglect of the lived experiences and meanings of SBE users. There is the need to explore users' meanings of SBEs in relation to disparities in teaching and learning conditions in basic schools.

Conceptual Framework

This study developed a conceptual framework based on the literature review to serve as the starting point for reflection about the research and its scope. A conceptual framework is set of broad ideas taken from relevant fields of enquiry and used to structure a subsequent presentation (Reichel & Ramey, 1987). A conceptual framework, which explores SBEs, will be incomplete if it fails to understand what users' experiences, messages, and meanings suggest about educational opportunities. Based on the conceptualization of SBE as a place of human experience, a basic conceptual framework was developed to guide the study. It assumes that users act on their SBEs, which shape their lived experiences and meanings.

In this study, a basic conceptual framework was developed from the literature review, particularly based on the works of Beynon (1997), Coleman

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(1966), and Vischer (2008). The conceptual framework illustrates an interaction among four main elements namely: users, instructional spaces, non-instructional spaces, and educational opportunities. The framework put users at the centre of SBEs and educational opportunities. It claims that how users feel about using their SBEs can reveal the extent of their access to equal teaching and learning opportunities. Figure 2 shows a basic conceptual framework of a SBE developed for this study.
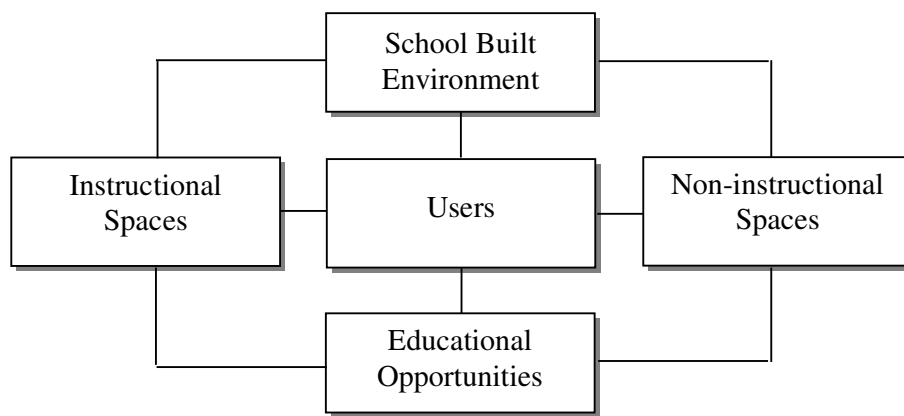
Figure 3. A basic conceptual framework of a SBE. Source: Author's construction

The basic conceptual framework of a SBE, first refers to users as people who directly (e.g. head teachers, teachers, pupils) or indirectly (e.g. parents, taxpayers, community) experience the SBE. Second, the framework refers to educational opportunities refers to the circumstances or situations in which activities such as teaching, learning, and working occur in the SBE. Third, the framework refers to instructional spaces such as classrooms, libraries, and ICT centres where teaching and learning occur. Finally, the conceptual framework refers to non-instructional (ancillary) spaces such as canteens, washrooms, sickbay, and staffroom used for social activities other than teaching and learning. Thus, this study explores how SBE users

experience and make sense of their instructional and non-instructional spaces manifest educational opportunities.

Summary

This chapter drawing on a combination of related theories and research established that how children and adults in basic schools experienced and made sense of their SBEs was likely to manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities. The review of the related literature, therefore, informed research problem, purpose, and questions presented in Chapter One. To address the research gap in SBE knowledge, the chapter developed a basic conceptual framework to guide study. Thus, this chapter provided a solid foundation on which to deepen understanding of whether users' meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities in the context of basic education. The next chapter sets out the research methodology used in throwing light on the research problem.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The chapter discusses the main drivers in choosing an appropriate research methodology for this study. It explains and justifies the chosen the research design (research paradigm, strategy, and methods) employed to achieve the purpose of this study. Particularly important is how the study design has guided my consideration of the scope of this study, the choice of research sites to explore, and the practicalities of the study.

Research Phenomenon and Question

This study explored how users of SBEs make sense of their lived experiences of using SBEs in the context of Ghanaian basic education. The purpose was to understand whether users' meanings of SBEs manifest inequality of teaching and learning opportunities in social democratic context. In addition the study sought to interpret participants' experiences of using SBEs, which included their feelings and expectations associated with the existing SBEs. The phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs is a complex and context-dependent. Therefore, exploring the phenomenon required the participants to make sense of the phenomenon in context.

The central research question of this study was 'How do meanings SBEs communicate to users through their lived experiences manifest unequal access to educational opportunities in the context of Ghanaian basic

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education?' This question developed in an inductive manner and reflected the level of available knowledge and the original research idea. The question also signalled the ontological quest to understand the 'being' of users of SBEs in their real life-worlds (van Manen, 1990), the notion of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962) and how unequal access to educational opportunities is manifested by users' meanings of SBEs. Thus, the question lent itself to qualitative research approach, as it sought to explore and understand social realities in context (Creswell, 2013).

Research Design

Research designs involve plans and procedures for that span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the process of research design began with philosophical assumptions that informed the methodological decisions made (Creswell, 2013). Traditionally, based on philosophical assumptions, philosophers of science and methodologies often make knowledge claims to clarify the structure of research and methodological choices made. This study recognized that philosophers have been engaged in a long-standing epistemological debate about how best to conduct social science research (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar, & Newton, 2002). Largely, the debate centred on the relative value of two fundamentally different and competing knowledge claims, which underlie quantitative and qualitative research.

The knowledge claims sometimes referred to as research paradigms are "a set of beliefs or epistemological assumptions about how research evidence might be understood patterned, reasoned and compiled" (Morrison, 2007, p. 19). The research paradigm underlying quantitative research is described as

being 'objectivist' or 'positivist'. Positivism arose from the philosophy identified as logical objectivity. Positivists assume a 'real', objective reality that is knowable and hold that the researcher can and should avoid any bias or influence on the outcome, and the results, if done well, are true (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). They use quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations. Thus, positivism shares its philosophical foundation with the quantitative methodology (Hays & Singh, 2012). A major implication of positivism is the need for independence of the researcher from the research participants.

On the other hand, the research paradigm underlying qualitative research is viewed as 'subjectivist' or 'interpretive'. Interpretivism or social constructivism, unlike positivism holds that multiple meanings exist perhaps about the same data (Creswell, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012). It assumes that all truth is 'constructed' by human beings and situated within a historical moment and social context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The paradigm also holds that "the social world has a very precarious ontological status, and that what passes as social reality does not exist in any concrete sense, but is the product of the subjective and inter-subjective experience of individuals" (Morgan, 1980, p. 608). Indeed, interpretivists reject the positivists' beliefs, which centre on atomism – that the objects of experience are atomic, independent events (Amaratunga, et al., 2002). Thus, this study selected qualitative research approach, which was congruent with the research purpose and questions.

Qualitative Research

This study adotped qualitative research design to understand the meanings users of SBEs make about their lived experiences of SBEs in

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relation to the disparities in teaching learning opportunities. Qualitative research aims "to investigate the meaning of social phenomena as experienced by the people themselves" (Malterud, 2001, p. 398). This study adopted qualitative research design as it sought to explore and understand the lived experiences of SBEs in basic education context to help readers gain a better insight into whether SBE meanings manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature and focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live (Holloway, 1997, p. 2).

Philosophically, this qualitative study assumed that SBE reality was subjective and multiple, as seen by the users or study participants. In addition, the study assumed a lesser distance between the researcher and the study participant. Furthermore, the study presumed the use of inductive logic, study of the lived experiences of SBEs within its context, and the use of an emerging design. Furthermore, the study assumed that this SBE research was value-laden and that biases were present, which needed to be acknowledged. Finally, the study assumed the literary form of writing, informal style using the personal voice and the use of qualitative terms and limited definitions (Crewell, 2013).

Qualitative research is characterized by inductive and abductive analysis, naturalistic and experimental settings, the importance of context, the humanness of research, purposive sampling, thick description, and interactive, flexible research design (Hays & Singh, 2012). Qualitative research offers a systematic, subjective approach to explore the lived experiences of SBEs and to interpret them in terms of users of SBEs bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln,

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1994). Thus, the nature and focus of qualitative research coupled with the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed informed the choice of the qualitative research design (Creswell, 2009; Hays & Singh).

Using qualitative research approach, the study explored how different users made sense of their SBEs, to understand those meanings, and to find out how the meanings manifested unequal access educational opportunities. The qualitative research design helped to gain new insights, discover new ideas, and/or increase knowledge of the lived experiences of users of SBEs (Burns & Grove, 1997). As Creswell (2009) indicated, qualitative research design encompasses interpretive paradigm, the strategies of inquiry, and the methods – data collection, and analysis strategies used to gather data and derive meanings from the data. He identified five main strategies of inquiry namely – narrative analysis, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography and three main methods – interviews, observations, and document – used in gathering data.

Indeed, qualitative research has a number of limitations. First, it has been criticized to be too subjective, difficult to replicate, restricted in scope, and lack transparency (Bryman, 2012). It is also is expensive and time-consuming regarding collecting and analysing research data (Patton, 2002). However, the main strength of qualitative research design for this study rests on its appropriateness and increased degree of flexibility (Robson, 2002). It also has the ability to avoid a reliance on the researcher's predetermined assumptions and to focus on the meanings of key issues for participants (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1997). Above all, it allows me to explore and interpret

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the unique experiences and meanings of users of SBEs in context (Holloway, 1997). The next section describes the paradigm underpinning this study.

Research Paradigm

As Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 105) noted, research paradigm is the "basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigators". This qualitative research sought to understand SBEs and users' experiences of SBEs. This aim fits the assumptions of interpretive research paradigm which seeks is to interpret the social world with its investigative approaches focusing on interpretive understanding (or *Verstehen*) (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The paradigm seeks to access the meanings of participants' experiences as opposed to explaining or predicting their behaviour, which is the goal of positivism (Ajjawi & Higgs). The interpretive paradigm uses qualitative and naturalistic approaches to understand, inductively and holistically, human experience in context-specific settings. These approaches provide participants in this with an opportunity to hear their voices, concerns, and practices regarding their SBEs (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

In this paradigm, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2013). The paradigm assumes that "universal truth" cannot exist because there are multiple contextual perspectives and subjective voices that can label truth in scientific pursuit (Hays & Singh 2012). The choice of the interpretive paradigm for this study was grounded in the assumption that, first, the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs involved cognitive processes, which were often tacit and subconscious and occur in context (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The phenomenon was situated and implicit (Billet, as cited in Ajjawi & Higgs) and could not be labelled as

objective since the voices of researchers and participants were biased and seated in different cultural experiences and identities (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007; Hays & Singh, 2012).

In line with interpretivism, this study assumed that there were many temporal truths and multiple realities of SBEs, and focused on the holistic perspective of the user and SBE, which was more congruent with the phenomenon. In this paradigm, users of SBEs, as human beings, constructed meanings in unique ways, depending on their context and personal frames of reference as they engaged with the world that they were interpreting (Crotty, 2005). The paradigm values subjectivity and acknowledges that users of SBEs are unable to achieve total objectivity because they are situated in a reality constructed by subjective experiences (Crotty). This is a notion of multiple constructed realities where findings emerged from the interactions between the researcher and the participants as the study progresses.

Accordingly, the lived experiences of SBEs cannot maintain its essential and embedded features if reduced or measured as in quantitative research (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Again, the phenomenon is complex, involving multiple strategies and interpretations as no perfect approaches to understanding users' lived experiences exist (van Manen, 1990). Besides, the phenomenon is contextual in terms of the people involved, the educational situation, the actual setting; what was useful, relevant, and meaningful depended on the situation (Ajjawi & Higgs). The paradigm has the potential to generate new understandings of complex multidimensional phenomenon and thus, a suitable paradigm for exploring lived experiences of users of SBEs.

Moreover, interpretive paradigm is value-bound because of the nature of the questions asked, the values held by the researcher, and the way the researcher interprets and generalizes the findings (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). In this study, the lived experience aspect of users' social world is difficult to explore using positivists' paradigm (Denscombe, 2010). Indeed, isolating or measuring lived experiences of users of SBEs in educational practice as specific and without a context ignores the complex realities and meanings of lived experiences. Thus, the choice of interpretivism over the positivism or other research paradigms was not because of its superiority (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) but rather its appropriateness (Creswell, 2013).

In sum, the philosophical assumptions informing this study have several practical implications. First, to deepen understanding of whether users' meanings of SBEs manifested disparities in educational opportunities, I used participants' quotes, images, and themes in their own words and provided evidence of different perspectives. Second, I collaborated, spent time in the field with participants, and became an 'insider'. Third, in line with interpretive paradigm, I worked with particulars (details) and did not seek to generalize, described in detail the context of the study, and constantly revised questions from experiences in the field. Fourth, I openly discussed values that shaped the participants' story and included my own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations of participants. Finally, I used an engaging style of narrative, used first-person pronouns, and employed the language of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013).

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Research Strategy

Qualitative research approach has a number of strategies of inquiry, namely: narrative analysis, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography (Creswell, 2013). Being aware of these strategies, I chose phenomenological research approach because it is congruent with the purpose of this study. van Manen (1990) described phenomenology as the study of lived experience or life world as consciously experienced, without theories about its causal explanations or objective reality. Thus, it seeks to identify the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by people and to understand how they construct meaning (Creswell, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1983). The goal of phenomenology is to describe and interpret an aspect of human experience

Phenomenology originated as a philosophical movement founded by the 20th German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). As a philosophy, Husserl's phenomenology focuses on the detailed description of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. The concept of epoché, which means "freedom from suppositions", is central to Husserl's philosophy (Laureate Education, Inc., 2013). This concept centres on the idea that people cannot feel that they know things without reflecting on them, and that only what people think about things gives them meaning. Husserl felt that the perception of the experience itself is the source of knowledge, and that obtaining knowledge is a matter of getting input from people who have experienced a phenomenon directly.

For Husserl, applying the concept of epoché to research requires researchers to recognize their own biases, recognize the impact of those biases

has on their analysis of data, and purposely set those biases aside. Edmund Husserl was concerned with epistemology and saw phenomenology as a descriptive method as well as a human science movement based on modes of reflection at the heart of philosophic and human science thought (van Manen, 1990). Husserl considered phenomenology as a discipline that endeavours to describe how human beings constituted and experienced the world through conscious acts. For Husserl, the natural scientific approaches to enquiry did not offer a suitable means of understanding the human being because he believed that it was impossible to reduce man to a measurable object (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008).

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), unlike Edmund Husserl, focused more on general concept of understanding. In Heidegger's view, human existence is a more fundamental notion than human consciousness and human knowledge (Dahlberg et al., 2008). For Heidegger, phenomenology is ontology referring to a study of the modes of 'Being-in-the-world' of human being. His notion of hermeneutic understanding aimed at the power to grasp one's own possibilities for being in the world in certain ways but not re-experiencing another's experience (van Manen, 1990). His aim was "to let the things of the world speak for themselves" (van Manen, p. 184).

There are two main traditions based on the works of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger that are commonly used in practice – descriptive (or transcendental) and interpretive (or hermeneutic) phenomenology (Laureate Education, Inc., 2013; van Mann, 1990). Husserl advanced descriptive phenomenology, which looks at how to transcend individual experience by reducing the reported experiences from individuals into patterns and themes to

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understand ("transcend") the commonalities. Interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenology stems from Martin Heidegger's philosophy. It looks at the same kinds of experiences and collects the same data as descriptive phenomenology, but instead of reducing the reported experiences from the individuals into patterns and themes, the researcher looks for the psychological or sociological factors that influenced the response (Laureate Education, Inc., 2013).

Contrary to Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology eliminated bracketing, asserting that impartiality was impossible because researchers become enmeshed with the experience (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Heidegger, therefore, endorsed the hermeneutic circle in which understanding and interpretation of phenomenon are gained through shared knowledge and experiences (Dahlberg et al.). He rejected the idea of suspending personal prejudices and offered interpretive narration as opposed to description. Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology is based on the premise that reduction is impossible (Kafle, 2011; Laverty, 2003). Later, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer, and others who developed Husserl's ideas (Spiegelberg, 1982) moved away from his descriptive phenomenology towards elaborating existential and interpretive (hermeneutic) dimensions (Finlay, 2009).

The two main schools of phenomenology share the same philosophical underpinnings of humanism and constructivism; both are qualitative approaches to data collection and interpretation (Laureate Education, Inc., 2013). Phenomenology aligns with qualitative research because it is based on the idea that individual perceptions guide actions and responses. It assumes

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that there can be no absolute reality because people understand actions only in terms of the way they perceive them. It uses data from first person sources (interviews, journals, focus groups) from 8-12 people or less. Data analysis consists only of the participants' own words or images about the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012; Laureate Education, Inc.).

This study employed hermeneutic phenomenology as a research strategy to understand how users of SBEs experience and make sense of their SBEs (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Henriksson and Friesen (2012, p. 1) described it as the study of "*experience* together with its *meanings*". As a human science, it studies the uniqueness of each human being (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology aims to elucidate lived experience and to reveal meaning through a process of understanding and interpretation (Wilcke, 2002). However, Whitehead (2004) described hermeneutic phenomenology as a philosophy and not a methodology.

Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a methodology in education, is attentive to both phenomenology and hermeneutics (van Manen, 1990). It is phenomenological (descriptive) because it seeks to be attentive to how things appear, or to let things speak for themselves. Again, it is hermeneutic (interpretive) because it claims that there are no such things as un-interpreted phenomena. As a strategy, it focuses on an in-depth analysis and the process of developing meanings from reading and interacting with texts, making it possible to generate new understandings through rigorous thinking, which allows new meanings to emerge (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Heidegger (as cited in van Manen, p. 181), "the (phenomenological) 'facts' of lived experience are always already meaningfully (hermeneutically) experienced".

Heidegger's philosophy makes it clear that the essence of human understanding is hermeneutic, that is, our understanding of the everyday world is derived from our interpretation of it (Dahlberg et al., 2008). As a methodology, hermeneutic phenomenology reintegrates part and whole, the contingent, and the essential, value, and desire (van Manen, 1990). His approach encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives, and makes researchers thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. Thus, in this approach, conducting a conversation implies allowing oneself to be animated by the question or notion to which the partners in the conversational relation are directed (van Manen).

One main advantage of hermeneutic phenomenology is that it is highly appropriate for researching lived experience and uncovering hidden meanings in the phenomenon embedded in the words and images individuals (van Manen, 1990). As a strategy, it is a credible, rigorous, and practical research approach to exploring the lived experiences of SBEs (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Odman, 1985). It also provides an in-depth understanding of phenomenon as well as rich data from the experiences of individuals. However, a major weakness of this strategy is that it focuses on experiences that are unique to the individuals and to their setting (Wilcke, 2002). This subjectivity of hermeneutic phenomenological data leads to difficulties in establishing validity and reliability of approaches and information. Besides, it is difficult to detect or prevent researcher-induced bias. Finally, it does not produce generalizable data (van Manen).

Nevertheless, the choice of hermeneutic phenomenology seemed best suited to gain insight into the complexity of users' real life world of SBEs in context. Smith (1997, p. 80) noted that hermeneutic phenomenology aims "at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively". Thus, within this hermeneutic phenomenological framework a deeper understanding of meaning of experience is sought from identification of the experience of phenomena. Having considered the potential contributions and limitations of the qualitative research strategies, hermeneutic phenomenology was chosen as a suited research strategy for this study. The following section relates van Manen's (1990) methodical structure for researching lived experience to this study.

Methodical Structure of the Study

This study followed methodical steps suggested by van Manen's (1990) for researching lived experience in human sciences. According to him, researching lived experience is a "dynamic interplay among six research activities" (p. 30). He described the methodical steps are suggestions to "animate inventiveness and stimulate insight" (p. 30). van Manen cautioned against using the methodical structure for pursuing hermeneutic phenomenological research as a prescribed set of procedures. He noted that these steps are suggestions to "animate inventiveness and stimulate insight" (van Manen, p. 30). Thus, the following paragraphs describe the steps briefly in the context of the present study.

The first step is turning to a phenomenon, which seriously interests us and commits us to the world (van Manen, 1990). While turning to the lived

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experiences of users of SBEs in basic schools, I undertook a review of the literature. A large amount of information on educational facilities was found but there was an absence of qualitative work on the lived experiences and meanings of SBEs in basic education. My interest in SBE users' meanings and educational opportunities led me to formulate the phenomenological question: 'What is the lifeworld of SBE users like in the context of Ghanaian basic education in relation to disparities in educational opportunities?' As van Manen noted, the formulation of phenomenological question is only possible when one has identified an interest in the nature of human experience.

The second methodical step is investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it. 'Lifeworld' or lived experience is the source of phenomenological research. Thus, the only way to understand the phenomenon under study was to enter the lives of people who experienced the phenomenon. van Manen (1990, p. 69) suggested, "The best way to enter a person's lifeworld is to participate in it". In this sense, to understand the lived experiences of SBEs, I went to the source of the phenomenon and participated in the lifeworld of SBE users who shared their experiential descriptions and knowledge about their SBEs. Thus, participating in the lifeworld of users of SBEs was crucial for this study.

The third step of pursuing hermeneutic phenomenological research is reflecting on the essential themes, which characterizes the phenomenon. As van Manen (1990, p. 33) stated, the true reflection on an experience is "a thoughtful reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance". What is crucial to the interpretation of the phenomenon is how to find a way to articulate the essence of the users'

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experiences of SBEs. Finding the words used by participants that capture the essence of their experiences requires a deep reflection of the language of the text, which involves a careful process of detailed reading and rereading of all their texts. This was to ensure that the essential structure of their descriptions was explicit. To recognize the essential structure, van Manen (pp. 92-93) suggested three reading approaches ("wholistic, selective, and detailed") toward uncovering thematic aspects of a phenomenon used in this study.

The fourth step is describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. van Manen (1990, p. 125) reminded researchers "hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity". He emphasized its importance in human science research, pointing out that "to write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one's own depth" (p. 127). Through the writing process, I became closer to the phenomenon by writing about the participants' experiences, as well as reflecting on my own experiences. Writing on the phenomenon, I brought understanding and interpretation together in "a common frame of reference" (Mohammadi, 2007, p. 86). This was to make participants' feelings, attitudes, and thoughts visible to the reader.

The next methodical step is maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon. In phenomenological research, it is easy to get-side tracked or wander aimlessly in the activity of researching lived experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). This can blur the research focus or question directing the research. To avoid this, I maintained a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon by carefully remaining sensitive to the research question raised earlier. Later in the study, when emerging themes

provided some insight, I re-examined each transcript to be sure that the data supported the emerging interpretation. As the researcher, I was keen in producing texts that present textual and visual themes that bring to the fore the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs.

Finally, the last methodical step is balancing the research context by considering parts and whole, which are closely connected to the activities in steps four and five (van Manen, 1990). The activity of parts and whole was necessary to understand how each participant's account contributes to the development the whole picture of how meanings SBEs communicated to users manifested inequality of educational opportunities in basic schools. Thus, I looked at the end and the beginning with the past and the future to determine essential integrated structure of the phenomenon. By moving between the parts and whole, I constantly scrutinized the phenomenon of being users of SBEs. Annells (1996) likened this activity to Gadamer's hermeneutic circle. Throughout the reflexive and interpretive processes, I immersed myself in the hermeneutic circle of considering parts and whole of participants' data.

Implementing the Study Design

Beliefs and Role of the Researcher

My interest in SBEs developed while I was a teacher, having taught for more than ten years in different senior high schools with different conditions of SBEs. Following my interest, I studied educational planning for my Master's degree and investigated the relationship between school physical conditions and academic achievement of students at the senior high school level. While my experiences as a teacher and a student of educational planning continue to motivate me in my area of interest, I believe that the place where

students live and learn, teachers teach, and other staff work is crucial to delivery of good quality and equitable basic education.

In addition, I believe that positive and supportive SBEs for all users in basic schools regardless of type or location of school, disability, age, gender or any consideration are necessary to bridge the gap in teaching and learning opportunities. Besides, I am certain that by ensuring that all users of SBEs at the basic level of education have positive and supportive SBEs will offer all users equal opportunities to live, learn, and work effectively. Currently, I work as a research assistant at the University of Cape Coast, and I am a PhD candidate pursuing my interest in SBEs. I brought to this research process some practical experience, having adequate knowledge and understanding of the research topic and context.

In this study, I positioned myself as a researcher; it was clear that I was the key instrument in collecting and analysis data to understand subjective experiences as well as personal meanings. Throughout my fieldwork, I assumed an *emic* (insider) position in the research (Hays & Singh, 2012) and played a major role in gathering and making sense of the data without the help of research assistants. I managed the data collection and analysis processes to ensure that the required issues were covered to the required depth, without influencing the actual accounts narrated. In avoiding researcher bias, I tried not to lead the participants, push them to continue answer questions they do not want answer, share their stories with others, or my own stories with them.

Besides, I audio-recorded the interviews and recorded my own reflections, thoughts, and ideas about possible links between data and participants. Again, I conducted an ongoing review of participants' responses,

including a review of my own conclusions about SBEs (Creswell, 2007). I also acknowledged that some of my valuable experiences in providing insight could serve as liability, biasing my judgement regarding research design and the interpretation of findings. However, in analysing the data, I gave equal weight to all participants to make sense of the phenomenon in the context of the meanings it has in SBE users' lives (Bowen, 2005).

Finally, in making my assumptions and theoretical orientation for this study explicit at the outset, I remained committed to ongoing critical self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues and supervisors (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Further, to address my subjectivity that manifested in participant selection, data collection and analysis as well as reporting, and to strengthen the credibility of the research, I took different procedural safeguards, including triangulation data sources and methods. Ultimately, I took the needed precautions identified not to impose my biases and beliefs on the data.

Pilot Study

In this study, pilot study was conducted before the actual study to solicit feedback on the lived experiences of SBE from a small number of respondents conveniently sampled. Its aim was to understand the protocols (interview and photo elicitation protocols) constructed, evaluate any ambiguity in the protocols, and test the feasibility of the actual study. Prior to the pilot study, on June 12, 2012, I submitted my research proposal together with a completed information sheet for ethical approval (Appendix A) to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Cape Coast. The submission of the proposal to IRB for considerations was to ensure that this study with human participants was ethical before embarking on the pilot study.

This small-scale study was conducted in one basic school in Elmina, the district capital of the KEEA Municipality. The school, which was a low performing school, had similar characteristics as the other basic schools sampled for the actual study regarding programme and examinations. On the July 19, 2012, I obtained informed consents from the participants selected to participate in the pilot study after seeking permission from the head teacher. Three participants consisting of a teacher and two pupils (a boy and a girl) took part in the pilot study. The interview questions were open-ended, written and structured in a way to encourage participants to focus on: (1) their overall experience in that setting, (2) concrete details of the phenomenon, and (3) reflection on the meanings their lived experiences hold for them (Seidman, 2006). For example, the interview protocol was based on the following core areas as:

1. Experiences about the SBEs

2. Experiences about instructional spaces

3. Experiences about non-instructional spaces

4. Images of SBEs

5. Messages from SBEs experiences

6. Meanings of SBEs

7. About the participant

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic and hermeneutic techniques. From the analysis, the existing condition of the available built spaces appeared to influence the participants' experiences of the SBE. The participants' experiential descriptions of their SBE suggested that while some spaces such as the toilet/urinal sent a negative signal to them,

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the other spaces such the JHS classrooms and library shape their experiences positively. Initial themes of physical, functional, aesthetic realities of SBEs emerged from the pilot study. This initial result was consistent with prior findings and theories in the research literature, which suggested that the built environment shapes users, experiences, and meanings (Rapoport, 1990; Vischer, 2008). The preliminary information from the pilot study indicated that the actual study would be feasible.

Indeed, the pilot study helped to identify and resolve some of the potential challenges associated with designing qualitative data collection instruments. Thus, the protocols were modified based on the participants' responses, by refining and excluding unproductive items to achieve the goals of the research (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Indeed, the pilot study improved upon my interview skills, as well as exposed few data collection and analysis opportunities and issues likely to occur during the main study. Finally, the pilot study helped in formulating my initial ideas about developing relevant themes that described the lived experiences of users of SBEs.

Selecting Study Setting and Sites

The study was conducted in the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. The Municipality is one of the 17 administrative districts in the region, with the capital as Elmina; the KEEA Municipal is identified as one of the deprived municipalities in Ghana and predominantly rural with fishing as its major economic activity. The choice of this research setting was based on (1) the limited knowledge about the phenomenon in the municipality, (2) disparities in educational facilities and outcomes, (3) accessibility of the research setting and the prospective participants and (4) time, logistics, and

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travel cost constraints. The population of study was users of SBEs in basic schools comprising head teachers, teachers, and pupils. At the time of the study, there were 72 basic schools in the KEEA Municipality.

The need to explore SBEs and provide hermeneutic phenomenological accounts of users' lived experiences placed necessary limits on the scope of this study. Thus, I limited my study to basic schools and their SBEs within the KEEA Municipality. I deliberately selected two basic schools – one HPBS and one LPBS – because of the contrasting level of academic performance of the schools and the research evidence that SBEs are positively associated with educational outcomes (Earthman & Lemasters, 2011; Sheets, 2011). The key distinction between the two schools is that the low performing basic school (LPBS) is owned and managed by the state and the high performing basic school (HPBS) is owned and managed privately. Nonetheless, both schools, which are located within the same educational circuit, follow the same national curriculum, and participate in the same national examination.

In selecting a sample of study sites, I employed stratified random sampling technique to ensure that the two basic schools were representative of SBEs associated with HPBS and LPBS. This technique involves randomly selecting from identifiable groups or strata, where members of a group share particular characteristics (Black, 1999; Robson, 2002). A major advantage of this technique was that it ensured that specific groups were represented, even proportionally, in the sample by selecting the sites from strata list. However, the technique was more complex, requiring greater effort than simple random sampling. Further, it also required the strata to be carefully defined (Black).

In selecting the two basic schools, I divided the 72 basic schools into four (strata) quartiles based on the 2012 Analysis of BECE Results from the KEEA Municipal Education Office. Each quartile consisted of 13 basic schools. Thus, I referred to the 4th quartile basic schools as HPBSs and the 1st quartile basic schools as LPBSs. Through lottery method of simple random sampling, I selected one basic school each from the 4th and 1st quartile schools or strata. Thus, the purpose for using this technique was to identify two study sites of interest, to develop a systematic way of selecting cases, and to increase credibility (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Patton, 2002). A key consideration for the selection of the two study sites was manageability of the study.

Gaining Access to the Study Sites

In this study, gaining entry to study sites was "a matter of establishing trust and rapport" (Patton, 2002, p. 310). To gain access to the study sites, first, I obtained an introductory letter from the Director of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast to enable me seek permission from the gatekeepers to the research site(s). With an introductory letter (Appendix B) and a letter of permission (Appendix C), I obtained an approval letter from the Municipality Director of Education, KEEA (Appendix D). Thus, with the help of these letters of approval I gained access to the schools.

Second, in reconnaissance visits to the research sites on October 29, 2012, I further negotiated access to the participants with the head teachers of the two basic schools. I sought approvals from the head teachers of the two schools and gave each of them the gatekeepers' information sheet (Appendix E). They gave me access to the potential research participants. Thus, I

established trust and rapport with the gatekeepers and potential participants. I then found out that the HPBS was a private school and the LPBS was a public school. While both schools follow the same curriculum and participate in the same national examinations they are however different in ownership and management as well as academic performance.

Study Participants and their Selection

Identifying the study participants. The study participants were obtained from a population of users of SBEs in two basic schools in the KEEA Municipality. The study participants comprised children and adults from male and female genders. The children were the pupils and the adults were teachers and head teachers. They are direct users of SBEs and are likely to have a considerable experiential knowledge about their SBEs unlike the indirect users. The study participants had similar characteristics based on school level, location, status, and educational objectives and programmes, and were therefore homogeneous. However, a major criterion for selecting the participants was their willingness to talk freely about their experiences with me.

In identifying the study participants, I decided that only "individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 150) as well as willing to volunteer would be recruited. With this decision in mind, I considered three user groups - head teachers, teachers, and pupils – who were involved directly with SBEs and could provide the data needed. I also considered participants' experiential knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation and participants' ability to articulate their lived experiences (Creswell).

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While various environmental quality factors of SBEs affect students, teachers, and other staff members (Baker & Bernstein, 2012; Buckley et al., 2005), it was unclear how SBEs shape the lived experiences and meanings of users in basic schools. In basic school, both children and adults as users could suffer or benefit from the conditions of SBEs and therefore capable of communicating their lived experiences of SBEs. It is recognized that for many children and adults, the complexities of experiencing SBEs are not tacit acts. However, with these users groups, I expected that the in-depth conversational interviews and hermeneutic photography would allow the experiences of using SBEs to be brought to the participants' awareness and recounted. Thus, the decision to include both children and adults in this study was because as users of SBEs their experiences could help deepen SBE understanding, planning, and management.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used. First, participants' lived experiences were regarded as the key elements in the selection criteria. Second, the participant should be a direct user of SBE (i.e., head teacher, teacher, and pupil). Third, the participants should spend not less than one year in the selected basic school or SBE. Fourth, the pupil participant should be in JHS 3. Finally, a minimum length of one year was desirable and sufficiently long enough for participants to experience their SBE as users. However, the JHS 3 pupils had richer experience of the SBE than the pupils in lower classes did. In addition, user groups such as Circuit Supervisors, School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent Teachers' Associations (PTAs) were excluded because they did not directly experience the SBEs.

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Selection strategies for study participants. The goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to develop a rich or dense description of the phenomenon being investigated in a particular context (van Manen, 1990). In this study, participants who met the selection criteria were selected using advertising and purposive sampling strategies. Advertising is a promotional strategy used to inform people about a product or an event using posters, flyers, radio, television, and magazines (Mohammadi, 2007). This study used advertising flyer (Appendix F), designed in the form of handbills to inform the potential participants about the research with the permission of the head teachers. The flyer outlined details of the research and gave interested participants an opportunity to get initial information about the research as well as indicate their interest. This strategy helped me in identifying interested users of SBEs who indicated their willingness to participate in the study.

The second strategy used was purposive sampling strategy recommended for this type of study by several authors (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002). Homogeneous sampling involves including participants who share many similarities to one another (Hays & Singh, 2012). The choice of this sampling technique was because this study interested in gaining comprehensive information about a specific group of users of SBEs from two basic schools. In this study, this technique gave detailed picture of the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs from the perspectives of participants who belonged to the same system of education or have the same peculiar characteristics (Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002).

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, in qualitative research, study participants are selected based on their first-hand experience of a phenomenon

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of interest. In this study, purposive sampling was used to ensure that key user groups – head teachers, teachers, and pupils – who directly experienced SBEs were included. Thus, the participants consisting of both children and adults were included because they constituted important sources of lived experience of SBEs and "from which [participants] most can be learned" (Merriam, 2002, p. 12). Thus, I selected children and adults as users of SBEs because of their direct experience of the phenomenon and their willingness to volunteer to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994).

A major disadvantage of the purposive sampling technique was that sample was not easily defensible as being representative of populations due to potential subjectivity of the researcher. Nevertheless, the technique ensured balance of group sizes when the three user groups were selected (Black, 1999). In addition, it also ensured the selection of sample units that have particular features for detailed exploration and understanding of each user's experience (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). Thus, notwithstanding its disadvantages, the technique was suitable and consistent with interpretive research paradigm and the research approach adopted in this study (Creswell, et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Number of participants. Typically, the number of participants in interpretive research is small as large volumes of data may be generated (Morse, 1995). As Hay and Singh (2012) noted sample size in qualitative research depends largely on the extent to which the research purpose is met. Some authors (Mile & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002) agree that the sample size should be consistent with the minimum number of participants you need to represent the phenomenon of research adequately – a number that is guided

by the purpose of the study. In addition, in determining the appropriate sample size, the goal was to obtain adequate data appropriate to the study, from a sufficient number and variety of individual users of SBEs to develop of rich description (Creswell, 2013).

Most often, in hermeneutic phenomenological research, participant numbers are between 2 and 12 (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this study, the sample size was guided by the principles of "data adequacy" or saturation (Morse, p. 142) and temporality of truth (Whitehead, 2004), which are recognized in interpretive research. Previous hermeneutic phenomenological research used sample size of 2 and 13 participants (Mohammadi, 2007; Williamson, 2005). In the course of the study, it was decided that 10 participants (five from each basic school) would allow in-depth data collection and provide possibility for data adequacy to be achieved. With the help of a recruitment letter (Appendix G), 10 participants, (5 from each basic school) consisting of four female and six male were recruited for the study, instead of the 14 originally planned.

Ethical Conduct of the Study

The ethical conduct of this study was paramount because it involved children and adults in basic schools. Having adhered to the ethical regulations and guidelines of the IRB, I obtained permission to conduct the study from the appropriate gatekeepers. I entered the study with a personal ethical position that what was inappropriate ethical behaviour for me would possibly be inappropriate and unethical behaviour with the study participants (Smith, 1990). Thus, through "process consent" (Heath, Charles, Crow, & Wiles, 2007, p. 410), I respected and addressed ethical issues of informed consent,

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confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw, and power relations in this study.

I obtained informed consent from each participant. Prior to obtaining their informed consent, I gave both research participants and gatekeepers verbal and written information. Informed consent is "the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway" (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2011, p. 6). The four constituent elements of informed consent considered were disclosure (providing adequate information), comprehension (understanding of information), and competence (ability of participants to make a rational decision), and voluntariness (no coercion) (Sim, as cited in (Sim & Wright, 2000). Further, I considered the attainment of informed consent as "the norm for the conduct of research" (BERA, p. 6).

Earlier, the gatekeepers/parents information sheet gave detailed information to the head teachers. Through the head teachers, I decided to inform the parents of child participants because as institutional gatekeepers (Heath, et al., 2007), they were in direct contact with parents and could better explain to the parents the extent of their wards' participation in the research. Thus, the information gave both participants and parent/gatekeepers detailed explanations about the purpose and procedures of the study as well as participants' right to withdraw from the study without prejudice. Notably, in this study, no participant withdrew from the study the participants trusted that their names would not appear in the research report.

Additionally, I met the participants both as individuals and as groups on three occasions to give them full information about the study. Each time, I

asked the participants to ask any question about their involvement, risks, benefits, and freedom of participation in the research. Indeed, I ensured that the participants were not under duress and understood all information about the study before agreeing to participate. I also selected only JHS 3 pupils as child participants because I believed they were competent and had the agency to decide on their participation in the study (Heath, et al., 2007). Thus, no participant was coerced to participate in the study.

At the beginning of each interview session, I reminded the participant about the research purpose and assured him or her confidentiality and anonymity concerning his or her involvement in the study. To protect the anonymity of each participant, I asked the participant to choose his or her own pseudonym. After this, I invited the participant to sign the informed consent form (Appendix H) and the photo reproduction rights form (Appendix I). Further, to protect the participants and their schools, I referred to the two schools as Basic School A and Basic School B. In writing research report, I removed all specific contextual details that could reveal the identity of the participants and their schools to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Another ethical concern for this study was unequal power relations between the researcher and study participants. According to Griffiths (as cited in (Scott & Morrison, 2006), the issue of unequal power relations between the researcher and study participants arises, particularly when there is a tendency for researchers to come from a particular sector of society. My status as a postgraduate student from the university, seeking information from participants in basic schools could result in coercion because of the unequal social status.

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Nonetheless, addressing the issue of unequal power relation led me to inform the participants that I was a teacher, but now a research student, interested in knowing more about their experiences as users of the SBE. Throughout my visits to the schools, I dressed in a similar manner as the teachers, avoiding any conspicuous difference between the participants and me (Oduro, 2003). Indeed, I spent more time in the study sites and created rapport with the participants, as well as reminded them about the aim of the study, and assured them of protecting their information. Thus, having interacted with for a while the participants saw me as 'one of them' and developed trust in me.

Besides, the continuous negotiation of research processes and products with the study participants throughout the study mutually shaped the research findings (Smith, 1990). Through this principle of dialogue, I ensured that the participants were not under any pressure; and that the participants did not give coerced, informed consent to their participation. In accordance with the IRB ethical guidelines for research involving human beings, I decided to store participants' data for 5 years after which to discard them. This research report assured strict anonymity because the report does not mention the participants' real names and their respective schools.

Finally, a copy of the summary of the research report will be given to KEEA Municipal Office of Ghana Education Service. However, the study participants reserve the right to be informed about the research result if they so wish. Ultimately, in disseminating the research results participants and their settings will not be disclosed.

Data Collection Procedure

There are several sources of gathering hermeneutic phenomenological data including protocol writing, interviewing, observing, biography, diaries, journals, logs, and art (van Manen, 1990). For this study, conversational interviews, and hermeneutic photography were used to obtain experiential descriptions complemented by close observation (Hagedorn, 1994; Sarantakos, 2005; van Manen, 1990). These methods were considered appropriate and credible for gathering and reflecting on the lived experiences of SBE users and helped to follow a precise, systematic data collection procedure because the main questions in this study concerns feelings, images, experiences, messages, and meanings (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Besides, the date, venue, and time of data collection were decided upon together with the gatekeepers and the participants to avoid using participants' time-on-task. The data collection began subsequent to obtaining an approval from gatekeepers and participants, which ended on February 22, 2013.

Observation of Built Spaces

Close observation of physical spaces is a more indirect method of gathering experiential anecdote or data on SBEs. In hermeneutic phenomenological research, it involves an attitude of assuming a reflection that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allow researchers to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations (van Manen, 1990). This method requires the researcher to be a participant and an observer at the same time, that one maintain a certain orientation of reflectivity while guarding against the more manipulative and artificial attitude that a reflective attitude tends to insert in a social situation

relation (van Manen). Thus, physical observation "focuses on objects, some of which are part of the physical environment and others the product of human behaviour" (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 231).

Close observation of built spaces was used to describe the context of the experiential knowledge of SBE users, and did not include participants' behaviour in their SBEs. The observation was based on availability, adequacy, and condition of the spaces in the SBEs to ensure accuracy. This began on October 31, 2012, after access to the schools had been granted. I started by generally observing the SBEs with particular focus on key observable built spaces, which were amenable to experiential knowledge. In addition, I recorded my observation using a field note template (Hays & Singh, 2012) (Appendix J) that detailed the characteristics of the settings, along with my own thoughts, insights, and reflections as they emerged. Within my field notes, I included descriptions of extant built spaces that were of interest to me.

For each basic school, I documented my observations by recording them in field notes based on my visits to the research sites throughout the study moving from one site to the other. (Brodsky, 2008) described field notes as a type of personal journal, which are crucial to any qualitative study, irrespective of methods used in data collection. She noted that qualitative researchers record in-depth descriptive details of people (including them), places, things, and events, as well as reflections on data, patterns, and the process of research in field notes. Thus, the descriptive details form the context and the quality control shape multiple qualitative data sources into articulated, meaningful, and integrated research findings (Brodsky).

In this study, the main aim of using field notes was to enable me to record and reconstruct the contexts in which the users of SBEs lived, worked, and learned. To this end, the field notes provided a record of descriptive details of built spaces identified in the SBEs. Furthermore, the field notes acted as a complementary source of contextual information to participants' interview transcripts and photographs. Besides, I used the field notes to record my thoughts, insights, ideas, and observations, providing an opportunity for reflection and self-evaluation (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Finally, as mentioned earlier, close observation of built spaces was used to complement the data generated from conversational interviews and hermeneutic photography with users of SBEs, and thereby triangulated the sources of data collection.

A major advantage of close observation is that it allows the qualitative researcher to better capture and understand the context (Patton, 2002). It generates different for forms experiential material than researchers tend to generate with written or the interview approach. In addition, the method helped to verify, falsify, or amplify information otherwise would not have been offered to me (Hay & Singh, 2012; Sarantakos, 2005). It also allows the human science researcher to try to enter the life world of persons whose experiences are relevant study material for his or her research project (van Manen, 1990).

Hermeneutic Interviewing

Hermeneutic or conversational interviewing refers to conversational interaction and exchange of narratives between interviewer and interviewee (van Manen, 1990, 2011). It involves the interpretation of interview content by the interviewee and the complex interaction between the interviewee and

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interviewer (Hays & Singh, 2012). In hermeneutic phenomenological research with understanding as the focus, the notion of hermeneutic interview comes to the fore (Roulston, as cited in Cole, 2010). Hermeneutic interview takes the form of conversational dialogue, constituted by the way we are 'in-the-world" in language; a dialectic process of question and answer which offers possibilities for understanding our world, others, and ourselves, from new perspectives (Gadamer, 1989).

Cole (2010, p. 3) referred to conversational dialogue as "a hermeneutics of language". In this dialogue, both the interviewer and the interviewee reflectively orient themselves to the interpersonal or collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view (van Manen, 2011). Hermeneutic interviews serve specific purposes, first, as a means for exploring and gathering stories of lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). In addition, hermeneutic interviews serve as a vehicle by which to develop a conversational relationship with the participant about the meaning of an experience. In this study, by reflecting with the participants on their daily experiences of SBEs, conversational relationship was achieved.

There are several approaches for conducting qualitative research interviews (Patton, 2002). In this study, the semi-structured format was used to benefit from the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews as well as engage with the participant (Creswell, 2009; Patton). The semi-structured interview approach was appropriate because I wanted to define the areas that each participant would cover and to allow participant to bring up issues that were important to them and so promote the fusion of horizons. The

interview protocol (Appendix K) was semi-structured and had some pre-set questions, but allowed open-ended answers (Hannan, 2007).

Having prepared for the interviews, the interview sessions began on the November 12, 2012 with the Head teacher at Basic School A followed by the teachers and finally with the pupils. For convenience sake, all the interviews with the participants were conducted in their various schools at venues selected by the participants. In Basic School A, the interviews took place in three different locations as suggested by the participants themselves. The interview with the head teacher occurred in his office; that of the teachers occurred on the classroom corridor; and that of the pupils occurred in JHS 3 classroom, which was empty at the time of the interview session. However, in Basic School B, all the interviews were conducted in the staff common room at the request of the participants.

At beginning of each interview session, I reminded each participant the purpose of the research and his or her right to withdraw from the study. I then obtained a signed written informed consent from the participant. I also used the opportunity to continue my relationship with the participant, building trust, and allowing them to feel comfortable. I developed empathy with them as well as won their confidence. As much as possible my relationship with them was unobtrusive by not imposing my own influence on them. In addition, my role during the interview was to keep myself and the participant oriented to the phenomenon at hand by focusing on the lived experiences of each participant (van Manen's, 1990).

Each interview began with a broad or general question after which I assumed an active listening role, maintaining eye contact with the participants

as often as possible. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995) suggested three techniques that I found useful in conducting interview for this study. The first technique was funnelling, where I began with general opening questions and narrowed down. The second technique was storytelling, where I encouraged each participant to tell his or her story concerning the key spaces identified for this study. The third technique was probing, where I elicited further details and points of clarification (Minichiello et al.). Applying the Minichiello et al.'s techniques, I used an interview protocol, which was a list of questions that I wanted to explore during each interview (Patton, 2002) to elicit responses from each participant.

Apart from providing data on users' lived experiences, messages and meanings of SBEs, the interview protocol enabled me to obtain participants' narratives instantly ensuring that the same information was obtained from other participants. I was free to explore within these predetermined enquiry areas because there were no predetermined responses (Patton, 2002). The interview protocol, which used semi-structured approach, was meant to put the participants at ease and to allow them to narrate their experiences relating to their SBEs. It also ensured good use of limited interview time, interview multiple users of SBEs more systematically and comprehensively, and to keep interactions focused (Patton). Thus, the participants were able to describe their experiences in a natural way and had the chance to further explain their answers and in depth the underlying meanings of their answers.

During each interview session, I used two digital audio recorders to record the interview responses to safeguard a possible malfunctioning one. As Patton (2002) noted, a basic decision going into the interview process is how

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to record interview data. For him, whether that one relies on written notes or a tape recorder appears to be largely a matter of personal preference. He emphasized that a tape recorder is "indispensable" (Patton, p. 348). Thus, the decision to digitally audio-record the interviews was grounded in the advantage of capturing data in more faithful manner, making it easier for me to focus on the interview.

In this study, the aim of using hermeneutic interviews with each participant was to capture their experiential descriptions. It also allowed participants to share their stories in their own words. Thus, at the end of each interview session, I thanked the participant for the time and insights. I then uploaded the audio-recorded interviews on my personal laptop as soon as I got home. I transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim. This was a crucial part of the analysis process, as it needed a lot of time and patience. I then saved the transcripts in folders created for each participant. On the average, each interview took approximately 45 minutes and between one to two hours to transcribe.

One disadvantage of using semi-structured approach included little flexibility in relating the interview to particular users and circumstances. In addition, standardized wording of questions constrained and limited naturalness and relevance of questions and answers. However, a major strength of this interview approach was that it allowed participants to answer the same question, thus increasing comparability of responses. The approach also presented greater richness in data, allowing participants freedom to respond to questions and probes (Morse & Field, 1995; Patton, 2002). Besides, participants were able to narrate their lived experiences and not tied down to

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specific answers, as required in structured interviews. Furthermore, the approach gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences or stories the way they wanted (Morse & Field).

Hermeneutic Photography

This study also used hermeneutic or reflexive photography as a pathway (Hagedorn, 1994). Empirically, photography has been used in qualitative research as images produced by the researcher and images produced by research participants (Banks, 2001; Harper, 2002; Pink, 2007). Grounded in hermeneutic aesthetic philosophy, Hagedorn stated, "Photography, an esthetic data generation technique, captures precise symbols of a person's reality" (p. 45), hence, its use in this study. Thus, hermeneutic photography, also known as photo elicitation interview, refers to the use of photographs produced by participants as a source of discussion during interviews to enable the researcher generates significantly more data (Harper).

In qualitative interviews, Collier and Collier (as cited in Hagedorn, 1994) noted that photographs are used to illuminate the interpretation of experience because they make strong visual statement about and experience. In addition, photographs are symbols or images of experience that represent the meaning of that experience. Furthermore, participants can take their own photographs and interpret them the using individual interviews. Finally, hermeneutic analysis illuminates meanings of lived experiences within participants' photographs as revealed in the transcribed interview text (Hagedorn).

In her paper, Hagedorn (1994) substantiated the use of hermeneutic photography in the study of experience. According to her, the method

explicates the importance of seeing and interpretation and enables researchers to understand experiences by grasping the images that reflect experience. It allows photographs to capture the images of situations and experiences about which little knowledge may exist. She noted that photographs constitute an interpretive text that illuminates the meanings of human experiences. Thus, in this study, the choice of hermeneutic photography was grounded in the fact that SBE photographs would reveal vital information about users' conditions and experiences that other methods might not reveal (Hagedorn).

Hagedorn (1994) offered support for the significance and use of photography in research by suggesting that photographs have the ability to make "strong visual statements about an experience and have been used in qualitative interviewing to illuminate the interpretation of experience. According to Cole (2010), where photographs or other visual arts introduced into the conversational interview, a 'hermeneutic of seeing' offer another pathway to human experience. The ability of hermeneutic photography to "disclose an understanding of both ourselves and of our being in the world in an immediate, unique, and revelatory manner (Davey, as cited in Cole, 2010, p. 3) is shared by Heidegger, Gadamer, and van Manen. Thus, as a visual method, hermeneutic photography is particularly appropriate for investigating people's experiences of the school environment (Woolner et al. 2010).

In this study of users of SBEs in basic schools, participants produced hermeneutic photographs as part of the research process and participated in photo elicitation interview. The participants as both narrators and photographers made their life worlds of SBEs phenomenological visible through their photographs, shared in face-to-face or one-to-one conversations.

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The method used participant-created photographs as an elicitation tool in conversation interviews in which participants were asked to give meanings to their photographs. In particular, I gave each participant a digital camera and a photo elicitation guide (Appendix L) asking the participant to take photographs of the spaces that support or hinder their activities in school.

In the photo-taking sessions, I maintained a spectator and operator relationship with the participants by allowing them to take their own photographs and conduct analysis of the choices of images photographed (Flick, 2006). The photo taking session took place before each interview session where each participant took photographs of spaces that he or she valued as vital to him or her. Then, I uploaded the photographs generated by each participant on my personal laptop and saved in a folder created for the participant. Throughout the photo interview session, which immediately followed the hermeneutic interview session, I screened the participant's photographs on my laptop in slide show allowing the participant to reflect on his or her experiences of the SBE.

During the interviews, I asked each participant to comment on the photographs indicating their reasons for and feelings about the photographs to develop as much interpretive insight as possible. Thus, in one-to-one photo conversations, each participant shared their experiences with me in a conversational dialogue guided by the photographs. Indeed, the use of the digital camera and the laptop as data collection tools allowed prompt viewing of and reflection on the images participants generated. The participants' comments on the photographs revealed similar and diverse SBE understandings, personal preferences, with particular feelings and concerns of

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their SBEs. For some participants, taking the photographs of their SBEs enabled them to express their cherished desire of representing and interpreting various dimensions of 'being-in' their SBEs. Thus, the participants' photographs produced a collection of images of SBEs as well as enhanced their skills of observation and description.

On the average, each participant generated eight photographs, most of which were relevant for this study. The conversation with each participant on his or her photographs lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. With the help of each participant, I sorted the relevant photographs to represent the key built spaces explored. As mentioned earlier, the method allowed participants to produce and interpret their SBE images. This method helped participants to interpret the significance of the phenomenon and to weigh its appropriateness based on the experiential descriptions of the participants. Indeed, it provided new insights into and knowledge about human experiences through seeing and interpreting.

There are some advantages associated with hermeneutic photography. First, the method provided one part of methods triangulation and thus provided a check on the rigour and trustworthiness of the research. In addition, it assisted the participants by allowing visual and verbal language and bridging psychological and physical realities. Furthermore, the method assisted me in solidifying the foundations of trust and rapport. Finally, it motivated participants to provide perspectives and explanations, assisted me to guard against research misrepresentation, and ultimately led to useful data for the study (Hurworth, Clark, Martin, & Thomsen, 2005).

Nonetheless, there are disadvantages associated with hermeneutic photography such as amateur attempts leading poor photo quality, difficulties relating to appropriate selection of photographs, ethics, and photographs only portraying partial reality. Ultimately, the advantages of this 'esthetic' method outweigh the disadvantages.

Data Analysis and Management

Qualitative data analysis reduces a large amount of textual data (from interviews, photo descriptions and field notes) to meaningful concepts while identifying themes and categories in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction refers to "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming that data" (Miles & Huberman, p. 10). In this study, the aim of the data reduction, which includes elements of codes, categories, and concepts (Lichtman, as cited in De Gagne & Walters, 2010), was to make clear the meaning, essence of users' lived experiences of SBEs as well as transform the data into findings (Patton, 2002). Thus, the analysis of textual and visual data involved a multilevel reflective process (Hagedorn, 1994).

In qualitative research, data analysis goes hand-in-hand with data collection (Patton, 2002). It began with the transcription of the audio recordings of participants' conversational and photographic interviews and processed the field notes from the close observations of physical spaces. Subsequently, I employed three strategies of data reduction namely: thematic (phenomenological) (van Manen, 1990), image analysis template (Appendix M) (Magno & Kirk, 2008) and hermeneutic (Gadamer, 1989) strategies. The first strategy aimed to "transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such as way that the effect of the text is at once as reflexive re-

living and reflective appropriation of something meaningful" (van Manen, p. 36). Thus, phenomenological themes may be understood as *structures of experience* and offer a thick description of phenomena (van Manen).

The second strategy was to stimulate critical thought and reflection (Magno & Kirk, 2008). In line with Magno and Kirk, participants' images of SBEs were selected based on two key criteria: (1) an image of a SBE and (2) the relevance of image to study. This strategy of coding visual data helped to evaluate for content and context, look for links, and interpret images of SBEs (Grbich, 2007) to complement participants' texts. I then organized participants' photographs into a portfolio that followed the sequencing of the interview (Hagedorn, 1994). Finally, the third strategy was to develop hermeneutic experience of understanding and interpretation as characterized by three metaphors: the hermeneutic circle, the act of dialogue, and the fusions of horizons (Gadamer, as cited in Wilcke, 2002). The strategy involved reflecting on the participants' texts.

In keeping with hermeneutic phenomenology adopted for this study, I relied on data analysis stages developed and reported by Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) and De Gagne and Walters (2010). These data analysis methods were developed from the principles of phenomenology and hermeneutics and from guidelines in the literature about systematic, useful ways of interpreting research data. I then organized and processed the textual data following six-stage process adapted for this study to reach a logical saturation point. This six-stage process drew on the experience and knowledge of experts in the field of interpretive research. The following are the six stages of data analysis used.

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Stages of Data Analysis

      Immersion. The first stage of data analysis involved constructing texts for each participant from the verbal, visual, and field note data gathered and transcribed. The texts were organized, labelled, and saved in a folder created for the participant. As part of the first step, I read and reread all texts to become familiar with the text set. I also listened repeatedly to audio recording of interviews along with relevant photographs and field notes. van Manen (1990) described this process as immersion (in the data), which involves engaging with the meanings of texts with the aim of getting "'sense' or preliminary interpretation of the texts, which then facilitates coding" (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). The field notes from the close observation of spaces and interaction with the participants were used to facilitate the recreation of the context in which experiences of SBEs occurred, which was an important part of text interpretation.

      Of course, my supervisors who read segments of the data set to become familiar with the text discussed with me the emergent coding frameworks during supervision session. These sessions served as a means to reflect on emerging ideas and to help develop and expand these ideas. The discussions during these sessions were "valuable for providing insight, considering alternative interpretations and contradictions, and thoroughness in interrogating the data" (Barbour, as cited in Ajjawi & Higgs, p. 623). At this stage, I documented emerging thoughts in the form of memos linked to relevant sections of the text in computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), NVivo 7 software.

Understanding. The second stage, which involved developing meaning units or first order constructs, refer to participants' ideas expressed in their own words or phrases capturing the precise detail of what each participant is saying (Titchen & McIntyre, as cited in Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). These meaning units were related to the research questions linked to everyday experiences, messages, and meanings of SBEs. The meaning units were identified first for two participants one from each basic school, and were then used to code for the remaining participants, with a constant process of checking for appropriateness and completeness of the meanings units or constructs.

In this study, coding was used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general categories, and at the same time, to expand the data to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Thus, I coded the texts using both manual and NVivo 7, to identify the meaning units. As each interview stage, I checked my understanding of the participants' meaning units by going back to the participants' ideas raised previously and by asking probing questions during sessions (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). This form of iterative member checking provided a progressively deeper understanding of participants' experiences of SBEs, and was a central aspect of producing results from the interactions between the participants and me as the study progressed.

Abstraction. In the third stage, which involved abstraction of the meaning units or first order constructs, I generated interpretive concepts or second order constructs using my theoretical and personal knowledge. A five-column table created meaning units, interpretive concepts, sub-themes, main

themes, and overarching theme. If an interpretive concept or a second order construct was very similar to an existing one, then I assigned a similar sub-theme. The interpretation of each transcript extracted was used to form a picture of that participant's data as a whole, which then informed understanding of each extract such that a deeper understanding of the phenomenon evolved.

Similarly, a composite data set for each basic school was developed that was used to understand each of participant's data and to seek any similarities among the participants and any differences between the two basic schools. Thus, at the end of the third stage, sub-themes were developed from all the interpretive concepts of second order constructs and from the meaning units or first order constructs, which were grouped under the three columns of meaning units, interpretive concepts, and sub-themes (See Chapter Five for examples).

Synthesis and theme development. In the fourth stage, the sub-themes or second order constructs developed were grouped together into a number of main themes both within and across the two basic schools. The main themes were further abstractions of the sub-themes developed through reading and rereading of the text set. At this stage, one overarching theme that reflected phenomenon emerged from the four main themes developing from the sub-themes. This stage involved continuous moving from parts to whole, moving forwards and backwards between the literature, the research texts, and the earlier analysis following a process informed by hermeneutic circle. From this process the interpretation of the research phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs developed. Another three-column table was created to

moving from sub-themes to main themes to overarching theme (see Chapter Five).

Illumination, illustration, and integration of phenomenon. In this fifth stage, I re-examined the literature for links to the main themes and overarching theme developing from the entire text set. I also looked for links between the main themes to support further theoretical development. Using the themes and their interrelationships as a basis, I reconstructed the participants' lived experiences of SBEs using their own words and images to illuminate their experiences and highlight key results from the data. At this stage, the participants' data were repeatedly examined to ensure that the constructed stories were true to participants' SBE experiences and meanings.

In this stage, reflexivity was deemed essential (Gadamer, 2004; van Manen, 1990), so I positioned myself being conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that I brought to bear on this study. The reflexivity played a significant role by allowing me to articulate my personal views about the phenomenon explored. Throughout the research, I was involved in a personal reflexivity associated with self-critique and an openness to the possibility of a 'many voiced' account in the research product (Gadamer).

Integration and reflexive reporting of phenomenon. The final sixth stage of data analysis involved a critique of themes and overarching theme by the researcher, supervisors, and externally through further reading and discussions with my supervisors. This process was done along with a final review of the literature for developments that could enhance our understanding of the phenomenon studied. It sought to identify themes or overarching theme that reflect(s) the meaning of the data collected and to report the final

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interpretation of the research results through writing and rewriting. The six stages of data analysis were characterized with an ongoing interpretation of the research text and the phenomenon of lived experiences SBEs.

Additionally, I continued to test my biases about the phenomenon by comparing and contrasting these presumptions with the results in the text. This helped to address any prejudices developed from the literature and personal experience. Throughout the study, I sought to maintain faithfulness to the participants' constructs, grounding interpretations in the data by constantly crosschecking my interpretations with the original transcripts. Indeed, I derived understanding from my personal involvement in reciprocal processes on interpretation that were inextricably related to one's being-in-the-world (Gadamer, 2004). I was also self-conscious about how my experiences might potentially shape the findings, the interpretations and the conclusions drawn in a study (Creswell, 2013). Through reflexive writing, I was able to identify my personal, practical and research purpose, becoming confident that my research topic was worth exploring.

In supporting the process of doing qualitative research in this study, I employed both manual and CAQDAS (NVivo 7). At first, I carried out the coding and analysis of the textual data manually. I read each transcript, made preliminary notes and analysis that informed my direction of making sense of the data. The manual coding and analysis was important because it helped me to get a feel of the qualitative data analysis process. Then, I decided to use NVivo 7 as data management tool. I transferred all the transcripts and photographs onto the software, followed by more detailed coding, putting together extracts (across documents) that are related to each other into basins

called nodes. Finally, the software facilitated an accurate and transparent data analysis process and provided a reliable, general picture of the data (Richards & Richards, 1994; Welsh, 2002).

As a management tool, the software was more efficient in organizing the data because it was easier and quicker to code text on screen than would be to manually cut and paste different pieces of text and images relevant to a single code onto pieces of paper and then store these in a file. Furthermore, it was relatively user-friendly and simple to use. However, its major drawback in this study was its limited usefulness in searching through the thematic ideas themselves to gain a deep understanding of the data. For this reason, this study valued both manual and CAQDAS in analysing and managing the qualitative data. This was to add rigour to the analysis process and to add credibility of the results (Welsh, 2002). The strategies used for the data analysis in this study were to maintain authenticity as suggested by (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Establishing Trustworthiness of Data Analysis

Trustworthiness in interpretive research comprises rigour and credibility as appropriate criteria as they both two go hand in hand (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Research findings are credible when the process of research is rigorous (Lincoln, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, a number of rigorous and credible criteria namely methodological congruence, triangulation, member checking, prolonged engagement, and thick description were used to ensure trustworthiness (Hays & Singh, 2012).

First, I ensured congruence between the adopted paradigm and chosen methods by following a certain degree of coherence of the epistemological

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perspective throughout the research process (Hays & Singh, 2012). Throughout the research process, I tried to infuse the interpretive paradigm, describing it thoroughly in the research report. Thus, multiple data sources, constructions, and interpretations of lived experiences of SBEs were consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretive paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenology (Crotty, 2005; van Manen, 1990).

Another strategy of trustworthiness used in this study was triangulation of data sources, units of analysis, methods, and theoretical perspectives that involves using multiple forms of evidence to support and better describe findings (Hays & Singh, 2012). In this study, I collected data from ten participants comprising head teachers, teachers, and pupils from two basic schools constituting different sources and units of analysis. The study also used individual interviews and photography to capture the lived experiences of users of SBEs. In addition, the study relied on multiple theories – across disciplines – to better conceptualize, explore, and understand the phenomenon under study. This strategy enhanced the depth and richness of the data, reduced systematic bias in the data, and ensured trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

In addition, I used member-checking strategy to establish trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Member checking is "the ongoing consultation with participants to test the 'goodness of fit' of developing findings" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 206). This study involved the participants in the research process and strove to portray their intended meanings in developing overall themes. Therefore, during data collection, I clarified each participant's responses or feedback on the SBE through probes. I also asked

participants to review their own transcripts and indicate how well the ongoing data analysis reflected their lived experiences by giving each participant their transcripts.

Furthermore, in this study, prolonged engagement was used as a strategy of "staying in the field" to build and sustain rapport with participants and settings in a way that fosters an accurate description of a phenomenon of interest (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 430). To achieve these outcomes, data from participants were gathered over a period of 3 months, with not less than five visits to each research site and participants. During this period, I established rapport with the participants and gained their trust. This gave participants the comfort and freedom to discuss their lived experiences.

Finally, the study employed thick description to strengthen its findings and replication. Thick description is a detail description and interpretation of aspects of the research context and process that go beyond simply reporting details of the study (Geertz, as cited in Hays & Singh, 2012). As a way of thinking about data interpretation and reporting, this strategy helped me to provide a detail account of my research context, process, and outcome (Denzin, 1989). In line with Lincoln and Guba (2000), I ensured that the voices of both the participants and me are evident in the text to enhance authenticity.

Summary

In this chapter, I have presented a blueprint for conducting this study by outlining and justifying the research methodology adopted. In addition, I have detailed the practical considerations of the research design and have discussed the way in which I conducted the study. I have also described the

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ethical conduct of the study and the criteria used to establish trustworthiness of the findings. Figure 4 shows the summary of the research design used to achieve the research objectives. Chapter Four presents an analysis of data in search of users' meanings of SBEs.
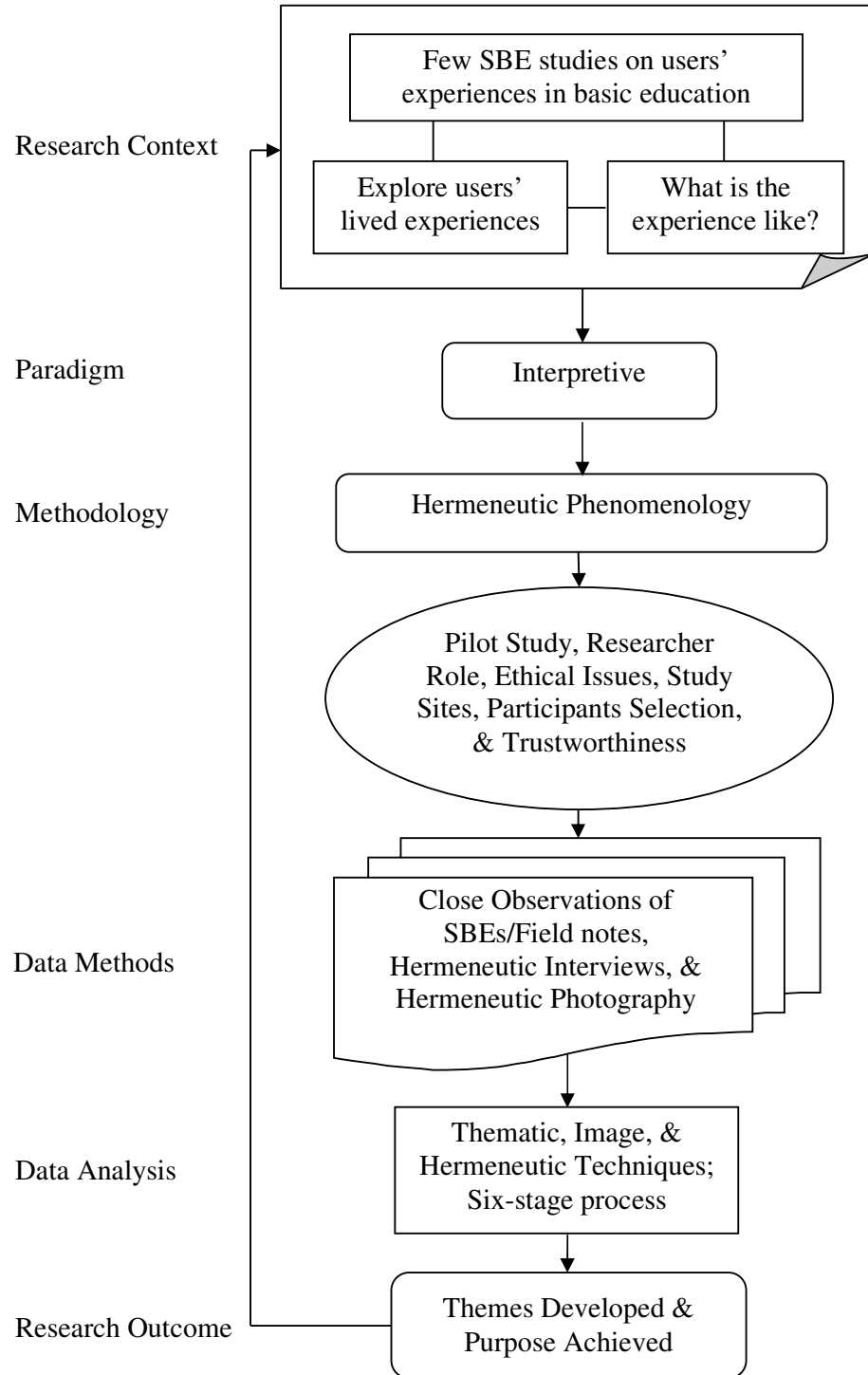
Figure 4. Summary of the research design.
Source: Ajjawi and Higgs (2007).

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the search for users' meanings of SBEs by analysing participants' texts. First, the chapter presents the biographical information of the participants who took part in the study. The chapter also presents a systematic ontological account of SBE users' experiences and meanings as revealed in their verbal and visual data. Thus, the chapter describes the processes of analysing participants' data through thematic analysis (van Manen, 1990), image analysis (Magno & Kirk, 2008), and hermeneutic analysis strategy (Gadamer, 2004).

Participants' Biographical Information

This study gathered experiential descriptions from participants who experienced the phenomenon and willingly volunteered to take part in the study. The study participants (n = 10) comprised two school administrators or heads, four teachers, and four JHS 3 pupils. Six of the participants were males and four females. The participants' ages range between 14 to 55 years. The participants' biographical information captured their pseudonyms, age group, gender, basic school (labelled as A or B), status, level of education, and number of years spent in the school. Table 2 presents the biographical description of the participants in the order of interviews.

Table 2: Biographical Description of Study Participants

Pseudonym	Age Group (Years)	Gender	Basic School	Status	Education	Years spent in school
Cole	40-44	Male	A	*HT	B.Ed.	2
Yaw	30-34	Male	A	Teacher	B.Ed.	5
Adjoa	35-39	Female	A	Teacher	B.Ed.	4
Ika	15-19	Female	A	Pupil	JHS 3	9
Paster	15-19	Male	A	Pupil	JHS 3	9
Zuki	40-44	Male	B	*AHT	MEd	6
Pat	50-55	Female	B	Teacher	DipEd	26
Lily	15-19	Female	B	Pupil	JHS 3	12
Kojo	10-14	Male	B	Pupil	JHS 3	12
Abeeku	40-44	Male	B	Teacher	B.Ed.	8

*HT – Head Teacher, AHT – Assistant Head Teacher

Processes of Analysing the Data

In this study, selecting a data analysis method and interpretation congruent with the interpretive paradigm underpinning the study was a challenge. This is because there were limited typical examples or guidelines in the hermeneutic phenomenological literature to direct the analysis of verbal and visual data. Roberts and Taylor (1998) believed that many of the "phenomenological methods leave prospective researchers wondering just what to do" (p. 109). However, van Manen (1990) cautioned against fixed signposts as mechanism for conducting research as they do not necessarily

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determine a method nor do they support the flexible philosophy of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Drawing on the works of Gadamer (2004), Magno and Kirk (2008) and van Manen (1990), this section provides the processes used to make sense of the verbal and visual texts. In addition, this study benefited from earlier hermeneutic phenomenological studies by Ajjawi (2007), Cole (2010), De Gagne & Walters (2010), Hagedorn (1994), Mohammadi (2007), and Williamson (2005). The use of visual methodologies within hermeneutically inspired conversational dialogue informed this study. The studies opened up possibilities for thinking about and acting towards the lived experiences of SBE in ways beyond the discourse of relationship between the condition of the SBEs and educational outcomes. In the present study, methodological strategies used were congruent with the interpretive paradigm.

Max van Manen's Thematic Analysis Strategy

Thematic analysis identifies and describes meanings inherent in the textual data (Luborsky, 1994). It brings out recurrent themes that are "embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Theme, according to van Manen, is "an element that occurs frequently in the text" (p. 78) in literature. He explained that in phenomenology, themes might be understood as the structures of experience. In this study, 'text or textual data' refers to transcribed interviews, visual text, and field notes generated from the data collection. In addition, 'theme' is used to describe the experiential structures that make up the phenomenon.

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Through van Manen's (1990) six methodical steps, I continuously reviewed my research topic, purpose, and question to ensure methodological congruence. This was followed by textual and image data collection from the two research sites and ten participants whose lived experiences I explored. I combined steps three and four to reflect on the essential themes characterizing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting. The fifth was used to stay on track with the central research question. Finally, I used the last step to analyse both individual (part) data and the group (whole) data gathered seeking meaning units, interpretive concepts, sub-themes, and themes. The essence of these methodical steps was to walk the reader through what I did with my data.

As indicated in Chapter Three, van Manen (1990) identified three main approaches to isolating themes with each approach guiding a different view of the text. First, the wholistic approach asks what phrase captures the meaning of the text/data source. This approach is more global, seeking overall meaning of the text. In addition, the selective approach asks what is essential or revealed in the text/data source focusing on phrases or sentences that stand out in the text. Finally, the detailed approach examines every sentence to see what it reveals about the phenomenon. This approach examines the text closely, sentence by sentence. The following section describes the approaches in detail.

Wholistic reading approach. In this approach, I read the text as a whole as suggested by van Manen (1990). As a first approach to making sense of the data, I read each of the ten transcripts several times engaging all the text to gain a sense of the overall experiences of the participants. Using this approach, I treated the data as a whole by deliberately searching for patterns in

ideas and recursive thoughts expressed by participants, as well as unique ideas. Thus, the approach involved moving from the parts to the whole. While taking note of key concepts in the transcripts, I eagerly looked for points of similarity, as well as difference, between each participant's data.

It became clear that participants from the same SBE shared similar experiences as users, revealing of the essence of the phenomenon under study. Through this process the core meaning of the phenomenon began to emerge, which was an important representation of the data in this research. Thus, the themes and sub-themes were all derived from the core meaning or theme. The development of concepts, sub-themes, and themes was a cyclical process allowing the wholistic approach to bring out the core meaning of the phenomenon by examining the parts (each participant's texts and images) and the whole.

Selective reading approach. The second approach of isolating thematic statements is the selective or highlighting approach where I extracted essential statements (van Manen, 1990). The approach involved analysing each interview transcript separately, moving from the parts to the whole picture of the phenomenon. The approach also involved reading the text to identify statements that appeared revealing about the phenomenon of being users of SBEs. I then highlighted significant statements and extracted them from the transcripts and field notes.

The selective reading process led to the extraction of essential statements, phrases, or meaning units that appeared revealing about the phenomenon under study. I put the extracted meaning units in the first column of a three-column table created to ensure a systematic procedure of moving

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from meaning units to sub-themes. The process continued until I captured extracted meaning units from all the textual and image data on the table. I then condensed the extracted meaning units into interpretive concepts, which assisted me in formulating sub-themes by exploring essential qualities of participants' stories. Finally, I aggregated the interpretive concepts into similar categories to reflect the sub-themes and main themes. The section on procedure for isolating themes describes the processes followed.

Detailed reading approach. The third approach in isolating thematic statements is detailed reading approach. According to van Manen (1990), in using the detailed reading approach, the researcher is expected to look at every transcribed sentence or combination of sentences and ask the question, "what does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?" (p. 93). At this juncture, I read through and reflected on each meaning unit, which may be "a sentence, part of a sentence, several sentences, a paragraph, that is a piece of any length that conveys just one meaning" (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 149), extracted from the textual data against the background of detailed reading.

The meaning units were then condensed into interpretive concepts, which expressed the essential meaning of each meaning unit in everyday words as briefly as possible (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Again, from the point of detailed reading approach, I then read through and reflected on all the interpretive concepts in terms of similarities and differences in meaning. Next, I sorted all the interpretive concepts into similar categories to form sub-themes, further condensed them to form the main themes, and finally, the overarching theme.

The three approaches of isolating thematic statements enabled me to project the "whole" to "part", discriminating between them. Throughout the process, I moved back and forth from the original texts to the data sets while working with the data sets. Thus, I became confident when dominant concepts began to emerge after several initial reading and rereading of the texts while making notes. Occasionally, I changed my mind about my reflections, feeling that the words I selected to exemplify a concept did not portray the essence of what a participant recounted. In addition, I often returned to the text to explore the context in which the conversation took place. Finally, these concepts and important items fused with my own fore-meanings made the phenomenon under study understandable.

Procedure for Isolating Themes

This section outlines how I analysed the participants' data based on the three approaches for isolating thematic statements in hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. The goal of this section is to allow any reader to follow the process of data analysis and to assess the decisions I took (Koch, 2006) using the three approaches to isolate themes. It involved grouping meaning units or keywords and interpretive concepts or condensation from the parts to the whole in similar categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). The suggestions on coding ideas by grouping them in similar categories were useful for this study. The categories enabled me to move from the aggregated meaningful statements of participants, to interpretive concepts, sub-themes, themes, and overarching theme.

Similarly, van Manen's (1990) ideas of isolating thematic statements coupled with Gadamer's (2004) ideas of moving from the parts to the whole in

a hermeneutic circle were valuable. Gadamer's fusion of horizons helped me to develop a deeper understanding of participants' narratives. The sections divided into two: moving from meaning units to sub-themes and moving from sub-themes to overarching theme.

Moving from meaning units to sub-themes. Having identified patterns of meaningful statements from the wholistic reading of the text, I continued with selective reading (van Manen, 1990). In isolating the thematic statements, I searched through all the texts, highlighted, and extracted the meaning units. Next, I condensed and tabulated the meaning units into interpretive concepts and sub-themes (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). To illustrate how the thematic statements were isolated, I deliberately selected the four excerpts, two from each research site, owing to lack of space and based on their typicality of the phenomenon under study.

In this study, one colleague PhD candidate and one senior lecturer with qualitative research knowledge confirmed the typicality of the four excerpts. Appendix N shows the remaining six excerpts extracted from the participants' interview transcripts and an excerpt from the field notes. The following excerpts and highlighted statements from four participants are examples of how data from the ten participants were analysed.

Excerpts from Adjoa's transcript. The following excerpts were extracted from Adjoa's interview transcript. Adjoa was a teacher in Basic School A. I highlighted the meaning units, as indicated in the paragraphs that follow.

> As I said initially, **the classroom spaces are OK. … The spaces are spacious enough** but **the windows are not good**. Therefore, that is why I said anytime the weather changes a bit [becomes cloudy] **the classrooms become dark. … There are not**

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*windows that you can open. We cannot open the windows …
and **there is no [poor] ventilation. The blackboards too are not
plastered well [smoothly] … They are very rough** … so
anytime you write and the chalk is getting finished, **you see
your fingers would be scratching** ... **We don't have a school
library … we don't have a library, the buildings are not even
enough** so **we don't have a library. This is affecting the
children.***

*It is just two tables and a chair and two benches … so we sit
there … some of us sit there even though **we do not feel
comfortable over there**. There is no specific room designated
as the staffroom. In addition, you know **this affects us a lot**. …
We do not a change room. Therefore, **when the children have
P.E., they [children] change in their classrooms**. It is not good
for both boys and girls to be changing at the same place. I
mean the classroom. **I know the girls do not feel comfortable
changing in the classrooms** … so **some go into the bush to
change** and others remain in their uniforms …*

*… That is the road to the JHS section … it is very weedy, it is
very weedy … and **if it rains you cannot come here**. …
Sometimes **the water gets up to your knee level**. Yes, the place
is not good … and that is the urinal. That is what I said look at
**the surroundings of the toilet, very weedy. Snakes can just get
into the room**. If you look at the room, the door to the
chambers too, there are spaces under, so **snakes can just sneak
under and enter the toilet,** and it is very scary. **The place is
very scary***

*... **The environment is not attractive ... the place is actually is
not good. The place is waterlogged** so any time **it rains we
have problems accessing the classrooms** and other things
especially the route to the JHS building is very bad … **This
environment does not befit a school.** As if the authorities
[educational authorities] do not know the importance of
education ... Sometimes, the officers [educational officers]
would come and would be saying **your surroundings are weedy**
... **as if we do not weed.** We weed … but **you cannot let the
children be weeding every time.***

*… **Teaching and learning is affected very much because we
do not have library, we do not have a science laboratory or
ICT lab there so if the children have ICT, there is no
computers**. There is not even a single computer for the children
to use. … How do you expect the **teachers to do well in this
environment** and **children to do well in their examinations**? ...
In addition, the **teachers are always blamed when the children
perform poorly in the BECE**. … **This environment doesn't
motivate you as a teacher**, it doesn't motivate you so especially*

if it rains and you are coming, you see that you would be **passing through water… I don't know how you will feel … I'm not satisfied with the built environment** *in this school.* **As for the condition of the school environment, I can say that it is not good** *… and* **the performance of the children too has not been encouraging**. *I do not know why. However,* **I think the school built environment is part of problem**. **It does not encourage the effective teaching and learning**

The highlighted meaning units were cut and pasted in Table 3. The table shows the meaning units or concepts as well as the interpretive concepts and sub-themes.

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Table 3: Thematic Structural Analysis of Adjoa's Texts

Meaning units/Keywords	Interpretive concepts	Sub-theme
The classroom spaces are OK … the spaces are spacious enough	Adequate classroom space	Being connected space
The windows are not good …The classrooms become dark … they are not windows that you can open. There is no ventilation	Poor classroom conditions	Being unconnected to space
The blackboards too are not plastered well … they are very rough … you see your fingers would be scratching	Poor quality blackboard	Being unconnected to space
We don't have a school library … we don't have a library, the buildings are not even enough	Inadequate spaces	Being unconnected to space
We don't feel comfortable over there	Feeling uncomfortable	Being uncomfortable
When the children have P.E., they change in their classrooms … I know the girls don't feel comfortable changing in the classrooms	Having no privacy / Pupils feeling uncomfortable	Being connected to self / Being uncomfortable
Snakes can just sneak under and enter the toilet … The place is very scary	Being in a risk or dangerous place	Being insecure
The environment is not attractive ... the place is actually is not good. … This environment does not befit a school.	Unattractive environment	Being attracted to place
You cannot let the children be weeding every time.	Being distracted with weeding	Being distracted
Teaching and learning is affected very much because we don't have library, a science laboratory or ICT lab	Inadequate spaces	Being inadequate place
This environment doesn't motivate you as the teacher	Uninspiring environment	Being uninspired
I do not know how you will feel … I am not satisfied with the built environment.	Lack of satisfaction	Being unsatisfied
The performance of the children too has not been encouraging.	Discouraging performance	Being discouraged

Excerpts from Paster's transcript. The following excerpts were extracted from the interview transcripts of Paster, a JHS 3pupil from Basic School A. Here too, I highlighted the meaning units, as indicated in the paragraphs that follow.

*… In our classrooms, some of **the boards [/blackboards/] are not smooth ... they are always wasting chalk. Sometimes the room [classroom] is not cold but hot, you feel hot**. The doors are not well prepared. **I can say that this school environment is not good** ... we need so many things here in this school. ... **The furniture is not well prepared [good] … some are weak and not comfortable. Then the floors are not well prepared. I do not feel comfortable here**. ... **[School library] ... we do not have. ... We do not have science laboratory in our school. ... That one too [ICT laboratory or centre] we do not have**. … **These do not encourage us to learn in school and it is affecting us in BECE [national examinations].** For example, we [pupils] do not pass well in ICT. ... **We do not have proper playing grounds to train for inter-schools sports and games. Our school doesn't do very well** when we go for sports and games ... we would not be first we would be last because of the playing ground that we don't have to train.*

*   **We do not have a good eating-place**. In addition, sometimes we go to back of the building before we can eat. Sometimes, some would eat in the classroom. … Sometimes we go into the community across the road. When we are crossing the road … even car can … **we can get an accident on the road**. … **We do not have boys' toilet, we do not have girls' toilet, only one that we all use. The place is not good ... we have to go to the bush before we can go to toilet**. This is not good at all. Sometimes **I do not feel like coming to school**. … **This is the toilet ... look at the place it is bad ... it is only one but I don't go there** ... the **school is always weedy and this does not make place nice**. That one too is not well prepared.*

*   I can say that the **school does not send any good or proper message to me**. Sometimes **I wish I were not in this school**. … **It [the school built environment] tells us that we are poor ... the country, the community, the school are poor**; they do not have much money. **It does not help us ... we do not feel well every day** because the sort of going to the bush and go and shit [ease] there …*

*   **I feel shy because the school is not well prepared** [attractive]. … **The compound is weedy. Sometimes they ask us to bring cutlasses to school to weed the compound.** At that moment, we*

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*have to learn but we use that period to weed, so **it affects our learning and us...The room [classroom] is so hot sometimes because the windows are so small** and **we always do not feel comfortable here**.*

*… **we need some support that can help the school to develop** so that the school can also go somewhere, so that the school can be also behaving scholarships ... Because if you go to BECE because of **this thing it affects us and we cannot pass well** so we need help so that the school can also be promoted. **I am not satisfied with this place** … Something should be done to help the school.*

The highlighted meaning units were cut and pasted in Table 4. The table shows the meaning units or concepts as well as the interpretive concepts and sub-themes.

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Table 4: Thematic Structural Analysis of Paster's Texts

Meaning units/Keywords	Interpretive concepts	Sub-theme
The boards [/blackboards/] are not smooth ... always wasting chalk.	Poor quality blackboard	Being unconnected to space
The room [classroom] is not cold but hot, you feel hot	Feeling hot	Being uncomfortable
The furniture are not well prepared [good]] … some are weak and not comfortable	Having uncomfortable furniture	Being uncomfortable
The floors are not well prepared	Poor classroom floors	Being in a poor space
I don't feel comfortable here [school built environment]	Being in uncomfortable place	Being uncomfortable
[School library] ... we do not have. ... We do not have science laboratory in our school. ... That one too [ICT laboratory or centre] we do not have.	Inadequate instructional spaces	Being in inadequate space
These do not encourage us to learn in school and it is affecting us in BECE [national examinations].	Discouraging learning and affecting perfomance	Being discouraged
We don't have a good eating place … we go into the community across the road … we can get an accident on the road [get knocked down by vehicles]	Fear of being knocked by vehicle	Being afraid
We do not have boys' toilet, we do not have girls' toilet, only one that we all use.	Inadequate toilet spaces	Being in an inadequate space
I don't feel like coming to school	Not feeling to go to school	Being unconnected to place
This is the toilet ... look at the place it is bad ... it is only one but I don't go there	Not a functioning toilet	Being in a less functional place
It doesn't help us ... we don't feel well every day	Not supporting	Not being supported
The compound is weedy. … Sometimes they ask us we should bring cutlasses to come and weed the compound	Pupil weeding	Being distracted
We need some support that can help the school to develop	School needing support	Needing support
This thing it affects us and we cannot pass well	Not passing well	Poor performance
I'm not satisfied with this place	Not satisfied	Being unsatisfied

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Excerpts from Lily's transcript. The following excerpts were extracted from the interview transcripts of Lily, a JHS 3 pupil from Basic School B. Here too, I highlighted the meaning units, as indicated in the paragraphs that follow.

… ***It is a very nice school because we have good facilities***, *almost all facilities* ...***we have a dining hall, and we have a library, many facilities****. … For* ***teaching and learning is good*** *because we have all facilities and all the teachers are good, if you don't understand the teacher will wait for all the students to understand before he/she move forward. …* ***The school built environment is good for learning. … The classrooms are all OK. They are good, spacious, and comfortable****. If you move around [other schools] you would not find any school where* ***classrooms that have tiles on the floor and even tiles on the wall****. There is space, even* ***we have louvre windows for fresh air****, students as I said are not overcrowded, is nice.*

The canteen or dining halls are OK. We have two ... one for the Primary and one for the JHS. *Everything is good over there.* ***The place is very clean****. ... The food itself you are buying it from outside its good, and* ***everybody has a place to sit*** *after that the bowls are well washed and everything is good. … we have toilets ... on the JHS block,* ***we have three for girls and three for boys ... they are OK*** *but* ***the problem is that at times some of the people do not flush after using the place****, but it's OK. When you move around, you cannot see schools like having these facilities,* ***some do not even have a washroom,*** *but we have everything. ... That is a problem*

This is the JHS form 3. You see everything is not overcrowded, everything is nice so it helps teaching and learning, ***fresh air inside****, everything. …* ***I always feel comfortable and safe here*** *because* ***there is a wall around the school and there is security man at the gate****. They care for us very well here* *and* ***we have all the facilities to learn, for example, in the classrooms, everybody has his own table and seat [/chair/] to have the peace of mind to study …*** *everything is good.*

These are all important because they are things [/places/] that are helping the school, and motivating us to learn and take part sports competitions *like football and basketball.* ***We have the sporting and everything****,* ***the place we can train*** *everything and this helps the school like for instance where we do not have these kinds of things we cannot train, we cannot go for inter-schools competitions. …* ***They mean a lot because without these things learning and other things cannot go on well****, ...*

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> *without the classrooms, may be if you go to other schools they don't even have classrooms to sit in and at times when it is raining they have to carry their things and **it is very bad … it doesn't help learning**. … **I like this school very much and I'm very satisfied with the facilities in our school. I wish all the schools would have all the things we have in this school**.*

The highlighted meaning units were cut and pasted in Table 5. The table shows the meaning units or concepts as well as the interpretive concepts and sub-themes.

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Table 5: Thematic Structural Analysis of Lily's Texts

Meaning units/Keywords	Interpretive concepts	Sub-theme
It's a very nice school because we have good facilities	Good school facilities	Being connected to facilities
We have a dining hall, and we have a library, lots of facilities	Adequate spaces	Being connected to spaces
The school built environment is good for learning. … The classrooms they are all OK.	Supporting learning	Being supported to learn
They are good, spacious and comfortable	Spacious and comfortable spaces	Being comfortable
Classrooms that have tiles on the floor and even tiles on the wall	Having tiled classrooms	Being connected to spaces
We have louver windows for fresh air	Good ventilation	Being connected to space
The canteen or dining halls are OK. We have two ... one for the Primary and one for the JHS… The place is very clean	Adequate and clean eating spaces	Being connected to spaces
[Washrooms] We have three for girls and three for boys ... they are OK	Having adequate washrooms	Being connected to spaces
I always feel comfortable and safe here	Feeling comfortable and safe	Being comfortable/safe
There is a wall around the school and there is security man at the gate	Feeling secure	Being secure
They care for us very well here	A caring place	Being cared for
We have all the facilities to learn, for example, in the classrooms, everybody has his own table and seat to have the peace of mind to study	Having peace of mind Feeling supported	Being connected to self Being supported
They are things [/places/] that are helping the school, and motivating us to learn and take part in sports competitions	Feeling motivated	Being motivated to learn
They mean a lot because without these things learning and other things cannot go on well	Meaning a lot for learning	Being supported
I like this school very much and I am very satisfied with the facilities in our school.	Feeling very satisfied	Being satisfied

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Excerpts from Abeeku's transcript. The following excerpts were extracted from the interview transcripts of Abeeku, a teacher from Basic School B. Here too, I highlighted the meaning units, as indicated in the paragraphs that follow.

> As far as the establishment of the school is concerned, we have everything here. Therefore, we can boast of so many things … **I can say that the facilities are underutilized**. However, apart from that **we can boast of so many things here, you name them, classrooms, science lab, playgrounds, ICT centre, canteen, etc**. **This is a very good place to send your children**. … **The classrooms are well ventilated** and **it creates some sort of serene atmosphere for children to grasp whatever the teacher teaches**. … **we are not crowded** and this kind of teacher to pupil ratio which to me is not bad and things go up **when it comes to teaching and supervision of individual work in the classroom, you can move freely** and it is not all that crowded. **We do not use dual-desks in this school ... All children have their tables and chairs ... the chairs and tables in the classrooms are in good condition**. The classroom **floors and the walls are tiled** and with ceilings making the rooms very bright and cool.

> **Life would not have been comfortable without the many washrooms we have**. **They are always kept clean and neat**. **There are places where you wash your hands after using the washroom**. It is really making life easy for the children and the teachers here. … **The staffroom is fantastic**. **It is one of the best staffrooms** in the community. **It is well furnished** if I should put it in this way. **It also helps when teachers are not teaching anything.** Sometimes if it is not your turn to teach a particular subject, **you can come to the staffroom and do some marking**

> Well, **it helps when it comes to the practical aspect**, when we talk of science lab for instance, there are … that you have to **take the children to the science lab so that they can see**, **they can experience, or even they can touch the items there that make learning very effective**. I can say that when it comes to **the spaces we have in this school … are very good and neat**. It tells you how important these facilities are for the teachers and children. ... As a teacher you are supposed to **make use of all these things facilities,** but when you go to certain schools those places are lacking these facilities. It somehow makes you unable to bring out your potential, so **as a teacher and having those things at my disposal it helps**. **It makes teaching easy and enjoyable for me**. **I can say it boosts my morale ... as you**

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*can see it is a very attractive place. In fact, **it helps in so many ways. …** Well, sometimes **it motivates me** because I have been to so many places where these things are lacking. Therefore, to me, **once I have these facilities at my disposal then I also have to use my human resource to teach effectively**.*

*So I can say that the school has everything or what it takes to … Well, I will say that **these photographs** that I have taken in relation to the environment of this school **portray that the school is fully set** and **we don't lack anything when it comes to school set up**. This again I would say also **help in teaching and learning process**. Therefore, this is all that I can say about it. ... Really, **I feel great. ... I am very satisfied with our school built environment** because **it is helping the children and us [teachers] a lot. If you look at our performance at BECE, we normally excel. … I can say confidently that the school built environment is playing a significant part in teaching and learning** in this school.*

The highlighted meaning units were cut and pasted in Table 4. The table shows the meaning units or concepts as well as the interpretive concepts and sub-themes. It is important to reiterate that the same approach was followed in isolating thematic statements from the interview transcripts of all participants.

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Table 6: Thematic Structural Analysis of Abeeku's Texts

Meaning units/Keywords	Interpretive concepts	Sub-theme
I can say that the facilities are underutilized	Underutilized facilities	Adequate facilities
We can boast of so many things here, you name them, classrooms, science lab, playgrounds, ICT centre, canteen, etc.	Having adequate spaces	Adequate spaces
This is a very good place to send your children	A good place	Being connected to place
The classrooms are well ventilated	Well ventilated classrooms	Being connected to place
It creates some sort of serene atmosphere for children to grasp whatever the teacher teaches	A serene atmosphere	Being connected to place
Life wouldn't have been comfortable without the many washrooms we have	Feeling comfortable	Being comfortable
They are always kept clean and neat.	Being in clean and neat place	Being connected to place
There are places where you wash your hands after using the washroom.	Being in a healthy place	Being healthy
It is one of the best staffrooms … It is well furnished. It also helps when teachers are not teaching anything. You can come to the staffroom and do some marking	A well-furnished staffroom Supporting staffroom	Being connected to place Being supported to work
It helps when it comes to the practical aspect. They can experience or even they can touch the items there that make learning very effective	Supporting effective learning	Being supported
The spaces we have in this school … are very good and neat	Being in good and neat spaces	Being connected to place
Make use of all these things facilities. … As a teacher and having those things at my disposal it helps	Making use of facilities	Using facilities
It makes teaching easy and enjoyable for me.	Easy and enjoyable teaching	Easy teaching
I can say it boosts my morale	Feeling motivated	Being motivated
As you can see, it is a very attractive place.	A very attractive place	Being in attractive place
It helps in so many ways. …	Feeling supported	Being supported
It motivates me	Feeling motivated	Being motivated
Help in teaching and learning process	Supporting teaching and learning	Being supported to teach
I feel great…I'm very satisfied with our school built environment	Feeling great and satisfied	Being satisfied
If you look at our performance at BECE we normally excel	Excellent academic performance	Being supported to excel

Moving from sub-themes to overarching theme. The search for meaning from experiential descriptions of the phenomenon to analysis continued by grouping sub-themes into main themes and overarching theme from the parts to the whole in similar categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). This exercise facilitated the movement from aggregated thoughts of the participants from sub-themes to overarching theme. In the present study, Coffey and Atkinson, Lindseth and Norberg, Gadamer (1989), and van Manen (1990) informed the process of finding meanings.

I thoroughly read sub-themes, condensed them into main themes and finally into an overarching theme. Table 7 shows the contrasting meanings communicated to users of SBEs as depicted in the sub-themes, which informed the subsequent main themes. In the table, I grouped the themes together in another three-column table, pooled with similar sub-themes after much thought on which ideas belonged together, to form main themes. The overarching theme finally developed from the four main themes as "Reality of being users of SBEs".

Table 7: Moving from Sub-themes to Overarching Theme

Sub-themes	Main Themes	Overarching Theme
Being in an adequate/inadequate place		
Being in a safe/secure/unsafe/insecure place	Physical reality of SBE	
Being in conducive/not conducive place		
Being in a supportive/an unsupportive place		
Being in a good/poor performing place	Functional reality of SBE	
Being in an effective/an ineffective place		
Being in a motivated/an unmotivated place		Reality of being users of SBEs
Being in a satisfying/unsatisfying place	Psychosocial reality of SBE	
Being in a comfortable/uncomfortable place		
Being in a place of social/less social interaction		
Being in an attractive/less attractive place		
Being in a beautiful/less beautiful place	Aesthetic reality of SBE	
Being in a welcoming/unwelcoming place		

Magno and Kirk's Image Analysis Strategy

This study employed the image analysis template to interpret participants' images of the two SBEs. Magno and Kirk (2008) developed an analysis template for analysing images (see Appendix L) in their research. This conceptual framework informed the iterative process of analysing text and image data on SBEs to enhance the readers' understanding of the phenomenon under study. Applying Magno and Kirk's strategy, each participant's images were selected, based on two criteria: (1) an image of a SBE and (2) the image relevant to the study. According to them, the analysis template of six categories, explained below, stimulated critical thought and reflection. The categories are surface meaning, narrative, intended meaning, ideological meaning, oppositional reading, and coherency.

The first category, survey meaning, refers to the overall impressions that one may have from quickly studying an image. The surface meaning is often somewhat shallow. In this research, I used the surface meaning to develop quickly a shallow meaning of each participant's images of the SBE. The second category tells a story through either a series of pictures or a frozen scenario that allows the viewer to imagine what has happened to the characters within the picture (Magno & Kirk, 2008). I used this approach to tell the stories participants' images revealed about their existing SBEs. The third category describes the meaning that the image presenter wants to convey. In this study, I used the intended meaning to describe the messages participants intended their images to convey about their lived experiences of their respective SBEs.

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The fourth category, ideological meaning, refers to the values expressed in a visual text, which may be decoded by examining the underlying assumptions and implications within an image (Magno & Kirk, 2008). In this research, the ideological meaning was used to express participants' values that were embedded in their images of the SBEs. The fifth category is the process of decoding an image from alternative positions and perspectives, acknowledging that the same image may be read differently depending on background and subject positions. Here, I used the oppositional reading to decode similar images from the participants based on the situations revealed in the images of the SBEs.

The final category, coherency, refers to the extent to which, for example, the participants' images of SBEs 'match' the content of the research report or the researcher's perspective. Thus, the current research reflected on the apparent coherence or dissonance between what was perceived as the intended message of the image and the 'message' of the participant's text (Magno & Kirk, 2008). Applying their template, participants' images of SBEs were based on two key questions. First, was the image about the SBE? Second, was the image relevant to the study? Chapter 5 applies the image analysis template to the analysis of participants' visual images of the SBEs.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's Analysis Strategy

To achieve a better understanding of the phenomenon of being users of SBEs in basic schools, Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutic approach was adopted. Gadamer wrote that "hermeneutic work is based on polarity of familiarity and strangeness … the true locus of hermeneutics is this in between" (p. 295). For him, hermeneutics aims at clarifying the conditions under which

understanding occurs because it operates in the intermediate position. He noted that the conditions "… do not amount to a procedure or method which the interpreter must of himself bring to bear on the context" (p. 295). This study employed three of the concepts put forward by Gadamer such as hermeneutic circle of pre-understanding, gaining understanding through dialogue with participants and the text, and fusion of horizons. Thus, the process of understanding the phenomenon under study derived from three distinct phases of the hermeneutic circle: starting from research questions to dialogues held with the participants, and the interpretations of textual data.

Hermeneutic circle of pre-understanding. Hermeneutic circle is a dialogical interpretive process between a researcher's pre-understanding and understanding of a phenomenon (Earle, 2010). In this context, pre-understanding refers to the knowledge a researcher requires to have and deal with a problem. Gadamer (2004) explained that pre-understanding includes specific experiences and encounters with the texts that tend to make individuals assume that they already understand the problem. According to him, pre-understanding becomes discernible through confrontation with different beliefs such as opinions of other researchers, colleagues, or traditional texts.

Similarly, Moustakas (1994) stated that by beginning with a researcher's pre-understanding, personal bias could be identified and made explicit to understand the phenomenon in an unfettered way. Indeed, pre-understanding is the starting point of hermeneutics, formed, and reformed through a hermeneutic process in order to generate and interpret data. Pre-understanding could change during the research process through the collection

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and interpretation of data, further relevant reading, and the keeping of a research journal. Thus, reflecting upon these enabled me to move beyond my pre-understandings to understand the phenomenon of using SBEs and so transcend my horizon (Fleming, Gaidys, & Robb, 2003). This in turn influenced the research findings.

Throughout the research, my pre-understanding continued to change with the understanding that SBEs influence the activities and performance of users who inhabit them. Indeed, as places, SBEs are communities that tend to affect users physically, functionally, and psychologically (Vischer, 2008). SBEs send messages to users, shape their daily activities and performance in school (Cash, 1993), and thereby communicate significant meanings to their users. Thus, there is the tendency for interpreted meanings of SBEs to portray inequality of educational opportunity as well as a source of disparities in learning achievement.

During the analysis, I maintained openness to the possibility of changing my preliminary concepts of pre-understanding and interpretation. I also ensured that the outcome of the data analysis was reassessed continually as new information emerged. As Mohammadi (2007) suggested, by clarifying and intermittently reviewing their pre-understanding to discover something new or understand something in a new way, researchers are enabled to enter the hermeneutic circle. However, my pre-understanding developed iteratively in the course of the research process to new levels. Thus, it became difficult, as noted by Mohammadi for me to explicate the actual development process retrospectively.

Additionally, my background as a teacher, master's degree experience, my prior personal unquestioned assumptions, as well as the literature review informed my pre-understanding. As a teacher who taught in two different schools, I was familiar with the importance of SBEs and their contribution not only to teaching and learning but also to social life at school. Some authors classified SBEs into above standard, standard, or substandard (Cash, 1993; Dare & Agbevanu, 2012b; Hines, 1996). However, the perspective taken in this research was that SBEs communicate messages to people who use them. These messages could reflect educational equality or inequality of opportunity in the context of basic education. Thus, my pre-understanding kept resonating with those of the participants. This resonance was valuable in gaining an understanding of the meanings users of SBEs attribute to their lived experiences.

Another pre-understanding had to do with my views about the delivery of quality basic education, formed through observation and reading of published accounts. In the context of basic education, all basic schools follow the same national curriculum and participate in the same national examination, Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The BECE, as a measure of academic performance, offers young people in basic schools the opportunity to further their education. Based the BECE results, basic schools can be categorized as high performing and low performing basic schools. I also understood that basic education is free and compulsory as well as a right for all children of school age. Further, I was aware that SBEs were inadequate, in poor condition, and unfairly distributed.

In Ghana, some pupils, teachers, and head teachers who through no fault of theirs find themselves in inadequate and poor condition SBEs are often held accountable for low academic achievement. Certainly, such SBEs influence the educational and social activities of users, and thus, tend to shape their everyday experiences positively or negatively. As the researcher, being aware of all these issues helped me to understand and make sense of the themes that emerged from participants' verbal and visual texts.

Gaining understanding through dialogue with text. In research, understanding may only be possible through dialogue when the researcher is open to the opinion of another person (Gadamer, 2004). In this context, the idea of dialogue is not limited to a conversation between two individuals. Gadamer added that there is also the likelihood of dialogue between reader and text to occur. In these two instances, language becomes the vehicle through which understanding is possible (Gadamer). Fleming et al. (2003) wrote that "'to gain information' or 'to collect data' does not seem correct expression in a Gadamerian sense, therefore we use the term 'gaining understanding'" (p. 117).

Through understanding and interpretation, people present the things of the world to themselves. Understanding is in itself an integral part of being-in-the-world (Odman, 1985). The interplay between understanding and interpretations is permanent, for example in language. Furthermore, interpretations are expressed in language. However, one understands through the categories of thought that language has provided. Therefore, in this study language is both interpretation and a way of understanding the experiential descriptions of SBE users (Odman).

While the research participants recounted their individual experiences to me through English Language, a medium of instruction in Ghana, each of them was in the process of articulating what the phenomenon meant to them. As described in the Chapter Three, I digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim each interview with the participants to create the text for analysis. After each transcription, I listened to the audio recordings and read the texts simultaneously several times to obtain a cursory sense and a naive understanding of the overall story emanating from the data. In gaining understanding through dialogue with the texts, I asked myself questions such as 'what is happening here?'; 'what experiences are being revealed here?'; 'what message does the SBE convey to this participant?'; 'what does this mean for this participant?'; 'are these meanings connected and related to those revealed by other participants?' However, I noted a multiplicity of partial meanings that were situated and momentary in nature but no singular meaning for users' lived experiences.

During the process of gaining understanding through dialogue with the text, I engaged with concepts as they emerged. I then formed projections about each participant's story of being a user of a SBE, while embracing some prejudices about other participants' stories. As van Manen (1990) pointed out, these preliminary interpretations became the beginning of the overall picture that was emerging – the parts of interpretation. As much as I could, I remained open to the verbal and visual text, and tried to eschew interpreting what I heard to fit into some theoretical account. At the end, sufficient and preliminary understanding of the phenomenon had already emerged. In

Chapter Four, I presented these parts of the story where each participant's narrative was contextualized.

Fusion of horizons. In the process of hermeneutic analysis, gaining understanding occurs through the fusion of horizons of the participants and the researcher. Gadamer (1989) defined the term 'fusion of horizons' as a facet of the process of understanding. For him, a person's horizon consists of "a range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (p. 302). Thus, the horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. It changes as we move, and is always in motion (p. 304). According to Gadamer, hermeneutic phenomenology is the belief that the interplay of partners in dialogue has the potential to generate shared meaning through the fusing of horizons. As Sammel (2003) wrote, this "fusing" occurs because the interpreter of a text, or the listener of dialogue, belongs to and is conditioned by their horizon.

In this study, fusion of horizons was a shared understanding about the lived experiences of users of SBE, which was an encounter between the participants and me, where two standpoints came together. This was in line with what (Thompson, 1990) said about fusion of horizons. He said, "We genuinely let the standpoint of another speak to us and in such a way that we are willing to be influenced by the perspective of another" (p. 246). Indeed, when people interact within a particular horizon, all interpretations are anchored in our social and individual pre-understandings. Thus, these pre-understandings enter into any dialogical situation with us for they serve as the foundations for our values, assumptions, and relationships (Sammel, 2003).

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Understanding of the phenomenon occurred through the fusion of participants' and researcher's horizons. As horizons of the present were in continuous development, understanding of the participants and the researcher merged into a new understanding (Fleming et al., 2003). Thus, during the fusion of horizons I accordingly attempted to understand how personal feelings and experiences affected the research, and then integrated this understanding into the study. In line with Gadamer's (as cited in Fleming et al.) philosophy of understanding, I shared the view that the task of understanding does not entirely end, because there is an infinite capacity to refine and extend understanding of things.

Fleming et al. (2003) were of the view that possibly, if the researcher interacts with the data in later years, he or she will understand the phenomenon in a different way. In addition, the authors noted that people who read the report of the findings would understand the data differently, bringing their own horizons to bear on their understanding. Importantly, these comments are consistent with hermeneutic phenomenology, which recognizes that understanding has multiple realities and nearly endless possibilities. Thus, the process of fusing horizons was accompanied with personal feelings of tension and anxiety as I tried to remain open to new and alternative understandings as they emerged.

Throughout the study, I was mindful of presenting an overall interpretation that was true about the participants as well as meaningful to and worthy of consideration by readers. I also realized that my unique horizons were continually forming and shaped by my past and present pre-understandings as well as my understanding, which changed over time. As I

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continued to dialogue with the verbal and visual texts from the research participants and the existing literature, my understanding of the phenomenon kept evolving. However, understanding the other can never be achieved totally, as it is constantly evolving. If one understands at all, one understands differently (Gadamer, as cited in Fleming et al., 2003).

In creating a coherent 'whole' that would articulate the phenomenon of being users of SBEs in the context of Ghanaian basic schools, I tried to understand the totality of participants' narratives by fusing their horizons. This process of hermeneutic circle involved constant back and forth movements from the parts to the whole picture that described the phenomenon. This movement was consistent with van Manen's (1990) "balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole" (p. 31). While in this hermeneutic circle, and empathizing with the lived experiences of users of SBEs, I did not seek to put myself in the participants' positions as this could lead to ignoring my own pre-understandings. Questioning the demand to put oneself in someone else's position, Gadamer (2004) argued that trying to do that implies withdrawing oneself from the situation of understanding, because one's own pre-understanding will be ignored.

In this study, I allowed my presumptions and biases to play out in my attempt to fuse horizons. In allowing my prejudices "full play", I was able to experience the participants' claim to truth and make it possible for them to have full played themselves (Gadamer, 2004, p. 299). As I engaged in the fusion of horizons, dominant horizons of the phenomenon became apparent which defined the essence of being users of SBEs in Ghanaian basic schools. Prior to the "fusion" of my horizon and that of participants' as reflected in the

participants' interview transcripts and images were considered distinct ways of understanding the human condition (Taylor, 2002). Taylor explained that "once the fusion occurs and one (or both) undergo a shift; the horizon is extended so as to make room for the object that before did not fit within it" (p. 133). Thus, the final interpretation provided an understanding of the lived experiences of users of SBEs from their own perspectives by being involved in its illumination.

Reflexive and Interpretive Activities

This study explored the lived experiences of ten users of SBEs from two Ghanaian basic schools trying to understand how meanings SBEs communicated to users manifested unequal access to educational opportunities. As indicated in Chapter Three, the study was underpinned by interpretive paradigm and applied interpretive and reflexive activities in the process of finding meaning (van Manen, 1990). At the end of this process, the horizons of the participants were fused with my horizons of understanding. Thus, the results of my interpretation are a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2004). My horizon developed out of the inter-subjectivity and culminated in my understandings of what it was like being-in-the-world as users of SBEs. Finally, my beliefs, ideas, and understandings fused with those of the users of SBEs in creating a new view of reality.

The aim of the interpretive activities was "to try to grasp the essential meaning" (van Manen, 1990, p. 77) of the phenomenon of interest. In line with interpretive approach, I immersed myself in the process of interpretation and became the part of data, seeking to understand how meanings SBEs communicated to users manifested unequal access to educational

opportunities. The themes developed were neither separate from their meanings; nor was my understanding separate from the participants' accounts in the verbal and visual texts. Indeed, the interpretation presented in this thesis, is essential mine as the researcher fused with the experiential descriptions gathered from the users of SBEs interviewed.

The data analysis identified one overarching theme from the four main themes that characterized the research phenomenon under study as 'realities of being-in-the-world of SBEs'. Throughout the processes of dialoguing with and reflecting upon participants' data, it became understandable that lived experiences of users 'of SBEs could be described with the phrase: realities of neglect or support. These realities, perhaps, explain what it is like being users of SBEs, which refer to the users' actual experiences of the built spaces of being positive and supportive or negative and unsupportive to their activities. Indeed, the realities as portrayed by participants' data were abstractions of users' verbal and visual accounts of their lived experiences of SBEs and complemented by my own close observations of the built spaces.

In this study, I used themes developed from four dimensions of SBEs to discern the lived experiences users of SBEs. Though not a definitive interpretation, it is a reasoned and coherent description of the phenomenon under study. The process of finding meaning occurred within an interpretive horizon that had turned to the lived experiences of users of SBEs through my appraisal of what was understood about this phenomenon. My horizon of understanding developed through reflection and interaction with the parts, textual and visual contents, and the whole of the data. In this thesis, I

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presented interpretations of the lived experiences of users of SBEs in the context of basic education.

The overarching theme that developed from the analysis and interpretive activities represented "an intricate unity" (van Manen, 1990, p. 105) that brought together and explicated how it was like being users of SBEs. Certainly, all the four main themes and their sub-themes that informed the overarching theme are equally important and have been considered as such. Each theme and its sub-themes contributed to the total understanding of the overarching theme. Thus, the description and interpretation of participants' experiences, messages, and meanings from the two SBEs highlighted an apparent dual reality of being-in-the-world of SBEs as 'present-at-hand' and 'readiness-in-hand' (Heidegger, 1962). This understanding of being-in-the-world revealed two facets of relationship between users (human beings or *Dasein*) and SBEs (world).

Through the fusion of horizons parallel ideas developed, which were aggregated by moving from the parts to the whole with each main theme contributing to a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon as they all constitute what it is like being users of SBEs. Based on participants' data, an overarching theme, four main themes, and their associated sub-themes developed from the meaning units and interpretive concepts. Table 7 illustrates the stages of developing the overarching theme from participants' meaning units in phenomenological analysis of 'part' and 'whole'.

Table 8: Developing Overarching Theme from Meanings Units

Meaning Units	Interpretive Concepts	Sub-themes	Main Themes	Overarching Theme
The windows are not good … The classrooms become dark … they are not windows that you can open. There is no [poor] ventilation (Adjoa)	Less conducive SBE	Being in a less conducive SBE	Physical reality of SBEs	
The classrooms have tiles on the floor and even on the walls. … We have louvre windows for fresh air (Lily)	Conducive SBE	Being in a conducive SBE		
… The items there [science laboratory] … make learning very effective. It makes teaching easy and enjoyable (Abeeku)	Effective/Teacher-friendly SBE	Being in an effective SBE	Functional reality of SBEs	
These [/lack of science lab., library, ICT centre/] don't encourage us to learn and … are affecting us in BECE (Paster)	Poor academic performance	Being in a poor performing SBE		Realities of being-in-the-world of SBEs
I like this school very much and I'm very satisfied with the facilities in our school (Kojo)	Comfortable SBE	Being in a comfortable SBE	Psychosocial reality of SBEs	
I don't feel comfortable here [school built environment] (Yaw)	Uncomfortable SBE	Being in an uncomfortable SBE		
… the set-up is very good, inviting … It is a very attractive place (Pat)	Attractive SBE	Being in an attractive SBE	Aesthetic reality of SBEs	
The environment is not attractive ... the place is actually is not good. … This environment does not befit a school (Adjoa)	Unattractive SBE	Being in an unattractive SBE		

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Summary

This chapter described the narratives from ten users of SBEs, which were analysed and presented as meaning units, interpretive concepts, sub-themes, and themes drawing on the works of various authors. In addition, the chapter showed that the data analysis strategies offered considerable flexibility to deepen understanding of the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs. Furthermore, the chapter revealed that the phenomenon is characterized by four main life worlds or themes identified as 'physical', 'functional', 'psychosocial', and 'aesthetic' realities of using SBEs. The next chapter presents the first part of results and discussion.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION I

Chapter Five presents the first part of the results and discussion describing the two study sites. The chapter, also, contextualizes participants' stories as recounted by them showing how I immersed myself in the story of each participant as the 'parts' of the data. Finally, the chapter provides a foundational understanding of the 'parts' of the experience in relation to the 'whole' experience of using SBEs based on participants quotes and images of built spaces.

Describing the Study Sites

To understand the users' lived experiences and meanings of SBE and how users' meanings manifest inequality of educational opportunities, thick description of the two SBEs is necessary. This section, therefore, describes the study sites and contexts of the basic schools based on the close observations of the existing instructional and non-instructional spaces recorded in field notes. The descriptions are interspersed with selected photographs from the participants. Basic School A and Basic School B are used to hide the identity of the schools and individuals participating in the study. Thus, throughout this thesis the two basic school seetings used in the study are referred to as Basic School A and Basci School B for the purposes of anonymity.

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Context of Basic School A

Basic School A was a public school located in one of the six educational circuits in the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. The school had two main buildings – the primary school block and the JHS block – that were about 150 metres away from each other. The school was not fenced exposing the teachers and pupils to stray objects and people. Apart from classrooms, the school did not have other instructional spaces such as a library, an ICT centre, and a science resource centre. The JHS classrooms were quite spacious apparently, because of the small class sizes of 14 pupils per class, thus, the classrooms were not overcrowded. The furniture in the classrooms were few and appeared old which were dual desks, some of which were in good condition the others were not. The desks appeared uncomfortable with some without back support.

The school compound was largely covered with grasses, especially the areas around the JHS block, making school to appear unattractive. The JHS classrooms had honeycomb windows; leaving the classrooms always dusty. The classrooms did not have ceilings, electric fittings for lights and ceiling fans. As a result, there was poor ventilation, less daylight in the classrooms, and dirty floors and desks. In addition, the building did not have any other space apart from the three classrooms and an office. Plate 1 shows the JHS block in Basic School A with only three classrooms and an office.

Plate 1. JHS block of Basic School A

In addition, the SBE had inadequate instructional spaces; with no school library, a place for private individual reading, quiet areas to work outside classrooms. As indicated earlier, there were no spaces for a science laboratory and an ICT resource centre let alone the equipment to support teaching and learning. Furthermore, the school did not have well-demarcated playing grounds for outdoor sports and physical education. The areas designated as playgrounds were covered with weeds. The playgrounds lacked the appropriate and adequate structures to support effective physical training of the pupils. The only available outdoor areas for the pupils to socialize with their friends were classroom corridors and undeveloped playgrounds.

Concerning the non-instructional spaces, the school did not have quality and adequate canteens for both teachers and pupils. The private food-sellers who were selling at the school did not provide adequate seats for pupils who went there to eat. The place where the children bought and ate their food was not hygienic enough as revealed by participants' photographs. In addition, the school had washrooms for both teachers and pupils located behind the primary school block, with six water closets, three for pupils, and three for teachers. However, the teachers' washroom was locked up with the key kept in

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the head teacher's office. Only one of the water closets was functional but had been used for days without flushing or cleaning, although the school was served with water.

Furthermore, in Basic School A, both boys and girls used the same toilet. The insanitary condition of the place did not encourage them to use the toilets. The toilet room was dirty, with used chamber pots, empty bowls, and other materials littering the floor space. Plate 2 shows the insanitary condition of the toilet room.

Plate 2. The floor of the toilet room in Basic School A

Besides, the insanitary condition of the toilets forced the pupils to resort to the bush to attend nature's call. According to the children, those who were afraid to go into the bush eased themselves on a refuse dump adjacent to the washroom building. On four occasions, I observed that both male and female teachers urinated around the area of the washroom building. The school had pipe-borne water but there was no indication as to whether the children use the water to flush the toilets, as water was not following into the toilets.

Moreover, the school did not have a staffroom. The headmaster's office attached to the JHS building was converted to a staff room. The office

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space was small room and not properly furnished to provide a comfortable resting and working place for teachers. Some of the teachers sat outside on the corridor behind the headmaster's office. Further, the school did not have personal storage facilities within the classrooms nor a changing room for the pupils. Finally, there was no provision of sickbay in the school to give first aid to pupils who fell sick in school. The SBE conveyed the feeling of neglect.

Context of Basic School B

Basic School B was also located in the same educational circuit as Basic School B. The school had several main buildings with different blocks for KG1 up to JHS. Basic School B was well fenced and gated with a security person always at the gate. The school compound appeared neat and attractive. The school had all the key instructional and non-instructional spaces in SBEs considered in this study. For example, there were good quality, adequate, and well-ventilated classrooms, library space, science laboratory, ICT centre, and playgrounds. The classrooms were spacious and not overcrowded, with chairs and tables in good condition providing comfort, and back support. All the classrooms in Basic School B had well-fitted louvre windows for good air quality. The classrooms had ceilings with the walls and floors well tiled. Each classroom had electric lights and fittings.

In addition, the school had a well-equipped library, which was conducive to do individual readings and works. The general facilities provided at the library were adequate for both children and adults in the school. Thus, the library provided a quiet space for teachers and pupils to do their private reading and academic work outside the classrooms. Furthermore, the school had a well-equipped science laboratory for teaching and learning science. The

ICT resource centre was equipped to support the teaching and learning of ICT. The general facilities provided at these spaces were adequate and in good conditions. Plate 3 shows the front view of the JHS block.

Plate 3. Front view of the JHS block of Basic School B

Moreover, the school could boast of several playgrounds for outdoor sports and physical exercises. For example, the school had standard basketball court, netball court, handball field, and volleyball court. The football field was not standard but had good metal goal posts and well-trimmed grass. There were outdoor areas available for the pupils to socialize with friends. Dustbins were located at vantage points in the school reducing the amount of litter on the school compound.

Concerning the non-instructional areas, the school had three dining rooms, one each for KG, Primary, and JHS pupils. The dining areas had adequate sitting places for all pupils. The dining areas were kept clean all the time. The dining halls were furnished with good quality and comfortable furniture. The school had adequate and clean washrooms located at the end of each classrooms building. Plate 4 shows the separate toilets for boys and girls in Basic School B.

Plate 4. Separate toilets for boys and girls in Basic School B

Unlike Basic School A, both boys and girls in Basic School B had separate toilets, which were clean with the doors kept closed. There were two reserved water tanks for continuous flow of water to flush the toilets. The toilets did not smell to the classroom areas as they were kept in good sanitary conditions. In addition, there was a sickbay in the school with two sets of single beds neatly covered for children's use and the area was quiet and calm for any sick child to relax and recover.

Besides, the school also had a big staffroom, adequately furnished for teachers' comfort and work. There were also lockers to keep pupils' exercise books and other teaching and learning materials. In each of the primary classrooms, there were inbuilt storage facilities where teaching and learning materials were stored. Moreover, the school had a sport room where the pupils changed their attires for outdoor sporting activities. The SBE sent a signal of support. However, just like Basic School A, there were no provisions for physically challenged users of SBEs in Basic School B.

Presenting Participants' Stories

This section presents the individual stories recounted by each study participant sampled from the two basic schools. Participants' stories consisting of text and images of their SBEs are presented according to the order in which they were interviewed.

Cole's Story

Cole took part in the study as the head teacher of Basic School A. He was interested and glad to take part in the study. Cole informed his teachers about the study and asked them to offer any assistance. He was the first participant to be interviewed in the study. The interview took place in his office after completing the informed consent form. Throughout the interview, Cole was full of smiles and responded well to the questions although he was cautious in his responses.

Cole shared his two years of experience in a careful but honest manner. His experiential knowledge about the SBE pointed to the fact that he did not have much appreciation of the key spaces in the SBEs. He did not give much details of his experiential knowledge initially. As Cole explained:

> You know, I came here last year, about one and half years ago.
> So, for the infrastructure of the school that one I cannot say
> much about it. My knowledge is very small because even when
> I have to write … I have to do a profile for the school.

In the course of my conversation with Cole, it became evident that he was aware of the condition of his SBE and its apparent influence on the activities of both teachers and pupils as well as academic performance of the school. As the head teacher, he was familiar with the state of the built spaces provided for the school. He lamented that the community was not supporting the school to resolve some of its infrastructural problems. Important among his

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photographs include Plates 5 and 6. Plate 5 shows a broken classroom window.

Plate 5. A broken classroom window in Basic School A

Sharing his experience about how the condition of the SBE was affecting teaching and learning, Cole recounted:

> Yeah … partly, yes … the performance of the children at the BECE level is not the best … is not the best. I think part of the problem … is due to the lack of good facilities in the school. For example, the absence of school library is affecting the children.

Cole also talked about the washroom. Plate 6 shows the washroom building. According to him:

> That is the washroom. It is there nicely, but the problem is most of the things [water closets] are not functioning ... everything was spoilt.

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Plate 6. Washroom building in Basic School A

In his attempt to resolve some the school's infrastructural facilities problems, Cole informed the appropriate authorities for action. This is what he said:

> … I even told the Parent Teacher Association chairperson and the School Management Committee executive about the condition of the place thinking that they may be help to put things in order. However, we are waiting for them to tell us something. It is not the best but for now, we are managing the situation.

Although, I was not very satisfied with the depth of his responses initially, later he gave much more detail in our conversation involving his photographs that made me change my impression about him. Perhaps, being the head teacher he was careful not to say anything to dent the image of his school. Interacting with Cole, I learnt his good human relation and readiness to welcome guest into his school, which was a valuable learning experience, especially in establishing rapport and trust with him before engaging him in conversation about his experiences and thoughts of the SBE. The lessons drawn from this first conversation guided my interactions with the other participants interviewed.

Yaw's Story

Yaw was the next participant interviewed in Basic School A. He was science and computer teacher and had spent five years in his school. I recruited him for this research through advertisement, contact with a key person and purposive sampling techniques. During our earlier interactions prior to the interview, Yaw indicated his interest in the research. He, however, willingly volunteered to take part in the research. I interviewed Yaw on the classroom corridor, a place he usually sat while in school. At the beginning of the interview, Yaw appeared quite composed and ready. He appeared unhappy and disappointed about the state of SBE and its effect on the academic performance in the school. Yaw recounted that:

> Really, I do not feel happy here. It is as if what we do here is not appreciated. There is nothing motivating about this place …
> I am even thinking leaving to go and further my education. …
> You saw how the place is like … the female teachers sitting there [/staffroom/] are always complaining and because they do not have any choice they are there.

Plate 7 shows the workspace for some of the teachers and two teachers sitting on the corridor. Yaw told me he took these photographs to show where he sat with some of his colleagues.

Plate 7. Teachers sitting on the corridor in Basic School A

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> Look at where we are sitting … it is because we do not have a proper or comfortable staffroom that is why we are sitting here on the corridor (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

Yaw was the second participant interviewed in Basic School A. He was concerned that the existing spaces in the SBE were not supporting smooth teaching and learning as well as other social activities in school. He believed the inadequate and poor condition of the spaces were partly the cause of the poor academic performance in the school. He was concerned about where the children buy and eat their food. Plate 8 shows where the children buy and eat their food in Basic School A.

Plate 8. Food vending area in Basic School A

Yaw thought that the built spaces in his school were not enhancing teaching and learning, which was affecting the academic performance of the pupils. This Yaw had to say about his school:

> Really, as it [the school built environment] does not enhance any meaningful academic work definitely, it does not give the joy to teachers to do what they are supposed to do. Mostly the pupils cannot give out their best due to the circumstances they encounter within the environment. It is really affecting their performance. Could you believe that our school was last [/last position/] at this year's BECE?

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Yaw told me that they have 72 basic schools in the KEEA Municipality and their school was 72nd. He felt very bad about this and complained that the officers from the education office were always blaming the teachers. He added that the officers ignored the problems confronting the school. According to Yaw, the SBE was not attractive and motivating enough to the pupils and parents of some of the good pupils had withdrawn them from the school.

Adjoa's Story

The third participant interviewed in Basic School A was Adjoa. She had spent four years in the school. Adjoa was the English Language teacher at the JHS. She was selected through advertisement, contact with a key person (Cole), and a purposeful sampling technique. During our first meeting, Adjoa appeared uninterested, but after explaining the purpose of my study and processes involved she became a bit receptive and agreed to take part. Adjoa had told me earlier that she was not feeling too well that morning but she insisted on doing the interview. She was completely happy at the end of the conversation about her experience of the SBE.

The interview with Adjoa also took place on the corridor after Yaw had allowed us to use his place. I took few minutes to go through the informed consent sheet with her before she signed. She appeared more friendly and lively than the first time I had met her. She smiled throughout our conversation. Recounting her experience, Adjoa indicated how the SBE was impeding teaching and learning in her school. She believed that asking the children to be weeding the school compound every now and then was depriving them of useful contact hours. I felt that Adjoa did not like the idea of

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using the contact hours for other things other than teaching and learning.

According to Adjoa:

> The environment does not befit a school. Sometimes, the officers [circuit supervisors] would come saying your surroundings are weedy. …they talk as if we do not weed. We weed but you cannot let the children be weeding every time because … the place is waterlogged. There is water in there. Therefore, it just springs up anytime or any moment you weed. In addition, tomorrow you come and it is as if you have not weeded at all.

Adjoa indicated that the path linking the primary school to the JHS block became flooded anytime it rained making it difficult for both teachers and pupils to have easy access to the classrooms. Among her photographs were Plate 9 and 10. Plate 9 shows the path between the primary school block and the JHS block.

Plate 9. A path to the JHS block in Basic School A

Adjoa also shared her concerns about asking the children to weed. She lamented that asking the children to be weeding every now and then affected lessons or teacher time-on-task. She told me that sometimes the children use Fridays to weed, while they should be having lessons. According to her, "so if we should always use the Fridays it means you are eating into somebody's lesson [period] and they always would come for output of work, if your output

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of work is not up to the number they started querying you as you don't teach

or something". Plate 10 shows one of Adjoa's photographs of some of the

children weeding during class hours.

Plate 10. Schoolchildren weeding in Basic School A

Talking about how the children are affected by using lesson hours to

weed, this is what Adjoa said:

> Therefore, we consider all these and if we should let the
> children be weeding every Friday meaning you are eating into
> [using] somebody's [/another teacher's/] lesson, subject or
> period ... this is not good. For instance, English [/English
> Language/], we have last two periods [/lesson periods/] in Form
> 2 and these last two periods are used for weeding … so you can
> imagine and English too we should learn and if we should be
> using Fridays for weeding then the English would suffer or be
> something.

I found Adjoa to be frank and passionate about her experiences and

views concerning the SBE where she found herself. She shared with me the

challenges they go through trying to prevent the children from weeding during

lesson hours by soliciting assistance from the community.

Ika's Story

Ika was the fourth participant I interviewed in Basic School A. She was

a 16-year-old pupil in JHS 3. Having addressed the ethical issues involved in

research with children (see Chapter Three), I recruited Ika through

advertisement and purposeful sampling after indicating her desire to participate in the research. The interview with Ika took place in her classroom where she found convenient. At the beginning of the interview, Ika appeared nervous and jittery. She was not fluent in expressing herself in the English Language. I thought that this might be the reason for her not being confident.

Ika was not able to narrate her story about the SBE clearly and very well. She attempted mentioning the year of establishment of the school but could not recollect the exact year. When I asked her to tell me a little bit about her school, he said:

> I know my school was built by … I have forgotten the year but when our new chief was there. I do not know ... I forgot ... I have been in the school for about 9 years. The school is not a comfortable place … sometimes when you are in the classroom you will be sweating and it is too bad … and we do not have a canteen too so we eat anywhere. The school is good but for people is not good for them.

On her experiential knowledge about specific built spaces, Ika's responses were brief. Most of her answers were in two or three sentences. Perhaps, this was due to her inability to express herself clearly and fluently in English Language. However, she shared her experiences to the best of her knowledge and ability. For example, Ika had these to say about the instructional spaces of the SBE.

> The classrooms are good but sometimes we sweat when we are in the class. It affects me by getting headache or something. … We do not have a school library ... we do not have one ... We only sit in our classrooms.

When I asked Ika to clarify why she described the classrooms as good, she responded in the following words, "They are big". However, Ika stated that they do not have science laboratory or resource centre as well as ICT centre. Concerning playgrounds, Ika indicated that their playgrounds were

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good but could not state why she thought the playgrounds were good. Plate 11 shows some pupils playing volleyball in their school uniforms.

Plate 11. Schoolchildren playing in Basic School A

Regarding the non-instructional spaces, Ika said that they did not have a canteen but they bought their food from food vendors selling at the junction of their school. She noted that where they ate was affecting them because "you will not know what you will get from what you are eating". She added that some of the pupils sit there to eat while others send their food to the classroom area. These were evident from the photographs she took of the SBE.

Ika told me that they eat anywhere because the food vendors do not have enough seats or space for all of them. She took a photograph of some of her classmates who were eating their food on the corridor. Plate 12 shows two girls eating on the floor.

Plate 12. Two girls eating on the floor in Basic School A

Ika appeared not to be happy with their washroom. She told me the place was not neat and she would prefer 'going into the bush' to using the washroom in the school. She recounted that there were snakes and she sometimes felt afraid to go into the bush. This is what she said:

> [Washroom] Hmm, that one is not good. The place is not neat … I like going into the bush somewhere there … There are snakes but we go … we are afraid sometimes. We feel afraid but ….

Ika felt that the insanitary condition of the washroom was a source of health risk, which compelled some of the children to go into the bush to attend nature's call. She was concerned about snakebite for going into the bush. The school did not have a sickbay and a change room. Ika noted that she usually goes home when she does not feel well. According to Ika, before physical exercises or plays, some of her classmates would either change in the classroom or play in their school uniform. She was not happy because some of the girls had to change in the presence of the boys.

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Paster's Story

Paster was 16 years old and the last participant I interviewed in Basic School A. Before recruiting Paster, ethical issues involved in research with children were addressed as indicated in Chapter Three. Paster showed interest in the research after learning about it through the flyer advertising for volunteers. He accepted to take part in the study and was happy to be one of the participants. Before the interview, he signed the informed consent form after reminding him about the purpose and the processes of the study. The interview with Paster took place in the classroom and lasted for about 40 minutes.

Paster appeared calm and relaxed at the beginning of the interview. Recounting his knowledge about the SBE, Paster started by mentioning the name of his school, the district in which it was located and the number of years he had spent in the school. This is an excerpt of how Paster described his knowledge of the SBE.

> Our classrooms, some of the boards [/chalkboards/] are not like smooth, is not smooth ... it always wasting chalk and sometimes the room is not cold but hot, you feel some hot, the doors are not well prepared and we don't have plenty chalk in the school. I can say that this school environment is not good ... we need some many things here in this school.

Clearly, Paster was not happy about some of the desks in the classrooms because of their conditions. Among the photographs important to him was Plate 13 showing some of the desks in deplorable conditions.

Plate 13. Broken desks in Basic School A

Paster's command over the English Language was weak as he struggled to share his lived experiences of the SBE. He noted that the SBE did not convey any good message to him and even wished he were not a pupil of the school. As the interview continued, I realized that Pastor was sweating as he removed a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his face. At that time, I also felt that the classroom was warm. A key concern for him was comfort. On his lived experiences about the instructional spaces in the SBE, Pastor said:

> The classrooms ... the furniture are not well prepared. Some are weak and then the floors are not well prepared. I do not feel comfortable here. … [School Library?] ... We do not have. … We do not have science laboratory, we do not have it … [ICT Centre?] … that one too we do not have. It is our ICT teacher that has sacrificed his own money … he has used his money to buy laptop that he use it to teach us. That one to it affects us in the BECE [national examination] … we do not pass well in ICT.

With regard to the non-instructional spaces, Paster's experiences were not different from that of the instructional spaces. He recounted that both boys and girls used the one same toilet. According to him, "the place is not good … we have to go into the bush to go to toilet". At this point, I sensed that he was not happy about the situation he found himself in the school. Among his

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photographs is Plate 14 showing the only functioning toilet used by the pupils in Basic School A.

Plate 14. Toilet for both boys and girls in Basic School A

Paster showed complete dislike for their washroom. As to what the photographs he took meant for him, this is what he said:

> It tells us that we are poor …the country, the community, the school are poor … they do not have much money. It does not help us ... we do not feel well every day because the sort of going to the bush to ease themselves there. … We may sick with cholera.

Generally, Paster was unhappy about the state of their SBE, indicating that most of the built spaces available were unsupportive. Indeed, Paster appeared worried because pupils from the school do not perform well at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE).

Zuki's Story

Zuki was the assistant head teacher of Basic School B and had spent more than six years in the school. He was recruited through a contact with head teacher who could not participate in the research because she was available at the time of data collection. Zuki got interested in the research after I explained the purpose of the project to him. He then took me around the

school on the first day I met him. He was the first participant to be interviewed in Basic School B. The interview took place in the staff common room and lasted 35 minutes.

Zuki recounted his experiential knowledge about the SBE in a very relaxed and friendly manner. Zuki started by saying that the school was established in 1994. Since then the school has been performing academically well at the BECE. He believed that the SBE offered a very good place for teaching and learning. For example, he said:

> I can say that it is a very good place for teaching and learning, because looking at the built environment it motivates the students and the teachers as well.

Zuki also mentioned that the school was fenced and had covered pavements. Plate 15 shows a section photographed by Zuki in Basic School B indicating how attractive he thought the SBE was.

Plate 15. A compound in Basic School B

Talking about the message the SBE conveyed to him, Zuki indicated that he felt happy about being in an imposing, well-structured, and well-painted SBE. According to him, the JHS storey building was helpful because of the science laboratory, home science, and home economics centre and other areas were located there. However, he thought that the primary school block

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would have been a storey building similar to the JHS block to make future development possible. Plate 16 shows the lower and upper primary classroom blocks in Basic School B.

Plate 16. Primary classroom block in Basic School B

Concerning the instructional areas, it became clear that all the elements of SBE this study was interested in were available and in good condition. He said similar things about the non-instructional areas too. For example, Zuki recounted:

> Looking at the classrooms, they are very spacious but the number in all is 40 so looking the classes it is enough and very comfortable for the students so controlling the students because the space is enough for us I think we are able to control the students a well. Because the place is very neat and the student behave well in class.

Zuki also talked about the school library and the science laboratory. He recounted how these spaces were helping the pupils and the teachers.

> We have a school library that serves all the children from Nursery up to JHS3. We are having about 2000 and over books, storybooks, textbooks and other things. …It is also helping the students. The library has a lot of space and it is well equipped. … We have a science laboratory or resource centre in the school for the students. The centre has all the equipment a science lab should have.

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Zuki further told me that they have ICT centre, which has about 40 computers. During ICT lessons, the children go to the centre to learn and practise skills in ICT. He added that they have enough playing grounds. According to him, they have a basketball court, a volleyball pitch, a soccer or football field, and a handball court. Zuki also told me that the kindergarten pupils also have equipment, which they use to play. He believed the equipment were adequate and safe for the children to play with. Zuki felt that play was important for the children.

In terms of the meaning Zuki made about his experiences of the SBE, he said, "It serves me and the students better because in a school with these materials I think there is no need for you to go out to look for information because all what you need is here". Throughout our interaction, Zuki was full of smiles and felt happy about his participation in the study.

Pat's Story

The next participant interviewed in Basic School B was Pat, who joined the school in 1996 and had been there since. Pat was purposively sampled and recruited based on her position as a teacher and on her gender as a female. She became interested in the study after the purpose and the processes of the project were explained to her. The interview was conducted in the staff common room and Pat cheerful throughout our conversation.

Pat started by describing the SBE as very beautiful, inviting, and perfect for academic work. She recounted that as a place for teaching and learning, the classroom set up was very nice. For her, the SBE is sending positive messages to her and many other people. Her main concern was how to

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handle the calibre of pupils they had, as some of them were academically good.

Recounting her experiences about the SBE, she gave similar accounts as Zuki. This is what Pat had to say about the canteen:

> We have a very neat and beautiful canteen. … The set-up is beautiful, with tables and chairs arranged for the pupils, tiled floor, and ventilation very good. Then we have a kitchen, the kitchen set-up too is very good. This is where the cooking and the dishing out of food are done. The pupils sit according to classes at the dining hall.… In addition, all is neatly set up. The tables are good.

Among Pat's photographs was Plate 17 showing the dining hall for primary school children.

Plate 17. Children's dining hall in Basic School B

Pat indicated that the photograph was of interest to her because of the importance of food in supporting the education of the young ones. In addition, she told me that they have adequate washrooms in the school. The girls have separate toilets and the boys use different toilets. Talking about washrooms, she indicated that:

> We have toilet and urinals here on the compound. We have some at the end of the lower to upper primary bloc. Then we have one here just behind me here. … Then there is a general one too out there near the canteen … they are all in good

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condition. Occasionally, the children clog it with materials that should not be used but [the cleaners] remove them ... they [toilets] are well maintained and are always in good condition.

Pat indicated all the washrooms they have in the school for both children and adults. Plate 18 shows one of the washrooms for teachers in Basic School B.

Plate 18. Teachers' toilet in Basic School B

Pat believed that the SBE, with all the facilities that were at the disposal of teachers and pupils, was really supporting the teaching, and learning in the school. She noted that as a user of the school facilities, she was motivated by and satisfied with the spaces available in the SBE. For Pat, the SBE was more like a home for both the children and adults because they felt safe and happy all the time.

Lily's Story

Lily was a 15-year-old girl in Basic School B. She had spent twelve years in the SBE. She got interested in the research through advertising flyer and was later recruited purposively based on her position as a pupil in JHS 3 having addressed the ethical issues involved. Lily was very calm throughout the interview process, which took place in the staff room. Though she showed much interest in participating in the research her responses to the interview

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questions were brief and lacked details even when she was encouraged to say more.

The interview began after I had downloaded her photographs onto my laptop. Responding to the first question, Lily mentioned the name of her school [name withheld for anonymity] and indicated that the school comprised JHS, Primary, and Nursery. She described her school as "a very nice school" because the school had good facilities. She believed that the teachers were good because they gave attention to each pupil in the class. To her, the SBE was good and conducive for learning.

Lily believed she was safe in her school because there was a fence wall around the school with a security man always at the gate. Talking about the message she received from her SBE, this is what Lily said:

> I feel comfortable and safe here because there is a wall around the school and there is security man at the gate. They care for us very well here and we have all the facilities to learn for example classrooms, everybody has his own table and seat, to have the peace of mind to study, everything is good.

When asked about her experiences about the SBE, particularly the instructional areas, Lily recounted that the classrooms were good, spacious, and comfortable. She added that if one should go round the schools in the community one would hardly find any school where the classroom walls and floors are tiled. Plate 19 shows a JHS classroom in Basic School B.

Plate 19. A JHS classroom in Basic School B

Lily also told me that all their classrooms had louvre windows, with fresh air in the classrooms. In addition, she mentioned that the school had a big school library, well-equipped science laboratory, ICT centre, as well as playing grounds. On the non-instructional areas, Lily shared her experiences about the school's dining halls, washrooms, sickbay, staffroom and changing room. She believed that the presence of all these facilities was helping her and others in school. For example, she said:

> We have toilets ... on the JHS block, we have three for girls and three for boys ... they are OK but the problem is that at times some of the people do not flush after using the place, but it is OK.

Lily indicated that the school had a sickbay, which was helping the children in the school. She said any time someone was sick, he or she would be sent to the room to rest after the person was given first aid. After the person recovered then he or she would go back into the classroom to continue learning. However, when the person's condition was serious, then the school principal or assistant head master would send the person to the hospital. Lily's photograph confirmed that of other participants who also took photographs of the sickbay. Plate 20 shows a sickbay in Basic School B.

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Plate 20. A sickbay in Basic School B

Talking about the photographs she took, Lily indicated that they meant a lot to her. She explained that

> When you move around, you cannot see schools like having these facilities, some do not even have a washroom but ours we have everything.

Lily maintained that the spaces in the photographs were motivating them to learn and to take part in sports competitions. She added that the spaces meant a lot to her because without them learning cannot go on well. She gave the example of the schools that did not have classrooms and felt bad that learning could not go on at all in those schools when it rained.

At the end of the interview, I realized that although Lily was very economical with her responses, she was able to give valuable information about her experiences of the SBE. The interview with Lily was very helpful in shedding light on the stories of other participants in the school. She was full of smiles, which indicated that she was happy about her participation in the research.

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Kojo's Story

Kojo was 14 years old at the time of the interview. He had spent twelve years in the school. He was the fourth participant I interviewed in Basic School B. Like Lily, I selected Kojo purposively after he indicated that he was interested in participating in the research. Having addressed the ethical issues involved in research with children, I recruited Kojo based on his willingness to volunteer to take part in the research. He considered the staff common room to be a convenient and appropriate place for the interview. At the beginning of the interview, Kojo did not give any background information about his school, as he was not able to recollect when the school was established. Thus, I interviewed him in the staff common room and it lasted 35 minutes.

While talking about the SBE, Kojo recounted that the school had all the facilities that they needed. He described the school as a beautiful school adding that it had almost all that they needed to play. Interestingly, Kojo told me he felt safe in his school because the school has a fire extinguisher. He even took a photograph of the fire extinguisher. I recall that there was a fire outbreak in one the basic schools in a nearby community few weeks earlier and this might have informed Kojo to know the importance of the fire extinguisher in the school. Plate 21 shows the fire extinguisher in Basic School B.

Plate 21. Fire extinguisher in Basic School B

Kojo's story about the built spaces in the SBE was similar to that of Lily and other participants in the school. He told me how the school facilities available were helping them to be happy in school. He noted that most basic schools do not have the facilities they have in their school. Kojo added that the SBE was contributing to their performance at inter-school sports competitions as well as the BECE. Like the other participants, Kojo said the photographs he took were of interest to him. Among his photographs was the school mower. Plate 22 shows the school mower.

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Plate 22. A school mower in Basic School B

When I asked him why he took a photograph of the mower, this is what

he said:

> In some schools, they spend their time or the study hours to
> weed their fields … with the mower, we don't have to weed the
> fields, and we would be even studying in the classroom without
> going thereto weed or spend all the time so … because we
> don't spend our time weeding

During my conversation with Kojo, he was concerned about the

absence of a Physical Education (PE) teacher. This is what he said:

> … We do not have a PE teacher. Therefore, when we are having
> PE, we just go to the field and warm up. After warming up, our
> school prefect would lead us into some things [/exercises/]. …
> We change in the classrooms. Some of the boys would also go
> to some secrete place to change. Now, that we have some place,
> so they now open it for us to go and change there.

I found Kojo to be an observant and assertive pupil who knew what the

SBE meant for him and his learning in school. He spoke confidently and

expressed himself well in English Language. He was glad to have taken part in

the study. He also wanted to know when I would invite him again.

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Abeeku's Story

Abeeku was a teacher in Basic School B and had spent almost eight years in the school. I recruited him for this research through advertisement for voluntary participation. I selected Abeeku based on his position, experience, and willingness to volunteer. He was enthusiastic about the research because of the importance he attached to SBE. The interview with Abeeku was the last interview conducted in Basic School B, and took place in the staffroom.

At the beginning of the interview, Abeeku took time to recount his knowledge about the SBE. According to him, the school had what it takes to provide conducive teaching and learning environment for the children. He boasted of good classrooms, science laboratory, playgrounds, ICT centre, and canteen. He stated that the school was a very good place for parents and guardians to send their wards. Plate 23 shows Abeeku's photograph of the science laboratory in Basic School B.

Plate 23. Science laboratory in Basic School B

For Abeeku, the SBE was a morale booster. He believed that as a teacher, he was supposed to make use of the facilities in the school to support him and his teaching. Having all the facilities at his disposal made teaching easy and enjoyable for him. Like Zuki and Pat, Abeeku gave similar

descriptions about the built spaces. He emphasized that the spaces were supporting both teachers and pupils in school. For example, this is what he said about the classrooms:

> The classrooms are well ventilated. They create some sort of serene atmosphere for children to grasp whatever the teacher teaches [be attentive in class]. In addition, we are not crowded … which to me is not bad. … When it comes to teaching and supervision of individual work in the classroom, you can move freely … We do not have dual-desks in this school ... All children have their tables and chairs ... The chairs and tables in the classrooms are in good condition. The classroom floors and the walls are tiled and with ceilings making the rooms very bright and cool.

Abeeku talked about how the science laboratory was helping them and the children. This is what he had to say about the science laboratory in their school.

> The science lab or resource centre, it is well equipped with many things. Sometimes even people [/pupils/] come from outside to use some of our facilities here. Therefore, when it is time for science we go there … especially the upper classes from class 4 up to JHS. Anytime we have science period, which the topics pertains to something about the science lab, the children are taken there … usually the skeleton and those things.

Abeeku emphasized the importance of the non-instructional places too (i.e., canteen, washrooms, and sickbay) in the school. He said the principal of their school thought it wise to provide canteen services within the school to check how food is cooked and handled. He noted that allowing children to buy food from outside the school or at the roadside was not hygienic. It was better to prepare the food within a good and healthy environment so that the children do not fall sick or suffer from any diseases.

Talking about washrooms, Abeeku noted that the school had numerous toilets and urinals. For example:

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> We have numerous … I cannot even count them. That is one of the biggest motivations here so that children do not ease about. They know where to go …and then how to use the toilet facilities because they are in abundance … Life would not have been comfortable without the many washrooms we have. They are always kept clean and neat. There are places where you wash your hands after using the washroom. It is really making life easy for the children and the teachers here.
>
> One other important space of interest to Abeeku was the staffroom.

According to him, this was where the staff members relaxed and marked the exercises that they gave to the children. He stated that all staff members had their lockers and shelves where teaching and learning materials were kept. Abeeku told me that staffroom had four toilets attached to it, two for female, and two for male making life in school comfortable. Plate 24 shows Abeeku's photograph of the staffroom.

Plate 24. Staffroom in Basic School B

He also spoke about the school mower. According to him, the school labourer used the mower to weed the school's surroundings to keep them clean. He noted that the teachers do ask the children to bring cutlasses to school to weed as this reduces contact hours with them. He believed that it would be tiring for the children to learn after weeding. At the time of the interview, the school labourer was weeding the school's surroundings with the mower. Abeeku also talked about the school's kitchen, saying how important

and hygienic the place was in supporting the children with their nutritional needs. Indeed, the interview with Abeeku was valuable as he took his time to recount his experiential knowledge about the SBE. It was clear from his interview that the SBE meant a lot to him. He expressed joy for participating in the research, and offered to assist in any follow-up interview.

Summary

This chapter provided the context of and insight into the study participants' stories to situate their understanding of their lived experiences. The chapter described the two study sites based on the close observation of built spaces recorded in field notes. The chapter also introduced the ten participants who volunteered and took part in the study. The participants shared their verbal and visual experiential knowledge about their respective SBEs. The chapter marked the beginning of hermeneutic phenomenological analysis by looking at "parts" of the phenomenon, putting them together to form the "whole" picture to provide meaning to the phenomenon. The next chapter presents the second part of the results and discussion of the study.

CHAPTER SIX

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION II

This chapter provides a qualitative account of users' lived experiences of SBEs and meanings in relation to disparities in teaching and learning opportunities. The chapter, therefore, presents and interpret the results characterizing users' lived experiences of SBEs in the Ghanaian context of basic education. The chapter also discusses the findings based on the four research questions that guided the study. The chapter relies on participants' quotes, which are indented to highlight individual subjective voices and to demonstrate the grounding of the results in the data. After each quote, is a bracket containing the participant's pseudonym, status, and basic school.

Interpreting the Phenomenon

This section interprets the results from this study to deepen understanding of whether users' meanings manifest inequality of educational opportunities. Interpretation is to place in the open what is already understood (Heidegger, 1962). In this sense, the process of interpretation required me to immerse myself in the data and become part of it by specifically seeking to understand how SBE meanings relate to disparities in teaching and learning conditions. Thus, the whole phenomenon gets clearer by its being described by users of SBEs. However, understanding is in itself an integral part of being-in-the-world (Odman, 1985), which for Heidegger, stood as unitary phenomenon, and must be seen as a whole.

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van Manen (1990) identified two senses of interpretation as "*pointing to* something" and "*pointing out* the meaning of something" (p. 26 emphasis original). The first kind of interpreting "is not a reading in of some meaning, but clearly a revealing of what the thing itself already points to … We attempt to interpret that which at the same time conceals itself" (van Manen, p. 26). The second kind of interpreting applies when we confront something that is already an interpretation, such as in the case of a work of art. Thus, according to Gadamer (as cited in van Manen, p. 26), "when we interpret the meaning of something we actually interpret an interpretation". The two senses of interpretation informed this study.

Heidegger (1962) emphasized the need to return to the facts of existence; to understand how something is lived, but also that there is no such thing as an unincorporated fact. For Heidegger, one must remain grounded in one's interpretation of the matter, of the things themselves. van Manen (1990), in explicating Heidegger's view wrote:

> Our notion of hermeneutic understanding for Heidegger was not aimed at re-experiencing another's experience but rather the power to grasp one's own possibilities for being in the world in certain ways. To interpret a text is to come to understand the possibilities of being revealed by the text (p. 180).

In this study, understanding of the phenomenon was to interpret verbal and visual text to grasp the possibilities of being-in-the-world. Thus, making meaning of the phenomenon required me "to stand close to" (Odman, 1985, p. 2163) the lived experiences of users of SBEs. Indeed, the meanings uncovered were neither separate from users' meanings nor my projections nor perception

separate from the meanings of users' narratives and images. The interpretation presented here is my own meaning as the researcher, fused with the data from users interviewed in this research. However, the participants' verbal and visual texts offered essential information about users' lived experiences of their SBEs and assisted in understanding what it means to be users of SBEs.

In addition, the final step in understanding the lived experiences of users of SBEs involved the development of a composite description of overall qualities, core themes, and essences that permeated the experiences of all the research participants (Moustakas, 1994). As van Manen (1990) suggested, when description is mediated by expression (including non-verbal aspects, action, a work of art, or text) a stronger element of interpretation is involved. Thus, the understanding of the everyday experiences of users of SBEs presented in this research is an interpretation of the conversational dialogues conducted with the participants' images in-conversation (Cole, 2010).

Besides, interpretation in this study involved the fusion of horizons. As Gadamer (1989) noted, the results of the interpretation are a fusion of the researcher's and the participants' horizons. Thus, the process of understanding added a layer of abstraction, consistent with hermeneutic interpretation, and presented themes that emerged from the data. As an exploratory study, I did not intend to draw definite conclusions; rather the analytic and interpretive processes sought to identify possible meanings related to the lived experiences of SBEs from the perspectives of users. Thus, the synthesis of the participants' accounts and my interpretations revealed four main themes.

Finally, in social research, there are no "'crucial tests of theories', [and that] we don't prove things right or wrong, [so] the real test has always been

how useful or interesting that way of looking at things is to an audience"
(Becker, as cited in Denzin, 1989, p. 1). In addition, others have to reject,
modify, and re-construe the researchers' selection of "fact"; the order; and the
relationships that form the basis of the interpretation and its conclusions
(Peshkin, 2000). Therefore, like all interpretations the interpretations in this
"are unfinished, provisional, and incomplete" (Denzin, p. 64). However, the
real test of this study is how practical or interesting the reader finds the
interpretations and conclusions presented in this study. In the next section, I
present the interpretation of the themes developed.

Understanding the Main Themes

Theme 1: Being-in-the-world of Physical Reality

The first main theme developed was being-in-the-world of physical
reality. This theme relates to the actual physical characteristics of the SBE
experienced by users. These physical characteristics include the temperature,
ventilation, air quality, lighting, doors, windows, floors, walls ceilings, roofs,
lockers, or storage space experienced or perceived by users of SBEs through
their senses. The theme is characterized by both positive and negative
experiences. From the analysis, the three sub-themes related to this theme are
adequate/inadequate, conducive/not conducive, and safe/unsafe SBEs as
discussed in the following sections.

Sub-theme 1.1: Being in an adequate/inadequate SBE. This sub-
theme means becoming aware of the adequacy or inadequacy. It also related to
the availability or unavailability of built spaces in school. Participants from
both research settings gave the indication of this sub-theme in their text and
image data. Close observations of the built spaces recorded as field notes

supported this and other sub-themes. The following are quotes from participants' transcribed interviews depicting this sub-theme:

> Apart from the classrooms, the school is lacking other school facilities such as library, ICT lab and so on (Yaw, Teacher, School B).

> [School library] … we do not have. We just go to the back of the building to study. … That one too [science laboratory] we do not have it. We do not have science laboratory … in our school. … [ICT centre] too we do not have (Paster, Pupil, School A).

Participants, in Basic School A, expressed similar views about their SBE. For example, Adjoa said, "… we don't have a school library … the buildings are not even enough so we don't have a library and this is affecting the children" (Teacher, School A). According to Ika, "The canteen we don't have … and it affects us because people eat anywhere they like" (Pupil, School A). Cole added that "We don't have sick bay here .... When someone is not well, I only ask him or her to go home. ... We do not have a well-furnished staffroom for the teachers (Head teacher, School A). However, the lived experiences in Basic School B differ as revealed by participants' quotes. Lily said:

> It is a very nice school because we have good facilities, almost all facilities ...we have a dining hall, and we have a library, many facilities. … The school built environment is good for learning. … The classrooms … are good, spacious, and comfortable. …You would not find any school where classrooms have tiles on the floor and even tiles on the wall. There is enough space. Even we have louvre windows for fresh air … it is nice (Lily, Pupil, School B).

> … We have everything [facilities] here. Therefore, we can boast of so many things … I can say that the facilities are underutilized. However, we can boast of classrooms, science lab, playgrounds, ICT centre, canteen, etc. This is a very good place to send your children (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

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In Basic School B, Lily and Abeeku's lived experiences about the SBE were similar to those expressed by other participants' texts and images. Kojo, for instance, recounted, "We have all the environment and facilities that we need for our studies" (Pupil, School B). Zuki also added, "We are provided with the needed facilities or environment to perform academically well" (Asst Head teacher, School B). The surface and intended messages conveyed by participants'' texts and images represent their everyday experiences about their SBE as an important place, in its adequacy or inadequacy. This interpretation of the existing instructional spaces of the two basic schools could be gleaned from the participants' photographs presented in Chapter Four, where one basic school appeared to have poor quality, inadequate, and ill-equipped spaces as compared to the other.

Indeed, participants' comment: "the school is lacking facilities"; "we don't have a library"; "we have all the environment and facilities"; "we are provided with the needed facilities", reflected their SBE experiences. These experiences of the participants as revealed by their texts and images conveyed ideological messages of one basic school not caring for or valuing the SBE needs of the users unlike the other basic school. Thus, my oppositional interpretation explored the disparity between the possible ideological messages that users in one SBE needed more built spaces while those in the other SBE had enough spaces. Interestingly, this reading reveals that the two SBEs sent contrasting messages to and/or about their respective users.

Sub-theme 1.2: Being in conducive/non-conducive SBE. The sub-theme, being in conducive or not conducive place, is used to articulate the physical conditions of the SBEs. This sub-theme relates to participants'

experiences of built spaces based on how conducive or not conducive to their activities and well-being. This sub-theme is gleaned from the following participants' quotes presented:

> The classroom is so hot sometimes because the windows are so small (Paster, Pupil, School A).

> The type of windows [honeycombs] that we have does not enhance ventilation. I think it is not the best. Therefore, during the afternoons, teachers and pupils suffer in the classrooms because of heat that is being accumulated ... and there are no electric fans in the classrooms (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

Further, other participants in Basic School A reported and captured the physical conditions of the SBE as images. For example, Ika commented, "The classrooms are good, but sometimes we sweat ..." (Pupil, School A). According to Cole, "the quality is not as expected" (Head teacher, School A). On her part, Adjoa said, "because of the way the windows have been built the classrooms … they not provide good ventilation. So you see the children sweating and you the teacher sweating like that [/too/]" (Teacher, School A). On the other hand, the situation as experienced and reported by participants in Basic School B contrasted with that of Basic School A. The following quotes from the participants' verbal and visual texts attest to the situation. For example, the participants said:

> There is good, ventilation, and adequate space to move about (Zuki, Asst. Head teacher, School B).

> Pat and Kojo in Basic School B recounted similar experiences. For

example:

> The classrooms are tiled, enough windows to allow ventilation that helps in learning. All these are set in place. There is lighting system … the classrooms are furnished with good

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chairs and tables for each pupil as well as the teacher. (Pat, Teacher, School B).

On Kojo's part, this is what he said:

We have all the facilities that we need for our study … The atmosphere in our classroom is always good (Pupil, School B).

The surface and intended messages conveyed by participants' texts and images presented their everyday experiences about their SBEs as important place, because of the conditions of built spaces. Interpretations of conducive or not conducive conditions were gleaned from the text and image data. Examples of participants' comments include "... this is a good school … well structured, very clean, and attractive", "… This is the window. We cannot open it. If [/When/] it is dark, we don't know". Participants' data indicated ideological messages of one basic school having SBE that is conducive to effective teaching and learning unlike the other basic school. The oppositional interpretation of the data portrays contrasting messages that users in one SBE felt more supported than users in the other SBE.

Sub-theme 1.3: Being in a safe/unsafe SBE. This sub-theme refers to the awareness of the safety and security of the place where participants spent significant part of their school days. The theme embodies health and sanitary conditions of the SBEs. This sub-theme is used to articulate participants' feeling of how safe, healthy and secure they considered their respective SBEs. Through their narratives and photographs, the participants revealed and felt the need for living, working and learning in safe and secure SBEs. This sub-theme reflects the disparity in participants' stories and photographs about their lived experiences of their SBEs.

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This is where the children have been buying their food. Look at the structure! This cannot be hygienic eating-place for the children (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

This is where we have the toilets … look at the door to the place … it is very bad. This is the [area] I was telling you about earlier … the whole area is bushy … It does not speak well about the school. ... The school fence … as for the fence, I do not think the PTA can do it now ... it is not their capacity. I do not think they can (Cole, Head teacher, School A).

This place is just bushy. Sometimes we see snakes around ... they come from there ... the bush and come in. It tells me the school is not nice [safe] … sometimes I feel may get hurt when you come, so is not comfortable (Ika, Pupil, School A).

Actually, we have a washroom (toilet and urinal) over there but the place is bushy and some of the equipment or things either are destroyed. Even one of the doors to one of the washrooms is not in good shape, so in totality the washroom (urinal and toilet) is not in good shape at all as I captured on this presentation (Yaw, Teacher, School B).

The safety, health, and security situations of the SBE are necessary for effective teaching and learning in schools. However, these situations in Basic School B were far more positive than that of Basic School A. This understanding was revealed by participants' text and image data about their SBEs. For example:

This is the sickbay … where … we take those who are sick … to rest …This place is very important because it allows the children to be safe and healthy. It a very quiet place too (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

... The school is well fenced ensuring that both children and teachers are safe, secure and people or stray animals from the community do not disturbed us (Pat, Teacher, School B).

It was obvious from the participants that both children and adults felt at home in Basic School B. This is how they put it:

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This place is more like a home for the children because they feel safe and happy all the time ... and the teachers too (Pat, Teacher, School B).

These are the toilets for the girls … the boys also have theirs. From KG to JHS, they all have adequate and clean toilets … we have been teaching the pupils how to flush after use to keep place clean (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

We have toilets ... they are water closets. … The washrooms are always kept clean to maintain their sanitary conditions so they are not sources of offensive smell. In this school, no one complains about the washrooms because they are adequate and clean (Zuki, Asst. Head teacher, School B).

The principal thought it wise to establish this canteen, first, to check how food is cooked. As the saying goes, a healthy mind is in a body (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

The place is very hygienic so I decided to take the picture (Zuki, Asst. Head, School B).
I feel safe in this school because the school is fenced and has fire extinguishers (Kojo, Pupil, School B).

In Basic School B, Lily and Abeeku also recounted similar experiences about their SBE. Lily, for example, narrated:

I always feel comfortable and safe here because there is a wall around the school and there is security man at the gate (Pupil, Basic School B).

According to Abeeku,

Life would not have been comfortable without the many washrooms we have. They are always kept clean and neat. There are places where you wash your hands after using the washroom. It is really making life easy for the children and the teachers here (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

It was evident from the textual data from participants in Basic School A that the built spaces were not as safe and appealing as those from participants in Basic School B. The field notes reinforced an assumed shared understanding of the existing SBEs to the research and the participants who

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because of their interpretation could make sense of both text and the images. For example, the participants noted, "I feel safe in this school", "look at the surroundings of the toilet, very weedy… Snakes can just get into the room", "this place is very scary", "this is the dining hall ... the place is very hygienic". These responses conveyed the ideological messages of living, working and learning in safe and healthy SBE on one hand and unsafe and unhealthy SBE on the other. My oppositional interpretation explored the gaps in the messages, for example, that one SBE was safe and the other unsafe.

Clearly, the main message the SBE conveyed to participants in Basic School A, perhaps, is that: You do not deserve to live, work and learn in adequate, well-ventilated, well-furnished, safe, clean, and comfortable SBE. These descriptions were interpreted to mean that the physical features of the SBE were not important. On the other hand, the main message received by participants in Basic school B is that: You are worth the effort of living, working and learning in a SBE that is adequate, well ventilated, well furnished, safe, clean, and comfortable. Perhaps, this implies that physical qualities of SBEs send important signals to and/or about users.

As evident from participants' accounts, SBEs can be physically, functionally, psychologically, or aesthetically ineffective or stressful. The definition of effective in this sense is the degree to which users' school activities are supported by the existing built spaces to produce successful educational outcome. Thus, the SBEs could be placed somewhere on the continuum ranging from completely effective or functional to completely ineffective or dysfunctional, using feedback from users at a given point in time (Vischer, 2008).

Theme 2: Being-in-the-world of Functional Reality

The second main theme developed from the study was being-in-the-world of functional reality. This theme refers to the usefulness or practical effectiveness of SBEs in accomplishing the objectives of education. The theme emphasizes the way SBEs fulfil the purpose (Dewe, 2012) of supporting the activities of users towards the fulfilment of their educational objectives. It recognizes that the objectives of education must be accomplished satisfactorily with the support of existing SBEs. This theme focuses on how easy or difficult it is for users of SBEs to go about their daily activities. It also relates to the awareness of how useful and supportive the built spaces are to users' educational activities and well-being. Three contrasting sub-themes, which combine to explicate this main theme, are presented in the following sections.

Sub-theme 2.1: Being supported/hindered by SBE. This sub-theme relates to how SBEs made it possible for users to live, work and to learn well as required of them. Most of the participants interviewed from both research settings reported about how their respective SBEs were either supporting or hindering their educational and social activities in school. Participants from each school reported similar experiences and sentiments concerning their SBEs. For example in Basic School A,

> In our classrooms, some of the boards [/blackboards/] are not smooth ... they are always wasting chalk. (Paster, Pupil, School A)

> The blackboards too are not plastered well … very rough … so anytime you write and the chalk is getting finished, you see your fingers would be scratching at the board, your fingers would be scratching on the board. (Adjoa, Teacher, School A)

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I do not think this place is supporting the children and the teachers to do their best. This place is supposed to be the second home for the children ... but I don't think the facilities we have here are allowing the school to perform that role well" (Cole, Head teacher, School A).

Adjoa and Paster reported similar sentiments about how their SBE was impeding their school activities. This is what they had to say about the SBE in Basic School A:

We do not have science laboratory in our school. ... [ICT laboratory or centre] too we do not have. Our ICT teacher sacrifices his own … laptop that he uses to teach us. These do not encourage us to learn in school (Paster, Pupil, School A).

The environment is not supporting effective teaching and learning here. … (Adjoa, Teacher, School A).

However, in Basic School B, participants' stories were different. For example,

In some schools, they will spend their time or the study hours to weed their fields … but with the mower we don't have to weed the field and we would be even studying in the classroom without going thereto weed or spend all the time so … because we don't spend our time weeding (Kojo, Pupil, School B).

… We are being surrounded by weeds very often especially during rainy seasons. The principal finds it tedious to ask the children to bring cutlasses to weed; this goes a long way to distract classes so she thought it wise to buy this one. As I am talking now the machine, [/mower/] is working. When machine works, it is better than we use human beings (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

Sub-theme 2.2: Being in an effective/ineffective SBE. This sub-theme relates to the level of suitability of the built spaces as narrated by the participants. In Basic School A, it appeared the SBE was not fit for purpose. The following quotes support this assertion.

We do not have a library, the buildings are not even enough so …this is affecting the children. ... We do not have one (smiling). You can just imagine, this age of computer

technology. It is a problem ... We do not even a single computer … at this computer age we cannot boast of one computer let alone centre. It is sad (Adjoa, Teacher, School A).

This is the blackboard; it is not well constructed as I said earlier. It is not smooth so when you are writing on it you suffer a lot. It breaks the pieces of chalk on you. It makes the teacher very dirty because of how it makes the chalk dusty (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

The story was however different in Basic School B where the participants' data seemed to suggest that the SBE was fit for purpose. For example, Abeeku said, "the classrooms are well ventilated and it creates some sort of serene atmosphere for children to grasp whatever the teacher teaches". His comments were similar from other participants in the school. Indeed, all the participants acknowledged how their SBE was supporting their teaching and learning activities and well-being. For instance, according to Lily,

At first, we were using the library here [on the JHS block] but now they have moved it to a new place, and that place is big. It is always quiet there ... I go there anytime I want read or do my homework. The library is helping us a lot (Lily, Pupil, School B).

We have so many books therein our library… we have library period on the timetable so that when it is library period each class goes to the library to read. Normally, we go there to read to polish their reading habits. … I can say it helps when it comes to learning vocabulary. It helps the children to cultivate the habit of reading (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

The participants in Basic School B also spoke about their science laboratory. For example, according to one participant:

The science lab or resource centre, it is well equipped with many things. Sometimes even pupils come from other schools to use some of our facilities here (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

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The surface and intended messages of participants' textual data presented SBEs as significant places that were designed to support them and their activities in school. Interpretation of the data centred on supportive and unsupportive built spaces where participants' data from one SBE conveyed positive messages, while the other negative messages. For instant, participants comments included, "it makes teaching easy and enjoyable for me", "pupils and teachers do suffer", "As a teacher, having those things at my disposal helps". Thus, the oppositional interpretation focused on differences between the realities that users in some SBEs are supported to excel and the reality that users in other unsupportive SBEs have to struggle to excel.

Sub-theme 2.3: Being in good/poor academic performing SBE. The cherished educational goal of all users is excellent academic achievement as reflected by pupils' performance on national examinations, BECE. Participants from the two research settings believed that their respective SBEs play a role in their good or poor academic performance. This sub-theme is considered as a functional reality because the ultimate purpose of SBEs is to provide suitable or adequate built spaces to support users' activities. The following quotes from participants' interviews transcripts reflect this sub-theme.

> These [spaces] do not encourage us to learn in school. This is affecting us in the BECE. For example, we [candidates from our school] do not pass well in ICT (Paster, Pupil, Basic School A).

> …The pupils cannot give out their best due to the circumstances they encounter within the environment. It is really affecting their performance. Could you believe that our school was last [/last position/] at this year's BECE? We have 72 basic schools in the KEEA Municipality and our school was 72nd (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

> All these things are affecting them [children] and their performance. It is not as we are expecting. … The performance of the children at the BECE level is not the best. I think part of the problem is due to the lack of good facilities in the school. For example, the absence of school library is negatively affecting the children (Cole, Head teacher, School A).

However, in the Basic School B the narratives are different from those from Basic School A.

> So long as the school facilities are there, functioning well both the teachers and children will continue to be motivated and to excel. With this beautiful environment, they will always do well to pass their exams ... and this is where they write their BECE so it helps them (Zuki, Asst. Head, School B).

> If you look at our performance at BECE we normally excel … I can say confidently that the school built environment is playing a significant part in teaching and learning in this school (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

> Overall, our school is one the best schools in the region or in the country in terms of academic performance. Our children are always doing well at the BECE. This is even making more parents to bring their children here (Pat, Teacher, School B).

The surface interpretation of the quotes of individual participants could confirm positive and negative meanings about SBEs to both the participants and the readers. Examples of participants comments included: "the pupils cannot give out their best", "the facilities don't encourage us to learn", "we [pupils] do not pass well in ICT" and "part of the problem is due to the lack of good facilities". Others are "absence of school library is affecting the children", "this is where they write their BECE so it helps them", "the school built environment is playing a significant part in teaching and learning", and "Our children are always doing well at the BECE". The oppositional interpretation of participants' text presents contrasting ideological meanings

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for people who are supposed to achieve the same educational objective of excelling at the national examinations.

Based on the data of participants in Basic School A, the main message conveyed to them was that: You do not need a supportive, suitable and performance oriented SBE to perform well academically. This message was interpreted to mean that the functional qualities of the SBE do not matter for those in Basic School A. On the other hand, the main message received by participants in Basic School B is that: You deserve a supportive, suitable, and performance oriented SBE. This message, perhaps, implies that functional qualities of the SBE are necessary and important for those in Basic School B.

Theme 3: Being-in-the-world of Psychosocial Reality

Thirdly, being-in-the-world of psychosocial reality also developed as a main theme from social and psychological effects of built places on the moods, feelings and sense of well-being of users of SBEs (McIntyre, 2006). This theme relates to the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours of all those who live, learn, play, or work in the built spaces as a whole (The Wingspread Declaration, 2004). The theme developed from the participants' experiential descriptions of their SBEs regarding their comfort, motivation, satisfaction, interaction, and overall well-being as users of SBEs. This theme combines psychological and social needs and awareness of the participants. Four contrasting sub-themes informing this main theme as portrayed by participants' textual data are presented as follows:

Sub-theme 3.1: Being in a comfortable/uncomfortable place. This sub-theme relates to participants' experiences of SBEs based on how

comfortable or uncomfortable they considered their built spaces. This sub-theme is gleaned from the following participants' quotes presented:

> The classroom is so hot sometimes because the windows are so small and we always do not feel comfortable here (Paster, Pupil, School A).

> The type of windows [honeycombs] we have does not enhance ventilation. I think it is not the best. During the afternoons, we [teachers and pupils] suffer in the classrooms because of heat ... and there are no electric fans in the classrooms (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

> I do not think you will be comfortable teaching or working here … it is difficult (Cole, Head teacher, School A).

Further, other participants in Basic School A reported and captured the uncomfortable conditions of the SBE as images. For example, Ika commented that "The place [/school built environment/] is not comfortable. I don't know ... the desks in the classrooms are not comfortable...." (Pupil, School A). Adjoa's experience supported that of Yaw when she said, "because of the way the windows have been built the classrooms … they not provide good ventilation. So you see the children sweating and you the teacher sweating like that [/too/]". (Teacher, School A).

However, the SBE as experienced and reported by participants in Basic School B contrasted with that of those in Basic School A. The following quotes attest to the situation. For example, the participants said:

> Looking at the classrooms, they are comfortable for the students. Because the place is comfortable and neat, the students are well behaved (Zuki, Asst. Head teacher, School B).

> Pat and Kojo in Basic School B recounted similar experiences. For

example:

> The classrooms are tiled, enough windows to allow ventilation that helps in learning. All these are set in place. There is

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lighting system. … I can say that the classrooms are very bright, comfortable, and attractive (Pat, Teacher, School B).

On Kojo's part, this is what he said:

The atmosphere in our classroom is always good and we are comfortable (Pupil, School B).

The surface and intended messages conveyed by participants'' texts and images presented their everyday experiences about their SBEs as important place, because of comfortable or uncomfortable built spaces. Interpretations of comfort or uncomfortable conditions developed from their data. Examples of participants' comments such as "this is a very comfortable place'; 'desks in the classrooms are not comfortable" are contrasting messages gleaned from the data. Furthermore, participants' data sent ideological messages of one basic school offering comfortable conditions and the other uncomfortable conditions. Thus, my oppositional interpretation of the data portrays contrasting messages that users in one SBE felt more comfortable than users in the other SBE.

Sub-theme 3.2: Being in a motivating/demotivating place. This sub-theme relates to participants' feeling of being motivated or demotivated about the SBE as place. The sub-theme articulates the feeling of being encouraged or discouraged by the extent of availability, adequacy, and quality conditions of the built spaces. Being in a motivating or an uninspiring place indicates how interested or uninterested participants felt in living, working and learning in their respective SBEs. This sub-theme is discerned from the following participants' text and image data.

You cannot be proud of this place ... it does not encourage effective teaching and learning (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

I can say that it is a very good place for teaching and learning, because looking at the built environment it motivates the students and the teachers as well (Zuki, Asst. Head, School B).

Teaching in this environment does not motivate you as the teacher especially when it rains. … you see that you would be walking through mud or flood … I don't know how you will feel because, how you are going to come to this place so it doesn't motivate you as the teacher to come to school to teach or see all this things (Adjoa, Teacher, School A).

Well, sometimes it motivates me because I have been to so many places where these things are lacking. Therefore, to me, once I have these facilities at my disposal then I also have to use my human resource to teach effectively (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

This is one the washrooms. They are always kept clean to maintain their sanitary conditions so they are not sources of offensive smell. In this school, no one complains about the washrooms because they are adequate and clean (Zuki, Asst. Head, School B).

The school environment is not motivating enough. Moreover, the good students are being withdrawn from the school. ... Really, I do not feel happy here because the nature of the school environment does make me feel good about the school. It appears the educational authorities do not care about education ... what we do here is not appreciated. There is nothing motivating about this place (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

The participants' use of words or phrases such as "not motivating", "I don't feel happy", "don't care", "motivates", "doesn't encourage", "motivating", "they care for us very well" connoted both positive and negative experiences. These contrasting quotes, perhaps, conveyed messages relating to motivation, care, encouragement, and contented from their narratives. The messages could be interpreted as sentiments that made participants to feel bad or good about their existing SBEs. These interpreted meanings are likely to reflect the importance of education to participants from the two basic schools.

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Sub-theme 3.3: Being satisfied/unsatisfied about SBE. Being satisfied or unsatisfied about the SBE is another sub-theme under psychosocial realities. This theme relates to being comfortable or uncomfortable with the condition of the SBE. In this study, participants from the two research settings reported contrasting experiences about their satisfaction of their respective SBE. The following quotes are taken from participants' transcribed interviews.

> I am very satisfied with our school built environment and I would tell you that if you are having a child you can bring that child to the school and that you would feel that oh my child there it would be safe for my child to study there and achieve their goals (Kojo, Pupil, School B).

> I do not think I am satisfied with the situation here (Cole, Head teacher, School A).

> I am not satisfied. Something should be done to help the school (Paster, Pupil, School A).

> So I would say that these things are available here fine but those who are ready to make use of it, it will help them. ... I am very satisfied with our school built environment because it is helping the children and us [teachers] a lot (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

> As a teacher in this school, I am satisfied and motivated because we have all the facilities a good school should have and I think it is helping all of us to help the pupils, teach them to excel …. Oh, I am satisfied...I am very satisfied about this place. It is best you can have (Pat, Teacher, School B).

The participants' words or phrases such as "very satisfied" and "don't think I'm satisfied" revealed users' respective positive and negative experiences of the psychological effects the SBEs had on them. These quotes conveyed messages of good and bad feelings the SBEs give the users. In other words, users received the messages of satisfaction from one SBE and dissatisfaction from the other.

Sub-theme 3.4: Being in a SBE of social interaction/less social interaction. This sub-theme is based on participants' relationship to their SBEs. It relates to how they feel about the SBE promoting or preventing their social interactions in school. In addition, this sub-theme conveys to readers how participants experienced their built spaces designed for social interaction with peers and/or superiors in school. The sub-theme reflects participants' responses or feelings about spaces available for social activities as gleaned from their quotes.

> We do not have proper playing grounds to train for inter-schools sports and games. Our school does not do very well … sports and games ... we would not be first we would be last because of the playing ground that we do not have to train … We do not have a good eating-place. In addition, sometimes we go to back of the building before we can eat. Sometimes, too some would eat in the classroom. That one there is not good (Paster, Pupil, School A).

> Actually, we do not have a staffroom … If you look at the staffroom we have … it is nothing to write home about [it is not good]. The place is not the best at all and it is small ... not well furnished and does not have enough space for all of us [the teachers] ... that is why you can see that some of the teachers are sitting here. The place is not the best for teachers as a staffroom (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

> These [playgrounds] are all important because they are spaces that are helping the school, motivating us to learn and take part in sports competitions like football and basketball (Lily, Pupil, School B).

> The staffroom is fantastic. It is one the best staffrooms in the community. It is well furnished if should put it in this way. It also helps when teachers are not teaching anything sometimes if it is not your turn to teach a particular subject you can come to the staffroom and do some marking (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

> Where we are sitting now is the staff common room with about 15 to 20 chairs and tables, and it's better and you will be happy even being a staff. As you can see, there is good ventilation, and adequate space to move about. Teachers come to sit here and relax or interact with other teachers when they are not

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teaching. The atmosphere here is very welcoming (Zuki, Asst. Head teacher, School B).

To me, I see it like … a good place that would help you in just having fun and enjoying yourself learning and so on (Kojo, Pupil, School B).

Participants' data contributed to the sub-theme "being or not being in a social place". For example, "well furnished", "don't have a good eating place", "eat anywhere", "having fun", "enjoying yourself", "eat in the classroom", "sit here and relax", "interact with other teachers" are some of the users' experiences of SBEs. These quotes such as "friendliness", "putting body and soul together", and "limited social interaction" conveyed messages about the importance of social spaces in school. The phrases were interpreted to mean the extent to which users' interactions with peers and spaces were considered important in SBEs.

For the participants in Basic School A, the main message conveyed to them was that: You do not deserve to live, work, and learn in a SBE that is satisfying, encouraging, and caring as well as supports social interaction. These descriptions were interpreted to mean that the psychosocial qualities of the SBE were not necessary. However, the main message conveyed to the participants in Basic school B was that: Users deserve to live, work, and learn in a satisfying and caring SBE. Perhaps, this means that the SBE was psychosocially positive and supportive.

Theme 4: Being-in-the-world of Aesthetic Reality

Finally, the fourth main theme that developed from this study was being-in-the-world of aesthetic reality. The theme recognizes that users of SBEs are generally attracted to beautiful and attractive places. As Carroll

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(2003) noted, defining aesthetic reality is a difficult task even for experts. However, aesthetic reality is the sort of experiences users undergo upon exposure to beautiful and welcoming SBEs, which are valued for their own sake (Carroll). This theme relates to the visual experiences of users pertaining to their SBEs. Three interrelated but contrasting sub-themes that appeared in participants' consciousness informed this main theme as follows:

Sub-Theme 4.1: Being in an attractive/unattractive place. This sub-theme explores the participants' awareness of being in an attractive or unattractive SBE. Being in an attractive place implies the awareness of the pleasantness of the place. Alternatively, being in an unattractive SBE implies being in a place with unpleasant and uninteresting qualities to occupy. The following participants' quotes reveal how unattractive the SBE was.

> More needs to be done to make the school look attractive to the community members (Cole, Head teacher, School A).

> I feel shy because the school is not well prepared [attractive] (Paster, Pupil, School A).

> If you work or teach in an environment like this, you cannot give of your best because no one cares about the place. The place is not attractive ... just look around (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

In Basic School B, participants' data painted a different picture about the attractiveness of their SBE. For example:

> Look at this place … flowers, hedges, and dustbins all located at vantage points making the environment look decent and attractive. … All I can say is that this is a good school ... well structured, very clean, and attractive (Pat, Teacher, School B).

> It is just attractive. This shows how the school cares about its image (Zuki, Asst. Head teacher, School B).

Sub-theme 4.2: Being in a beautiful/ugly SBE. Participants also reported how beautiful or ugly their respective SBEs were. This sub-theme means that the participants were aware of how beautiful their SBEs were and how pleasant they felt to live, learn, teach, or work in their respective SBEs. The following participants' quotes reflect this sub-theme.

> The school is a beautiful school ... the facilities beautify the place at the same time it helps other people achieve their talents (Kojo, School B).

> We have a very beautiful canteen; the set-up is beautiful, with tables and chairs arranged for the pupils, tiled floor, and ventilation was very good (Pat, Teacher, School B).

> I think this is a beautiful place for any teacher or pupil to be. Just take a look around ... who will not feel happy here ... we have everything thing that should encourage every teacher to teach and help the children. We have a future (Pat, Teacher, School B).

> … The nature of the school environment does not make feel good about the school (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

Sub-theme 4.3: Being in a welcoming/an unwelcoming SBE. Being in a welcoming or an unwelcoming place means the awareness of living, working or learning in a SBE that is not only comfortable or uncomfortable but also engaging or disengaging. This contrasting sub-theme is portrayed by participants' data from the two research settings. In essence, the sub-theme relates to how pleasant or unpleasant participants found their respective SBEs. The following participants' quotes reveal this sub-theme.

> This environment ... is not inviting. Not many teachers would want to be in a school like this (Cole, Head teacher, School A).

> This place is just bushy. Sometimes we see snakes around ... It tells me the school is not nice … This place [refuse dump] is not good. Sir, they are also bad (Ika, Pupil, School A).

> I just feel happy about being in a school with this environment. It is very imposing ... well structured and painted ... it is just

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attractive. This shows how the school cares about its image (Zuki, Asst Head teacher, School B).

I can say that the classrooms are very bright, comfortable and attractive … looking at the buildings; the environment is so inviting … Look at this place … flowers, hedges, and dustbins all located at vantage points making the environment look decent and attractive (Pat, Teacher, School B).

While participants' comments such as "not inviting", "the place is bushy" "not nice", appear to reveal negative experiences, comments such as "I just feel happy", "very imposing", "decent", and "attractive" appear to reveal positive experiences from the two research settings respectively. Thus, for the participants in Basic School A, a low performing basic school (LPBS), the main message conveyed to them was "You are not worth the effort of being provided with an attractive, beautiful, and welcoming SBE". This means that the aesthetic qualities of the SBE are not desirable. However, the main message conveyed to the participants in Basic school B was: "You deserve a beautiful, attractive and welcoming SBE to live, work and learn". This, perhaps, means the aesthetic qualities of the SBE are desirable and necessary.

From the foregoing analysis, participants' texts conveyed messages of neglect and dissatisfaction on the one hand and support and satisfaction on the other. The oppositional interpretations of the texts questioned how reflective these interpreted meanings were of SBE realities in basic schools. My interpretations reflected the possibility that the well-being and success of users of SBEs in the HPBS appeared to be important than those in the LPBS did appear. Clearly, the meanings gleaned from participants' textual data were a mixture of inadequacy, neglect, and dissatisfaction on the one hand and support, adequacy, and satisfaction on the other. Perhaps, these interpretations revealed how the participants' made sense of their SBEs as places that

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positively or negatively shaped their everyday experiences. For example, participants from Basic School A said the following things about their SBE.

> Apart from the classrooms, the school is lacking other school facilities such as library, ICT lab and so on... (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

> The classroom is so hot sometimes because the windows are so small and we always do not feel comfortable here (Paster, Pupil, School A).

> I do not think you will be comfortable teaching or working here … it is difficult. (Cole, Head teacher, School A)

> Look at the structure! This cannot be hygienic eating-place for the children (Yaw, Teacher, School A).

> This place it is just bushy. Sometimes we see snakes around ... they come from there ... the bush and come in. It tells me the school is not nice [safe] … sometimes I feel may get hurt when you come, so is not comfortable (Ika, Pupil, School A).

> … The surrounding of the school ... is very bushy. The environment is not supporting effective teaching and learning here. … The children cannot be weeding every now and then … The community must do something about the school (Adjoa, Teacher, School A).

These quotes and other similar ones from participants' verbal and visual texts were interpreted as expressing not only inadequacy and neglect but also dissatisfaction. This interpretation developed from the fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1989) because participants did see how their built spaces supported them. Thus, in Basic School A, the textual data from participants' interviews, photographs, and field notes revealed that the SBE was not supportive of effective academic work and social life. Unlike Basic School A, participants from Basic School B described their experiences about their SBE as:

It is a very nice school because we have good facilities, almost all facilities ...we have a dining hall, and we have a library, many facilities (Lily, Pupil, School B).

All the classrooms are furnished with good chairs and tables for each pupil as well as the teacher. I can say that the classrooms are very bright, comfortable, and attractive (Pat, Teacher, School B).

The classrooms are well ventilated and it creates some sort of serene atmosphere for children to grasp whatever the teacher teaches (Abeeku, Teacher, School B).

In addition, this is the school mower. In some schools they will spent their time ... the study hours to weed their fields (Kojo, Pupil, School B).

So long as the school facilities are there, functioning well both the teachers and children will continue to be motivated and to excel (Zuni, Asst Head Teacher, School B).

This place is more like a home for the children because they feel safe and happy all the time ... and the teachers too (Pat, Teacher, School B).

Unlike Basic School A, these quotes and similar others from the verbal and visual texts of participants in Basic School B were interpreted as expressing support, adequacy, and satisfaction. Similarly, these meanings developed from the fusion of participants and my horizons show participants' profound eagerness about their built spaces. Of course, participants' physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic realities as users of SBEs were subjective, yet their desires and needs for positive and supportive built spaces were evident from data gathered and analysed in this study. However, these realities even though based on four main contrasting themes, the boundaries often overlapped and culminated into one overarching theme.

The distinctions among and levels of the physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic needs of SBEs were considered as valid for

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practical reasons, yet there were cases where they interrelated or overlapped. Notwithstanding these interrelationships and overlaps across the themes and sub-themes, there were some differences within them which justify keeping them separate. Essentially, the demarcation of these themes was only an artificial representation of users' lived experiences of SBEs, as understood and recounted by the study participants. Indeed, the themes occurred simultaneously and the demarcation only sought to provide the reader some amount of clarity. Thus, the physical, functional, psychosocial and aesthetic dimensions of SBEs, which seemed to be important to the participants, might well be more or less than satisfactory to put up with in use. Figure 5 is a visual model developed to illustrate the realities of users of SBEs.
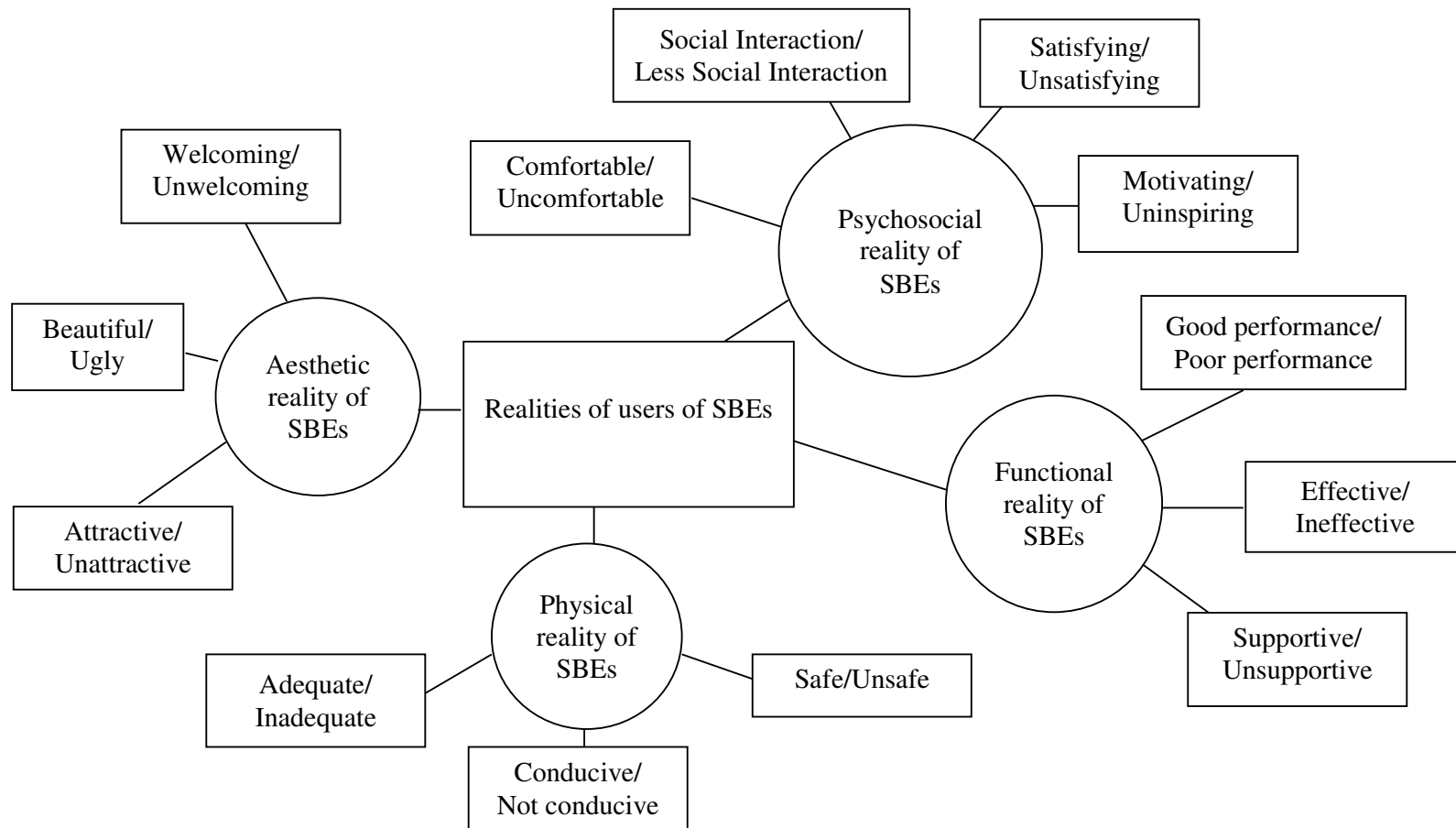
Figure 5. A visual model illustrating realities of SBE users. Source: Author's construction

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Discussion of Results

This section discusses the results based on the four research questions guiding this study in the light of related theoretical and empirical literature. The discussion is informed by the four main themes and the overarching theme developed.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked about the lived experiences of users of SBEs from two basic schools in the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. This research question sought to describe lived experiences of participant – head teachers, teachers, and pupils – as users of SBEs from one low and one high performing basic schools. The study, based on the analysis of the textual data gathered from field notes, interview, and photo data, demonstrated that SBEs shaped the lived experiences of participants involved. The participants of the two basic schools were unanimous with regard to the physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic dimensions of SBEs. However, in essence, they described their lived experiences of SBEs differently. Indeed, the experiential descriptions of participants in Basic School A revealed negative users' experiences, unlike those in Basic School B who had positive users' experiences.

As the evidence suggests, the participants from both schools were conscious of their physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic needs of their respective SBEs. These SBE needs revealed that the participants were more likely to experience their built spaces positively or negatively based on the existing conditions of the two SBEs. Thus, the result that the existing SBEs shaped participants' lived experiences negatively in one basic school

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and positively in the other basic school emanated from the data. This result, perhaps, could be because participants in Basic School A had their SBE to be of poor quality, inadequate, and ill-equipped and might not be satisfied as their counterparts in Basic School B. As the literature suggests, built environment users are more likely to have positive or negative physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic experiences (Kjævrang, 2006; Matz, 2012; Vischer, 2008).

In addition, the data from participants in basic school A suggest a negative user experience and a positive user experience in basic school B. This means that immediate measures need to be taken to improve the SBE users' experiences in basic school A, because the existing SBE might make it difficult for both users to learn, teach, and work effectively to raise the level of academic performance. When users' lived experiences of a SBE are described as negative, it implies that that SBE is not generally supporting users' activities and well-being. It also means that the SBE does not enable high productivity and efficiency, and therefore, does not allow users to achieve good quality educational outcomes. Again, the SBE does not encourage users to enter a 'flow state' i.e., a mental state of focus, concentration, total immersion that engenders productivity and satisfaction. However, as Matz (2012) indicated, it is important to note that the characteristics associated with positive and negative users experiences are vague, subjective, and not easily measurable, and therefore do not lend themselves to easy checklist-style verification.

Moreover, there are some cases where a SBE can have rather negative characteristics, yet some users still describe their experiences of certain spaces

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positively. This can happen, for instance, if a particular space in the SBE facilitates enjoyable or memorable experiences, such as social interaction, or if the space is perceived or experienced as providing important value or support. For instance, the poorly developed playground in Basic School A allowed children to play and interact with one another, and so even if the space or facility was poor, users might still highly value its availability and use as one participant indicated. Indeed, it is not so much the use that the users focused on, but rather the emotional aspect of social interaction and connection that the use of the space allows them to enjoy.

Besides, the result underscores the complexities of the relationship between SBE and the experiences of participants as indicated by Uline et al. (2010) and Vischer (2008). For example, as Vischer suggested the built environment is effective and functional or functionally comfortable, if users indicate that environmental features or conditions support what users are doing. However, while users of SBEs do not assess, for example, their functional comfort because of simple physical comfort, it is important to note that these dimensions of SBEs create feelings of anxiety and frustration for some users in some basic schools or, alternately, create feelings of ease and comfort in for other users in other basic schools. Thus, in this study, users of SBEs bring their knowledge, feelings, memories, expectations, and preferences into their assessment and description of their built environments. As work environments, SBEs could be physically, functionally, psychosocially, and aesthetically comfortable and stressful based users' feedback at a point in time.

The evidence shows SBE users are more likely to have their lived experiences shaped positively or negatively based on the physical, functional, psychological, social, and aesthetic dimensions of place experience. The negative and positive users' experiences as realities of the two SBEs are not linear as indicated in the extended model but rather recursive with all occurring at the same time. At any point in time and space, users' lived experiences of SBEs can be put on a continuum from, for example, aesthetically pleasant to aesthetically unpleasant (Vischer, 2008). Thus, aesthetically pleasant SBE implies positive lived experiences of user; otherwise, their lived experiences are negative. Indeed, this result is unique because it extends our understanding of the SBE needs of users.

Finally, the result suggests that participants from the two basic schools explored shared the same ideal of physically, functionally, psychosocially, and aesthetically positive SBE. This result, while extending Vischer's (2008) model enhanced our understanding that in a typical SBE, users – head teachers, teachers, and pupils – interacting with their built spaces live through different realities (positive or negative) of SBEs as discussed in Chapter Five. Indeed, the adapted model is representative of the participants involved in this study and can be transferred to other settings or participants. This model, therefore, suggests that responses or feedback from users of SBEs are perhaps relevant or even crucial means for a better understanding of users' lived experiences of SBEs. Figure 6 shows a visual representation of the extended model for understanding users' lived experiences of SBEs.
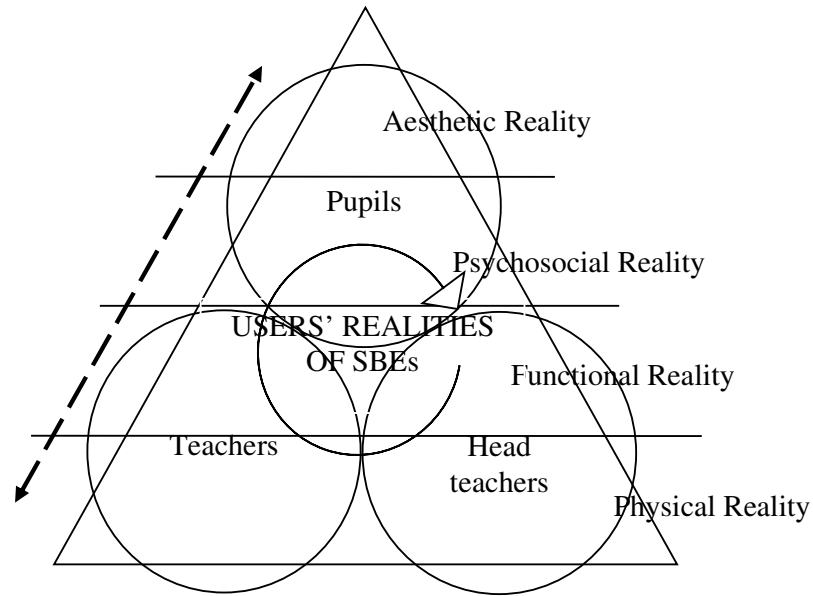
Figure 6. An adapted model for understanding SBE users' experiences.
Source: Vischer (2008)

Jacqueline Vischer has recognized the need for a simple model for
assessing user's experience of the built environment that helps researchers not
only to develop ideas but also to contribute to understanding. In addition, like
Vischer's model, this adapted model offers a valuable theoretical foundation
with its heuristic ability to generate new ideas, its focus on building users'
experience, and its flexibility. This adapted model can serve as an effective
tool for researchers interested in exploring SBE users' experiences.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked about the messages users' lived
experiences of SBEs conveyed to them from the two basic schools. This
question sought to identify the messages sent to participants through their
lived experiences. Based on the analysis of textual data gathered, this study
found that users' lived experiences of the two SBEs conveyed messages to
them. For example, in Basic School A, the messages such as 'unvalued',

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'uncared for' and 'education is not important' conveyed to the participants were interpreted as 'wrong' because they did not reflect the essence of SBE. However, the messages sent to participants in Basic School B were interpreted as 'right' messages they reflected the essence of SBE. While it is not surprising that contrasting messages are sent to participants from different basic schools, this finding suggests that SBEs can send either wrong messages or right messages to their users.

In addition, the evidence from this study revealed that the SBE for participants in Basic School A reflected a 'place of failure', unlike participants in Basic School B whose SBE portrayed a 'place of success'. This result supports the suggestion of Cash (1993, p. 83) that "schools should reflect the environment of success" because SBEs are physical representations of a public message about the value of education. In addition, this result complements the view that decaying, unsafe, poorly equipped and furnished and inadequate school facilities send the wrong message to students, teachers, and community members (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988; Lackney, 1994). As the literature also pointed out, SBEs of high quality signal to the pupils and students, and society that the school or the educational institution is an important place, and therefore, signal to them that they are important (American Association of School Administrators, 1999; Kjævrang, 2003).

Besides, evidence from the current study shows that while the participants in Basic School A received messages that reflected that they were undervalued and uncared for, those in Basic School B had messages that reflected that they were being valued, respected, and cared for. This evidence

highlights the claim that deplorable conditions of SBEs may convey wrong messages to users. For example, "You are not worth the effort of providing and maintain a good school" (AFT, 2007, p. 43). As Sixsmith et al. (2004) also noted children and adults in poorly designed schools are likely to feel that they are a reflection of their SBE: undervalued, worthless, dirty, and uncared for. Thus, depending on their conditions, SBEs can tell users who they are and what they should think about the world (CABE, 2011). The fact that the two SBEs sent contrasting messages to their respective users, perhaps, may be because of the SBE inequities of the two basic schools. Clearly, the messages SBEs convey to their users are worth considering.

Furthermore, as the evidence shows, it is not an idle claim to suggest that SBEs send different signals to users based on the condition of their SBEs. For instance, as Kozol (1992) noted, the ugliness of a school building in disrepair conveys clear messages to users that they are not highly valued, or cared for. Kozol's claim is supported by Earthman (2002) who reported that the atmosphere created by a school's physical surroundings and communicated to the students signals the value the school places on the physical conditions of teaching and learning. This result further buttresses the claim by Earthman, Kozol, and others who reported that places and buildings or physical settings convey important messages to their users.

Moreover, in this study, participants from the low performing basic school (LPBS) felt not valued for learning and working a negative SBE while those from a high performing basic school (HPBS) felt valued learning and working in a positive SBE. According to participants' data, where children and adults in basic schools feel valued and do not have to face with any

problem or barrier in their teaching and learning activities, the feeling of valued may be interpreted as respected or important. On the other hand, in situations where users of SBEs do not feel valued, having to face several barriers and problems in teaching and learning activities, the feeling unvalued may be considered as disrespected or less important. Thus, in the context of basic education, SBE messages can be demoralizing or encouraging.

Finally, based on the evidence from this study, it is clear that different messages were sent to users emerge across the two basic schools, and these differences in messages point to an 'unfair' or 'unequal' conditions of teaching and learning between the schools. From the foregoing discussions, it is evident that SBEs convey the wrong messages which are likely to demoralize their users and rights messages which are likely to encourage their users as participants' data in this study purported to suggest. As Kjævrang (2003) indicated, SBEs convey messages that may be encouraging or demoralizing about their worth and the value of education as reported. However, messages SBEs convey to users should not taken for granted.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked that in view of research questions (1) and (2), what meanings did SBEs communicate to users from the two basic schools. This research question sought to understand the meanings SBEs communicated to users through their lived experiences and messages sent to them. The study found that meanings SBEs communicated to the participants revealed their being-in-the-world (the way users feel or are involved in SBEs) (Heidegger, 1962). Specifically, the study revealed that participants in Basic School A felt neglected, while those in Basic School B felt supported by their

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respective SBEs, reflecting the participants' being-in-the-world of neglect and support. It is evident from the data that the two SBEs communicated contrasting meanings to the participants resulting from their everyday experiences of SBEs and messages these experiences sent to users.

In this study, being-in-the-world of neglect is likened to 'presence-at-hand' understood as a "self-conscious, perhaps disinterested reflection, or any attitude in which there occurs a feeling of separation from matters" (Relph, 1985). On the other hand, being-in-the-world of support is likened to 'readiness-to-hand' understood as a "pre-reflective use that appreciates 'the practical value of things'; their immediate use in a given context" (Relph as cited in Filmer, 2006, p. 19). From the literature, the importance of meanings built environments or places communicate to users has been emphasized (Rapoport, 1990; Relph, 1976). For example, Pasalar (2001) wrote that people interact with their built environments making sense of them by giving meanings to them as 'good' and 'bad' or 'attractive' and 'unattractive'.

This result further provides support for Relph's (as cited in Seamon & Sowers, 2008) concepts of 'existential insideness' and 'existential outsideness' that are the core lived structure of place as they have meanings in human life. In this study, the 'existential outsideness' or a sense of strangeness and alienation, which is likened to users' being-in-the-world of neglect, revealed how users of SBE in Basic School A felt hindered or alienated by their built spaces. On the other hand, users of SBE in Basic School B felt inside their built spaces when they felt 'at ease' rather than 'stressed', 'safe' rather than 'threatened' or 'here' rather than 'there' (Seamon & Sowers). This result is not

surprising because users of the two SBEs had their instructional and non-instructional spaces supporting them differently.

The result also implies that the meanings SBEs communicate to users are more likely to reveal significant structures of their SBEs. As the literature suggests, SBEs are just more than depiction; they are representation because they engage all the senses of users, awaken their memories, and fuel their aspirations (Nivala, 1997). This result provides support for some authors who suggested that participants' sense or meaning of place is more likely to be interpreted as a general way they feel about a place (Najafi & Shariff, 2011; Relph, 1976). The result, therefore, lends credence to the claims that place or the built environment communicates meanings to users (Rapoport, 1990; Relph, Skantze, n.d.; Tuan, 1977).

From the discussion above, it is evident that users' lived experiences of SBEs are more likely to be interpreted as being-in-the-world of 'neglect' or 'support'. In this study, the 'Being' of users of SBEs in basic schools was considered within the framework of being-in-the-world and against the backdrop of the life world in which they lived (Heidegger, 1962, 1996). Consistent with phenomenology of place (Relph, 1976) as grounded in Heidegger's (1962) phenomenology of being, this result suggests that SBEs play an integral part in users' experiences and meanings. As Heidegger (1962) noted the theoretical requirement of the 'Being' of users' of SBEs is to enquire into the nature or meaning of users' lived experiences of SBEs. Perhaps, this notion highlights the fact that users' being-in-the-world is a way, participants in this study, as human beings, existed, acted, felt, or involved in the world of SBEs (van Manen, 1990).

Research Question 4

Finally, Research Question 4 asked how meanings communicated to users of SBEs from the two basic schools manifested unequal access to educational opportunities in the context of social democracy. This research question intended to find out how the meanings communicated to users of two SBEs manifested unequal access to educational opportunities. The meanings SBEs communicated to users of two SBEs were being-in-the-world of neglect and being-in-the-world of support, which mean that the users had contrasting circumstances or conditions of their SBEs. Thus, the evidence clear shows that the meanings SBEs communicated to users are more likely to manifest unequal access to educational opportunities. However, given that all basic schools follow the same academic programmes and participate in the same national examinations, the contrasting meaning of the two SBEs, perhaps, indicates unequal access to effective teaching and learning opportunities.

This study found evidence that meanings the two SBEs communicated to their users in both basic schools point to the different circumstances or conditions of SBEs they inhabit. This implies that users of the two SBEs had unequal access to educational opportunities to teach, learn, or work effectively. Consistent with assertions from previous studies (Amedahe, 2007; Ankomah, 2002; Djangmah, 2011), this result extends the views that users of SBEs do not have equal educational opportunities and achievements at the basic level of education. The result further amplifies the view of Sheets (2011) who suggested that equal educational opportunities may be unavailable for all users if the condition of a SBE in one basic school is such that the quality of education provided in that school is unequal to that another schools.

Furthermore, in this study the evidence do not only violates the principles of social democracy but also contradicts the position of the 1992 Constitution (GoG, 1992), which guarantees all Ghanaians the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities as well as safe, healthy, and satisfactory work conditions for all. It appears that in the context of Ghanaian basic education, the right of users of SBEs to equal educational opportunities and facilities for all is perhaps a mere rhetoric than reality. This study's demand for equal educational opportunities is central to social democracy and does not mean that every user of SBE must live, learn, teach, or work in the same way however (Carlsson & Lindgren, 2007). Indeed, this study does not argue for all users of SBEs to be same, but rather puts an emphasis on every user's equal right to positive and supportive SBE that supports users' effective educational outcomes and well-being in basic schools.

Moreover, the finding highlights the unfairness in the distribution of SBE, as an educational resource. Contrary to Brighouse's (2010) intuitive case for educational equality which rests on the intuition of what it takes a competition to be fair, this finding suggests that users of SBEs form the two basic schools do not equal teaching and learning opportunities to have a fair competition. Indeed, this study based on this finding contends that equality of educational opportunity is a central principle of equity or justice. While it is legitimate for SBE-users' prospects for excellent performance to be a function of users' talent and effort, their opportunities for effective teaching and learning outcomes should not be a function of the SBE, type, or location basic school. In this context, it would be unfair for equal educational opportunities for all users to be a function of their SBEs. As Hutmacher (2002, p. 20) noted,

people increasingly consider they share the same humanity with equal rights and dignity, inequalities are more deeply experienced as injustices".

In this study, equality or equity of educational opportunity refers to equal or fair access to instructional and non-instructional spaces or facilities. The concern about equal or equitable access to educational resources particularly SBEs echoes the idea that fairness should govern the competition among basic schools. However, for the competition to be fair and basic education truly meritocratic, equal access to the SBEs that ensure success must be available to all users. This requires that equal educational opportunities to compete be available to all users of SBEs regardless of the type or location of school. In particular, it implies that equitable teaching and learning opportunities must be accessible to all users of SBEs. From humanistic perspective, where all SBE users share the same humanity with equal rights to educational and work opportunities, inequalities or inequities are deeply experienced as unfairness or injustice.

Summary

This chapter presented the interpretation, understanding, and discussion of the findings developed from this study. The understanding of the phenomenon presented here is an interpretation of the texts and images from participants' experiential descriptions interlaced with my understanding. During the interpretation of the emergent themes, participants' verbal and visual texts were analysed to develop a better understanding of the essence of being users of SBEs in basic school context. The chapter also presented the discussion of the research findings based on the four research questions that guided the research. The following chapter is the final chapter of this study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final chapter, I present the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study. The chapter places specific emphasis on the overview of the research process, key findings, limitations, implications, and contribution of the study. Finally, the chapter presents the recommendations of the study, suggestions for further research, a reflection on the research journey, and a final thought.

Summary of Research Process

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this interpretive study was to explore the lived experiences of users SBEs in the context of Ghanaian basic education to understand how meanings communicated to them manifest unequal access to educational opportunities. To achieve this purpose, four research questions based on the central research question were explored:

1. What are the lived experiences of users of SBEs from two basic schools in the KEEA Municipality of the Central Region?

2. What messages do users' lived experiences of SBEs convey to the users from the two basic schools?

3. In view of research questions (1) and (2), what meanings do SBEs communicate to users from the two basic schools?

4. How do the users' meanings of SBEs manifest inequality of educational opportunities in the context of social democracy?

In answering these research questions, this exploration study used hermeneutic phenomenology, informed by the work of van Manen (1990), underpinned by interpretive paradigm. This paradigm assumed that the social world has a very precarious ontological status, and that what passes as social reality does not exist in any concrete sense, but is the of subjective and inter-subjective experience of individuals. Data were gathered from ten participants comprising two head teachers, four teachers, and four junior high school (JHS) 3 pupils, purposively sampled from two basic schools. One of the basic schools was a high performing basic school (HPBS) and the other was a low performing basic school (LPBS). The participants consisted of children and adults; six of whom were males and four were females to allow for uniques experiences of SBE users.

Using closed observations of built spaces, conversational interviews, and hermeneutic photography, verbal and visual data were gathered. Interview data were transcribed verbatim; and together with participants' photographs, which were sorted, coded, and managed manually and electronically. The study used computer assisted qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 7, to isolate themes into relevant categories through reflexive and interpretive activities. Hermeneutic phenomenology strategies were used data analysis. Ethical conduct of the study and trustworthiness of results were ensured.

Key Results

One overarching theme developed from four main themes to explicate how meanings SBEs communicated to users manifested unequal access to educational opportunities. The overarching theme was 'reality of being-in-the-world' of neglect (present-at-hand) and support (ready-to-hand) developed from physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic realities of SBEs. These themes combined to explicate users' lived experiences, messages, meanings of the SBEs, and therefore, informed research questions 1 to 3. The following paragraphs summarize the key findings of the study.

First, the study found that participants from the two basic schools described their experiential knowledge about their respective SBEs differently. In Basic School A, the participants' data revealed users lacked supportive built spaces, unlike users in Basic School B, who had supportive built spaces. Thus, the SBEs shaped the lived experiences of their respective users negatively and positively. This finding reflects the claims of positive and negative user experience (Matz, 2012) and functionally comfortable and dysfunctional or stressful (Vischer, 2008).

Second, the study found that users' lived experiences of their SBEs conveyed contrasting messages to users. For instance, in Basic School A, the SBE, through users' lived experiences, conveyed demoralizing messages of unvalued, and uncared for, unlike users of SBEs in Basic School B, who received encouraging messages of being valued or cared for. This finding is consistent with claims in the literature that school physical settings convey significant messages to people (Cash, 1993; Earthman, 2002).

Third, the study found that as places, SBEs communicated meanings to their users indicating their being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962). The study revealed that being-in-the-world of SBE might be neglecting and supporting. In this study, the SBEs, through users' lived experiences and messages sent to them, communicated being-in-the-world of neglect to users in Basic School A and being-in-the-world of support to users in Basic School B. This finding exemplifies Relph's (1976) concepts of existential insideness and outsideness.

Finally, the study found that being-in-the-world of neglect and support manifested unequal access to educational opportunities to learn, teach, or work, given that both basic schools follow the same academic programmes and participate in the same national examinations. This finding contradicts Brighouse's (2010) meritocratic conception of educational equality in distributing educational resources, which is based on fairness and justice. For him, the principle of educational equality must guide states to do whatever they can to promote educational equality.

Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations. Inherently, interpretive studies are not generalizable because there is no single truth or one way of seeing things (Crotty, 2005). Thus, results of this study cannot be generalized beyond the research settings in which they occurred. Hammersley (1992) suggested transferability of the research results to other setting as an important indicator instead of generalizability. Thus, in this study, my aim was to describe the research context sufficiently to help readers judge the applicability of the results to their own contexts (Hammersley, 1992).

In addition, hermeneutic phenomenology relatively new approach to educational research is steadily evolving and thus, subject to limitations and amateur attempts. A major concern is that many researchers using this approach lack the philosophical understanding of the approach (Ray, as cited in Williamson, 2005). While this concern applied to me and appeared to cloud the credibility of the study, in Chapter Three of this thesis, I attempted to resolve this limitation by thoroughly grounding my knowledge in this approach to research.

Furthermore, the deliberate focus of the study on only two basic schools, direct users, and instructional and non-instructional spaces limited the study. Thus, the research design used generated findings that are only interpretations and snapshots of the lived experiences and meanings of only ten users of SBEs from only two basic schools in Ghana. These interpretations are likely to change or evolve over time or space, even with the same users. Moreover, restricting the study to five instructional and five non-instructional spaces of SBEs limited the understanding of SBEs, as these are not the only spaces in SBEs.

Besides, notwithstanding the limitations, the main strengths of this study is that it provides "understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 22) and serves as a valuable beginning for experiential reflections of SBEs. Indeed, the limitations did not detract from the significance of the findings as the objectives of this study were achieved. Finally, further SBE research is needed to strengthen the claim of this study.

Conclusions

This interpretive study has provided valuable insights into the lived experiences and meanings of SBEs in the Ghanaian context of basic education and social democracy. Indeed, what is interesting in this study is that in Basic school A, although the participants' experiential descriptions largely pointed to negative and unsupportive SBE, one participant, Ika, for instance, described the playgrounds as 'good'. Again, in Basic School B, Kojo also, for instance, indicated his dissatisfaction about the frequency of use of the equipment in their science laboratory.

Clearly, these dissenting views or lone voices, although contradict with many of the participants' experiential descriptions of their SBEs, are important because they tell us, first, something that many other users may not value or see as important; and second, they tell type of who the user is and what he or she expects from the SBE. However, based on the evidence from this study, it is argued that SBE inequities as revealed by users' meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities and well-being. Education professionals need to reflect on users' experiences and meanings of SBEs to develop a deeper understanding of how SBEs can address the disparities in teaching and learning conditions and outcomes.

The study draws on a combination of theoretical frameworks to deepen understanding of a phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs. While the main theoretical frameworks underpinning this study provided a valuable basis for understanding how users experience and make sense of their SBEs, they, however, did not highlight dissenting or lone views that are likely to be sources of neglect or support. Although, the evidence from this study appears

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to support the user-centred theory of the built environment, it is inconclusive. Admittedly, that the current study is far from being conclusive, therefore, care in needed in interpreting the results. However, this study has achieved its purpose of creating awareness and deepening understanding, and therefore, contributes the extant SBE knowledge. The following sections present the study's implications and contributions to scholarship.

Implications for SBE Practice

The results from this study have implications of SBE practice. First, the study draws on a holistic picture of the users' lived experiences of SBEs to offer education practitioners with an opportunity to reflect on users' meanings of SBEs and its implication for equal teaching and learning opportunities. Improved SBE practices need to involve all users in school facilities planning and decision making. This identifies users' lived experiences of SBEs as central and shows how users' perspectives provide valuable insights into SBE knowledge and understanding. SBE practices should therefore consider users' pre-reflective and immediate awareness of users. The description of participants' lived experiences of SBEs as negative and positive buttresses the fact that the two SBEs had contrasting qualities the SBEs. There is the need to adopt best SBE practices and develop strategies that include the physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic needs of users.

In addition, SBEs practices need to ensure that the importance of quality and equitable basic education for all is not only a rhetoric but also reinforced by the messages SBEs convey to users. As important civic symbols, SBEs do not only house the task basic education but also convey messages about our commitment to education and the well-being of the people involved.

While the literature, supported by this empirical study provides some evidence of SBEs conveying different messages to their users, research in this area is lacking. However, the study gives the indication of the potential messages SBEs can send to their suers. The results suggest that best SBE practices need to take into account the fact that SBEs send signals to users about our commitment to education and their well-being.

Furthermore, the study highlights the disconnection between policy and practice and the need to have a deeper understanding of users' meanings of SBEs to help improve practice. The knowledge of users' meanings is necessary for education authorities to develop and implement SBE guidelines to reduce the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities across basic schools. SBE practice to improve and sustain SBEs needs to be informed by clear understanding and strategies to achieve its aims. The evidence from this study suggests the importance of involving users of SBEs can improve practice as well as inform policy.

Besides, there is the compelling need for best SBE practices to consider SBE meanings in deepening our understanding, planning, and management of school physical facilities. The evidence from this study highlights participants' being-in-the-world of neglect suggesting the SBE as 'present-at-hand' where it loses its usefulness in one basic school. In the other basic school the study highlights participants' being-in-the-wrold of support portraying the SBE as 'readiness-to-hand' where the SBE is seen as a useful place. This implies that SBE users and decision makers need to work together to repair SBEs that hinder users' activities and to sustain those support their

users' activities. Perhaps, this could close the gap in meanings SBEs communicate to users in different basic schools with different SBE conditions.

Finally, given that, all basic schools in Ghana follow the same academic programmes and participate in the same national examination; all users of SBEs in basic schools have the right to equal educational facilities, opportunities, safe, healthy, and satisfactory learning and working conditions (GoG, 1992). From this study, meanings SBEs communicated to users manifested unequal access to educational opportunities. This suggests that SBEs practices need to focus on bridging the gap in teaching and learning opportunities in basic schools. However, what is clear to claim from this study is that users of SBEs with similar lived experiences, messages, and meanings have equal educational opportunities. Gaining this understanding would help develop policies that sustain such SBEs that really support users' activities, performance, and well-being.

Contribution of the Study

The present study contributes significantly to the area of scholarship. First, practically, this study deepens our understanding of existing body of knowledge in the light of lived experiences of SBEs in general and how meanings SBEs communicate manifest inequality of educational opportunities. Indeed, this added understanding could help local school managers, decision makers, and SBE professionals to take informed actions to improve upon negative and unsupportive SBEs and to sustain positive and supportive ones. In addition, the new insight to the SBE literature would help practitioners in consultation with SBE users to adopt best practices to shore up quality and equitable basic education.

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The second contribution of this study is theoretical. By conceptualizing SBEs as places of human experience consisting of instructional and non-instructional spaces created to support their users, this study has extended the frontier of knowledge. This extension of knowledge draws on different theoretical frameworks to set data and interpretations from multiple sources against the works of Brighouse (2010), Earthman and Lemasters (2011), Heidegger (1962), Relph (1976), and Vischer (2008) to shed light on how the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs could be understood in basic education and social democracy contexts. Additionally, the conceptual models developed in this study would serve as a theoretical foundation on which to build further understanding.

The third contribution of this study rests in its methodological approach. Using the interpretive paradigm enabled understanding of the phenomenon of lived experiences of SBEs in context. Hermeneutic phenomenology proved to be an appropriate methodology to explore the lived experiences of SBEs from the perspectives of basic school head teachers, teachers, and pupils as users. As a methodology, hermeneutic phenomenology provides a credible and rigours strategy for thinking about and understanding lived experiences of SBEs. Indeed, the adoption and application of this methodology, through its reflexive nature enabled me to engage my own experiences of SBEs in deeply understanding the phenomenon, the methods used, and myself as the researcher. Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology has "significant gravitas" (Gubrium, as cited in Nudzor, 2007, p. 304) for understanding the phenomenon studied.

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Finally, the present study has contributed immensely to my personal and professional career development by broadening my horizon beyond quantitative research. It exposed me to different but important theoretical and methodological perspectives and people; equipped me with new and additional research skills to contribute meaningfully to my chosen career. Indeed, the study has offered me the academic qualification, skills, and abilities to conduct research with little or no supervision. I intend to disseminate the results from this study through the distribution of executive summary, seminars, workshops, and local, national, and international conferences as well as publish academic papers in peer-reviewed journals. Ultimately, the dissemination of the results will create the desired awareness and stimulate debate about the importance of users' meanings of SBE in relation to the disparities in teaching and learning opportunities.

Recommendations

Recommendations for SBE Practice

The study, based on its results, recommends that:

1. Municipal and District directors of education should employ users' meanings of SBEs in providing and maintaining positive and supportive SBEs. This is because users' lived experiences and meanings of SBEs can enhance our understanding and inform SBE practice and policy.

2. School administrators of all basic schools, particularly those with negative users' experiences of SBEs should form SBE committee comprising all users groups. The SBE committee should be responsible

for periodic evaluation of existing SBEs. In addition, the committee's recommendations should inform SBE maintenance and repairs.

3. National and local education agencies should develop short- to medium-term plans for constructing new SBEs, and sustainably maintaining existing ones to enhance equitable basic education. The agencies should prescribe standards and spaces based on best SBE practice to which all basic schools in the KEEA Municipality and the country should conform.

4. The Government of Ghana and other stakeholders of basic education should strive to make positive and supportive SBEs for all a high priority and a continuous endeavour. A comprehensive SBE policy should be developed and implemented to ensure equal teaching and learning opportunities for all users of SBEs in basic schools.

5. There is need for stakeholders at national, regional, district, community, and school levels to be actively interested in sustainably maintaining the SBEs. This is to ensure that SBEs remain civic symbols to reflect a nation and community's values and importance of education irrespective of the location and type of basic school.

6. Guided by this information, education agencies must ensure that all children and adults in basic schools enjoy their right to equity, equality of teaching and learning opportunities, healthy, safe, and satisfactory work conditions. In the context of humanism and social democracy all users of SBEs should have a fair and equal access to teaching and learning opportunities, given that all basic schools follow the same national curriculum and take part in the same national examinations.

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Suggestions for Future SBE Research

The following suggestions for future research are warranted:

1. This study suggests that research on users' lived experiences and meanings of SBEs appear to be limited. The study explored the lived experiences of SBEs from the standpoint of three direct user groups without any indirect user groups. To further our understanding of the lived experiences of SBEs, research on a larger user population is essential.

2. This study narrowed its conceptualization of SBEs to places consisting of five instructional and five non-instructional spaces. Future research on other important spaces in SBEs not covered in this study is needed to deepen our understanding.

3. This study employed three data collection methods in gathering data. Future research should replicate the results of this study in other school and work settings to confirm and refute the claims in this thesis.

4. This study used a qualitative approach to explore the unique experiences of SBE users from only two basic schools. Mixed methods, post-evaluation, and comparative research into the nature and significance of SBEs in equitable basic education within and across schools is necessary.

Reflection on the Research Journey

This section presents aspects of my reflection on the research experience in exploring the lived experiences of SBE users from two Ghanaian basic schools. It considers my subjectivity as a researcher and intends to be informative. However, this section is not a manual for qualitative

research practice, but may serve as a useful guide for the reader about what happened and lessons learned. It is organized into three linear but recursive stages of pre-fieldwork, fieldwork, and post-fieldwork for the sake of convenience. Thus, the stages are interrelated and overlapped.

Pre-fieldwork stage. In October 2010, I enrolled on the newly mounted PhD programme in Qualitative Research Methods at the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA), University of Cape Coast. While my expectations were high about the programme, this academic journey was a mixture of opportunities and challenges. First, I had the opportunity to fulfil my dream of acquiring an advanced research degree to enable me contribute meaningfully to national and global development. With the support of Prof G. K. T. Oduro and IEPA, I had the opportunity to pursue the programme on a Commonwealth Split-site Scholarship at the University of Bath, UK, having won the award.

I spent a total of one year (two six-month periods) in the UK studying and working on my thesis. This international exposure had tremendous influence on my study and personality. First, I had access to relevant library resources, undertook several career-training courses, and had periodic discussions with my supervisors concerning the progress of work. In addition, my theoretical and methodological understandings of the phenomenon of interest as well as research and career development skills improved beyond measure. However, integrating my quantitative background with my training in qualitative research methods was a key challenge initially. With time, it became clear that my research orientation could vary depending on the research issue at hand. Indeed, I also made a couple of friends.

In the first year of my study, identifying a research topic was quite easier than getting a research focus. With school facilities planning and management as my area of interest, SBE was select as the research topic as a way of building on my master's thesis. After several consultations with the literature, I found that there was an absence of qualitative work on what it meant to be users of SBEs although research continues to document the importance of school buildings. In particular, it was unclear how meanings SBEs communicate to users could manifest educational inequality of opportunities. With this gap in the literature, my focus emerged inductively as understanding how meanings SBEs communicated to users through their everyday experiences and messages SBEs sent to them manifested unequal opportunities to teach, learn, or work. Indeed, this focus emerged during my second year into the PhD programme after several consultations with relevant literature and discussions with my supervisors.

To situate the study theoretically, I read extensively to identify theories and concepts germane to my topic. I found user-centred theory of the built environment, phenomenology of place, philosophy of being-in-the-world, meritocratic conception of educational equality, and theoretical model of physical environment as offering an important theoretical starting point for this study. The theoretical frameworks, therefore, provided a foundation, background, and context for the current study; establishing a bridge between the study and the existing knowledge based. My decision to use these theoretical frameworks was not integrate them into one big theory but to emphasize the multidisciplinary nature the phenomenon of interest. By

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continuous reading of articles and textbook materials, I was able to identify

contextual, conceptual, theoretical, and empirical gaps in the literature.

Indeed, the purpose of my study found support in the interpretive

research approach having considered all the methodological options available.

Reading the methodological literature, I sharpened my understanding of

ontology, epistemology, and methodology of interpretive research. The

flexible nature of qualitative research design allowed my study and its design

to "unfold, cascade, roll, and emerge" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 210).

Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the various qualitative strategies

and methods, I found hermeneutic phenomenological strategy appropriate for

this study because it is rooted in the everyday lived experiences of human

beings in educational settings. The approach also offered the most appropriate,

credible and rigorous strategy for researching lived experiences of users of

SBEs (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; van Manen, 1990).

Another important aspect of this study was to how to choose a research

setting and participants. Choosing a research context, setting, and participants

was quite simple; being aware of the several challenges basic education is

going through in Ghana. Key among the challenges is SBE inequities and

disparities in learning opportunities and academic performance. Thus, I chose

basic education as my research context and two basic schools from the KEEA

Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana as the sites to explore the

phenomenon. Among the reasons for these decisions were the relative limited

knowledge about the phenomenon, manageability, and accessibility of sites

and participants, and participants' willingness to participate in the study

(Bowen, 2005).

After settling on the research approach, I conducted a pilot study for initial structure and guidance with a set of tentative research questions and a basic framework of analysis. This aimed at pre-empting and resolving unanticipated issues that might emerge in the course of the main study. Thus, prior knowledge of the research context, the relevant literature, and the issues that emerged from the pilot study and in the initial stages of the fieldwork facilitated discovering which categories and dimensions of SBEs were important to explore. Thus, details of the study design evolved and took shape throughout the research process.

In qualitative research, ethical considerations are inseparable from the research process. Therefore, I paid attention the institutional guidelines and procedures for dealing with human participants. My main aim was to protect the rights and well-being of the participants. Thus, before submitting my research proposal to the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for ethical approval, I met the ethical standards of IRB. Essentially, I adopted the informed consent approach to set stage for negotiating access. In gaining access, I followed proper protocol procedures. First, I obtained an introductory letter from the IEPA, University of Cape Coast, which enabled me to introduce myself to gatekeepers. With this and a permission letter, I obtained the consent to carry out the study from the Municipal Director Education. I then made reconnaissance visits to the research sites.

In follow-up visits, I sought approval from the basic school head teachers to conduct the study in their schools, soliciting their support to have them, their teachers, and pupils participate in the study. As key gatekeepers, the head teachers accepted this formal way of gaining access with

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appreciation, setting the stage for establishing rapport with prospective participants. I felt welcomed to the two research settings as the head teachers introduced me to the teachers and JHS 3 pupils. I also had the opportunity to introduce myself and to explain the purpose of my study to them. Subsequent visits to the schools helped me to develop trust and a close relationship with the study participants who were motivated to participate freely in the study.

Finally, there was the challenge of appropriate time and venue of the data collection; particularly on the part of pupils, because of the decision not use time-on-task for gathering data. However, through discussions and negotiations with the head teachers and teachers, appropriate times (break times, play periods, and free periods) and venues (office, staffroom, and classroom) were identified and agreed upon. The key lessons learned at this stage are that reading extensively, consulting with key people, and adhering to institutional guidelines, methodological details, and negotiations are crucial to research.

Fieldwork stage. This stage involved data collection, analysis and management, and writing. In line with hermeneutic phenomenological approach, close observation of built spaces, hermeneutic interviews, and photography became essential pathways for obtaining experiential descriptions. My aim of collecting the 'data' of other people's experiences was to develop texts from their experiential descriptions of SBEs (van Manen, 1990). For him, "We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (p. 62). Thus, the close observation of built spaces, hermeneutic interviews, and hermeneutic photography complemented one another in developing a rich text set for analysis.

The challenge, however, was that very little was said in the literature about how to integrate the verbal, visual, and written texts developed from different data collection pathways or methods. While these pathways were considered appropriate for this study, triangulating them was difficult. Despite the utility of these pathways and the rapport with the study participants, sometimes, I wrongly felt that they were inadequate for the study. Although the participants responded to the questions asked, it was impossible to explore all of their everyday experiences of the SBEs. I often wondered how three pathways would help me to develop meanings of SBEs from the data gathered. However, through further readings of previous studies that used the same methodological approach I could interpret and understand how the participants made sense of their everyday experiences of SBEs.

As usual with qualitative research, the data collection went hand in hand with data analysis. Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed verbatim the interview session. Initially, the transcriptions took more time than expected, with its associated cumbersomeness and tiredness. It was demanding and time-consuming. At one time, I thought of seeking assistance, but realized that it was an opportunity to learn so I continued. With time, I was able to improve upon my speed of transcribing the recorded interviews. Although, I had spent some time learning the CAQDAS, NVivo 7, I never felt completely in control of analysing and managing all the data I had collected with the software.

With the volume of the qualitative data gathered, devising a system to sort and to make sense of the data was challenging. However, the good thing about the NVivo 7 was that it helped in coding and managing the data.

Initially, identifying meaning units to categorize, to organize, and to reflect on was demanding. This process of finding meaning continued as categories of meaning units developed through reading and rereading of participants interview transcripts. With time, the process became easier, and I began to find similar and dissimilar meaning units that developed into interpretive concepts, sub-themes, main themes, and overarching theme.

One interesting moment for me on the field was when I gave the transcribed interviews to the study participants for member checking. While the child participants reviewed and accepted the verbatim transcript as their own accounts, the adult participants wanted to find out whether I would present or publish their accounts with the mannerisms, interjections, and grammatical errors in their transcripts. One adult participant did correct the errors in his transcript. However, the others requested me to edit their accounts before presenting them in the research report.

For me, just understanding exploring the meanings SBEs communicate to their users in the two basic schools was not enough. I needed to go beyond the meanings to find out if those reveal anything contradictory to provisions in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Although the participants did not specifically indicate their equal or unequal access to educational opportunities, my challenge was to find out how their meanings manifested inequality of teaching and learning opportunities. Thus, developing themes to reflect the SBE disparities between the two basic schools was an onerous task of dealing with the data. It was only when I considered the physical, functional, psychosocial, and aesthetic dimensions of SBEs that I was able to develop appropriate themes, which were meaningful.

Finally, this study took a period of 14 weeks of fieldwork to gather verbal and visual data from the two basic schools selected for this study, visiting each school three times per week. This period of immersion enabled me to explore the phenomenon under study and to gain a fair understanding of how meanings SBEs communicated to users manifested unequal access to educational opportunities between the two basic schools. Certainly, the key lesson learned at this stage was that qualitative research is demanding, time-consuming and cumbersomeness activity, yet a worthwhile experience.

Post-fieldwork stage. This stage involved largely the writing and rewriting of the research report. Here, my intention in composing the story of users of SBEs in the context of Ghanaian basic education, as it appeared to consciousness, was not to produce a generalized account that ignores the uniqueness of the everyday experiences of users of SBEs in context. Indeed, the evidence from study was not a compelling and could not be generalized over a wider population. Rather, my desire was to create awareness and understanding of how a critical factor of good quality basic education may be perpetuating a social problem. Thus, it was important that the writing and rewriting of the hermeneutic phenomenological story would be true to its objectives and the participating basic schools as experienced by users of SBEs and interpreted by me (van Manen, 1990). The length of this thesis was not something that I planned for or would have wished for but its trustworthiness required a thick description of the research process.

For me the challenge was how to present a thesis that reflects the essence of SBEs as places of human experiences and meanings and as tools for accomplishing an end. Thus, writing with data in a way that was engaging

and captivating to produce a unique story of users of SBEs was part of the challenge. The back and forth decision of what to include and not to include, coupled with restriction on number of pages of the report was daunting and frustrating. Added to the frustration was the limited opportunity of presenting the findings of my study at any conference for a constructive feedback. However, feedback from my supervisors coupled with the writing and rewriting process, which began from the conception of this study, and continued until now, helped in this direction. The writing and rewriting process appeared to me as tedious and never-ending aspect of the interpretive research. Sometimes, I wondered whether any other researcher investigating the same phenomenon as explored in this study would have presented the story the same way I presented it.

Importantly, going into the two research settings as an outsider gave me the opportunity to have a bird's eye view that insiders might not have. As I gathered the data, developed my thoughts, and reflected on what I had gathered, I became confident in my interpretation of the data, as I understood them. I was aware that many of my interpretations found agreement with the participants I interacted with from the two basic schools. The study's purpose has been to fill a gap within educational literature about how qualitative research can help our understanding of lived experiences of users of SBEs. Indeed, this study has provided a first-hand account of a qualitative research project focusing not only on the data itself, but also on the way in which I conducted the study.

While this qualitative research deepened my thought and therefore improved my thinking, the interpretive approach enabled understanding of the

users' lived experiences of SBEs in context from the perspectives of head teachers, teachers, and pupils. In addition to contributing to the body of knowledge concerned with school facilities planning and management, the research strategy, through its reflexive nature enabled me to engage with my own experiences towards a deeper understanding of the phenomenon explored, the methods used, and myself as the researcher. I agree with van Manen's (1990, p. 77) view that "Phenomenological reflection is both easy and difficult". First, it is easy because the meanings of SBEs were something users do constantly, though unconsciously, in everyday life. Second, it is difficult because I had to come to a reflective determination and explication of what 'a SBE means to the user' (van Manen).

In this study, engaging with the users about their lived experiences of the SBEs and activities has enabled me to reflect on my own experiences as a user of SBE and school facilities planning and management researcher or educator. I came to appreciate the value of the close interaction with users' SBEs, and their experiential descriptions (verbal and visual) to develop texts that shape the analysis and interpretation of their realities of being-in-the-world of SBEs. These realities (positive or negative) are always taken-for-granted and unacknowledged as an important source for understanding users' lived experiences of SBEs. Thus, the framework for understanding users' lived experiences of SBEs, and its implication for equal teaching and learning opportunities that emerged from this study has value for my career as a an educational planner and researcher and as a foundation for future research and teaching.

My future plans after this worthwhile research experience is to disseminate the results of the study through seminars, workshops, conferences, and publication in both local and international peer reviewed journals. I also intend to construct and validate a SBE survey instrument, which will be used to develop a SBE experience index for evaluating existing instructional and non-instructional spaces of the SBE. Again, I intend to collaborate with other researchers to conduct similar or related studies to contribute to existing knowledge and discussions of pertinent issues confronting the education sector in particular. Besides, I intend to apply the knowledge and skills acquired from this research experience to teaching and future research.

Finally, I have presented the study and issues relating to its construction in this thesis. Have I made an interpretation of the data I have collected in a way that faithfully reflects the lived experiences and meanings of the users of SBEs in the study? Have I produced an engaging and interesting thesis? Is it a believable and convincing thesis? Have the results strengthened our understanding of the phenomenon, as I have found out? I want my thesis to be judged against these issues. Ultimately, while I learned that writing and rewriting of qualitative report could be tedious and unending process, I trust this thesis truly reflects the lived experiences of users of SBEs interviewed.

Final Thought

This study has demonstrated that to understand whether users' meanings of SBEs manifest disparities in teaching and learning opportunities, there is the need to explore the lived experiences of SBE users. The results from this study suggest that positive and supportive SBEs are more likely to

enhance teaching and learning and help users to fulfil their aspirations than negative and unsupportive SBEs. While SBE is not the only factor affecting teaching and learning conditions or opportunities in basic schools, it is imperative to recognize that SBEs as places shape not only users' activities and well-being but also their lived experiences and meanings.

Importantly, from humanistic or social democratic perspective, all users of SBEs have equal right to positive and supportive instructional and non-instructional spaces regardless of the type or location of their basic schools. However, as the study shows, not all users of SBEs have equal or equitable teaching and learning opportunities. The study offers a valuable basis for future SBE research on users' lived experiences and meanings. Indeed, the conclusions in this study should be seen as propositions that may be used as guides for further research and not as 'social facts' for policy making. Therefore, it is expected that the results will generate further SBE research to strengthen the claim that users' meanings of SBEs manifest inequality or inequity of teaching and learning opportunities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A INFORMATION SHEET FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of the study: Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education.

Researcher: Wisdom K. Agbevanu, PhD Candidate, Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast

Purpose of the study: The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of how meanings school built environments communicate to users through their lived experiences manifest unequal access to educational opportunities at the basic level. The reason for this study is that very little is known about the lived of experiences of users of school built environments in basic schools. The study focuses on head teachers, teachers, and pupils at the basic school level in Ghana. The study seeks to provide new insights for educational policy makers and professionals to reflect on.

Possible risks and discomforts: There are no anticipated risks to you as a participant; you may experience some discomfort during the interview while you are discussing your experiences of the school built environment as a user. You may skip any questions that may make you uncomfortable. You may discontinue your involvement in this study at anytime. If any discomfort or uncertainty occurs, you can stop the interview.

Possible benefits from this study: First, as a participant, you will not benefit directly from this study; however, the findings of this study will provide valuable insight into user experience and therefore inform education providers about important issues. Future school designs may incorporate these issues and so help improve the school built environment of users at the basic school level. Second, it is also expected that the findings of the study will be used to provide information and will inform educational practice about specific needs of users of school built environments. The finding of the study will be the first step in uncovering the experiences of user groups, and because of this process help determine issues of importance for these user groups.

Your involvement: If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher will select a location of your choice within the premises of the school to conduct an interview. Simple questions will be asked about your experience of being a user of the school built environment. You will also be required to take photographs of the spaces in your school built environment. The interviews will be audio-recorded and the interview will not last for more than 45 minutes.

Compensation for participation: This is a self-sponsored academic study. However, you will be compensated for your time and participation. After each interview session, you will be provided with a snack. You will also receive a pen with University of Bath inscription as a souvenir.

Confidentiality: All information and documents containing your personal details will be kept confidential in any report or publications, which will come

from this research. No information that could identify a particular individual will be made public. All information is strictly confidential, including your identity, which will remain anonymous.

Voluntary participation and right to leave the research: Your participation in the study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties to you now or in the future.

Contact details: The names and contact details of the research and his supervisor are respectively listed below. If you wish to discuss your involvement in this study or have any other questions, you can contact the researcher or his supervisor at any time.

Researcher: Wisdom K. Agbevanu, Student,
IEPA, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast.
Mobile: 0507317474
E-mail: wizagbey@yahoo.com

Supervisor: Dr. A. L. Dare, Senior Lecturer,
IEPA, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast.
Mobile: 0208215346
E-mail: adare@gmail.com

Your right to participate: This research has-been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of University of Cape Coast (UCCIRB). If you wish to discuss any other aspects of this study with someone who is not directly connected to this study, you may also contact the IRB Office between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. through the landlines 0332135351/0289670793(4) or e-mail address irb@ucc.edu.gh.

Thank you for your assistance.

APPENDIX B INTRODUCTORY LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION

Tel. No. : 03321-30571
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University Post Office
Cape Coast
Ghana

April 20, 2012

Our Ref. EP/90.1/V.2/82

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LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

The bearer of this letter, **Mr. Wisdom Agbevanu** is a graduate student of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration of the University of Cape Coast. He requires assistance to undertake his research as a requirement of Ph.D degree programme at the University.

We would be grateful if you would kindly give him clearance to conduct his research in basic schools in the KEEA Municipality.

We appreciate your co-operation and support.

Thank you.

Prosper Kwamiga Nyatuame
ASSISTANT REGISTRAR
for: DIRECTOR

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APPENDIX C LETTER OF PERMISSION

I.E.P.A
University of Cape Coast
Cape Coast
October 29, 2012

The Head teacher/Principal
……………………………………
……………………………………
……………………………………

LETTER OF PERMISSION

I write to seek your permission to conduct an academic research study in your basic school.

My name is Wisdom K. Agbevanu. I am a graduate student at the University of Cape Coast; embarking on an academic research study titled *Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education.*

This study seeks to explore users' lived experiences of school built environments in relation to inequality of educational opportunities. The purpose of this study is to understand and articulate how meanings school built environments communicate to users manifest unequal access to educational opportunities.

The school built environment as a place for teaching and learning shape the activities of its users. Yet, the empirical evidence of users' experiences of school built environments is lacking. The results from this study will contribute an academic thesis and provide policy makers, school planners and educators valuable insights for further reflection, discussion, and better understanding of the issues.

In order to protect the identity of the volunteer participants and the school, actual names will not be identified in this study. The participants' time-on-task will not be used for this study.

Should you require any further clarification, please call me on the mobile phone number 0507317474orDr. A. L. Dare, my supervisor, on the mobile phone number 0208215346.

Please find attached copies of an introductory letter from the Municipal Director of Education and the informed consent sheet for your consideration. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

…………………………
Wisdom KwakuAgbevanu

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APPENDIX D APPROVAL LETTER

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

In case of reply the
Number and date of this
letter should be quoted

Tel No.: 03321-40025 /40046/40017
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REPUBLIC OF GHANA

Municipal Education Office
Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem Mun.
P. O. Box 13
Elmina

9th May, 2012

Our Ref: GES/ED/UCC/VOL.I/171
Your Ref: ....

MR. WISDOM KWAKU AGBEVANU
INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING
AND ADMINISTRATION
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
CAPE COAST

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT AN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

Reference to your permission letter dated May 3, 2012 to conduct an academic research in public Junior High Schools in the KEEA Municipality, I write to grant you this request.

We hope you will conduct the exercise with untmost attention and decorum, to have a true picture and help us to address some of our academic issues.

Counting on your co-operation.

Thank you.

GABRIEL K. GADEMOR (MR.)
MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR OF EDUC.
K.E.E.A. – ELMINA

cc: The Director
        Faculty of Education
        Institute for Educational Planning
        And Administration
        University of Cape Coast
        Cape Coast

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APPENDIX E GATEKEEPERS/PARENTS INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the study: Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education.

Researcher: Wisdom Kwaku Agbevanu, Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast.

Purpose of the study: The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of how meanings school built environments communicate to users through their lived experiences manifest unequal access to educational opportunities at the basic level.

Possible benefits from this study: The findings of this study will be used to provide valuable insight that will inform the delivery of quality basic education by ensuring that specific needs of key users of school built environments at the basic school level are met. The findings of the study will be the first step in uncovering the experiences of user groups, and because of this process help determine issues of importance for these individuals or user groups.

Your involvement: The purpose of this request is to inform you about your ward or pupils' involvement in the impending research about their school built environments as participant(s). Participation in the research is voluntary and each participant is allowed to discontinue his or her participation without any adverse effect on him or her. However, the participant may suffer a minimal psychological harm. The research will ensure that each participant feel comfortable in the course of the research. If your ward or pupils agree(s), he or she will be compensated for his or her time and participation in the research.

If you wish to discuss any aspects of this study with someone not directly involved in this study, you can contact the UCC IRB Office between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. through the landlines 0332135351/0289670793(4) or e-mail address: irb@ucc.edu.gh.

Thank you for your assistance in this process

APPENDIX F ADVERTISING FLYER

Volunteers! Volunteers! Volunteers!

Are you interested in sharing your experience about the school built environment in which you live, work, and learn? I am looking for volunteers who are willing to take part in a research project.

Project Title: Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education.

Researcher: Wisdom K. Agbevanu, Student, Institute for Educational Planning and Administration, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast.

Purpose of the study: The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of users' experiences of school built environments. This information can help in school facilities planning and management.

I am looking for volunteers who have the following specific criteria:
- ✓ You are a user of the school built environment, e.g., a headmaster/mistress, a teacher, or a pupil.
- ✓ You are a pupil in JHS 3.
- ✓ You have been in the school for not less than a year

If you are interested and think you may eligible for this study, please contact me personally or through the following contacts.

Wisdom K. Agbevanu
Mobile: 0507317474
E-mail: wizagbey@yahoo.com

APPENDIX G RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Participant,

I am recruiting you because you have volunteered to take part in the research entitled: *Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education.* My name is Wisdom Agbevanu and I am a graduate student from the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration at the University of Cape Coast. I would like to remind you that participation in this research is voluntary, and you can discontinue your participation at anytime without suffering any consequence.

The research will involve a minimum of single 30-minute long interview in a convenient place on your school compound about your personal experience. You will also be required to take photographs of spaces that support or hinder your activities in school.

As the researcher, I will ensure that you feel comfortable throughout your participation in the research. You will be compensated with a token for your time and participation in the research project.

If you have questions or need more information about the research, please feel free to contact me on, 0507317474 or at wizagbey@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

Wisdom Agbevanu, Student
University of Cape Coast
IEPA

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APPENDIX H PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education.

Purpose: The aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of how meanings school built environments communicate to users manifest unequal access to educational opportunities.

Researcher: Wisdom K. Agbevanu, Research Student, I.E.P.A., University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast

Participant: I agree to take part in the above research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Informed Consent Statement, which I keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that:

- ✓ I am willing to be interviewed by the researcher one-on-one, to allow the interview to be audio-recorded and to make myself available for a further interview should the need arises
- ✓ I understand that I may suffer a very minimal discomfort and may not necessarily benefit from the project
- ✓ I understand that my name and identifying details will be changed and access to the original audio recordings and transcripts restricted to the researcher and supervisor to protect my identity from being made public
- ✓ I understand that I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research
- ✓ I also understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalized or disadvantaged in any way.

Please tick the appropriate box:
- ▪ The information I provide can be used in further research projects which have ethics approval as long as my name and contact information is removed before it is given to them
- ▪ The information I provide cannot be used by other researchers without asking me first
- ▪ The information I provide cannot be used except for this project

Pseudonym: …………………………   Signature: ……………………..

I certify that I have explained the study the participant and consider that he/she understands what is involved.

Signature: …………………………   Date: ………………………

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APPENDIX I PHOTO REPRODUCTION RIGHTS FORM

This form refers to photographs that you snapped, as part of this research in which you are participating. The researcher will securely store all photographs. As discussed with you, photographs will not be shared with anybody who is not connected to this research project. I would also like to use some of the photographs (in print or electronic), in reports, presentations, publications and exhibitions arising from the project. Please sign one of the boxes below to indicate whether you allow the researcher to do this. I have attached printouts of your photographs to assist you, and for your records. I will not use any of the photographs outside the research project without your permission.

Please sign either 1or 2 below:

Box 1

> *I give my consent for these photographs to be reproduced for educational and/or non-commercial purposes, in reports, presentations, and publications connected to the Users' Lived Experiences of School Built Environments Research. I understand that real names will NOT be used with the photographs.*
> *Signed..Date......................................*

Box 2

> *I do not wish any of these photographs to be reproduced in connection with the Users' Lived Experiences of School Built Environments Research.*
> Signed..Date...

Thank you for participating in this research project. If you have any queries about this form or about the project or your participation in it, please do not hesitate to contact Wisdom K. Agbevanu: 0507317474, wizagbey@yahoo.com

Thank you.

APPENDIX J FIELD NOTE TEMPLATE

Date: Time of Observation: Location: Observer: Researcher	
Facts and Details in the Field Site	Observer Comments
[Insert verifiable sensory information.]	*[Insert reflections/subjective responses to the facts and details of the setting.]*
Reflective Summary: *[Insert below the overall impressions of the observation as well as additional questions you have for future data collection.]*	

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APPENDIX K INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Topic: Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education.

Interview Focus

Knowledge about school built environment
Could you tell me a little bit about your school? (How long have you been in this school? What would you say about your school built environment? How would describe this school built environment? What is your everyday experience about the school built environment like?)
    (a) Experiences of Instructional Spaces
    What are your experiences about the following specific areas: Classrooms, Library, Science/resource centre, ICT centre, and Playground? How do you feel like being a user of these spaces?
    (b) Experiences of Non-instructional Spaces
    Tell me your experiences about the following: Canteen, Washroom (Toilets and Urinals), Sickbay, Staffroom, and Storeroom. How do you feel like being a user of these spaces?

Images of school built environments
Looking at your photographs, how do you describe your experiences with the school built environment? Why do you have taken these photographs?

Messages from the school built environment
Considering your experiences, what messages does your school built environment send to you as a user?

Meaning of SBE Experiences
What do these photographs of your school built environment represent or mean to you as a user?
Given your photographs and overall thoughts and feelings surrounding your experiences in this school, how is it like being a user of these spaces in your school built environment?
Is there anything you would like to add or say about what your school built environment as a place for teaching and learning mean to you as a user?

Information about the participant
Please tell me about the following attributes:
Your age or age group, gender, level of education, position

Thank you very much for your time and participation in this interview. I really appreciate your time and patience. I hope to contact you again when the need arises.

Probe/Prompt:
What do you mean?
How do you feel about this place?
Can you explain further?

APPENDIX L PHOTO ELICITATION GUIDE

Dear Participant,

In connection with your voluntary participation in the research project titled: *Exploring lived experiences of users of school built environments in the Ghanaian context of basic education,* you are kindly requested to take photographs of important spaces that support or hinder your activities, particularly teaching or learning, in your school built environment.

You are **not** encouraged to take photographs of anyone without his/her expressed permission.

Thank You

Wisdom K. Agbevanu

APPENDIX M IMAGE ANALYSIS TEMPLATE

Photograph Title:

Photograph Type:

Participant:

Summary of the Content:

Surface Message:

Narrative:

Intended Message:

Ideological Message:

Oppositional Reading

Coherency: (How the image reflect the phenomenon)

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APPENDIX N TRANSCRIPTSAND FIELD NOTE EXCERPTS

Excerpts from Cole's Transcript

*This thing [/school/] was established and it was in 1985. … For me to say something about **the building, in fact, the structure is not very good.** For me, **the school built environment is not good** because when you look at **the doors and the windows. ... it's like the wood and the this thing [materials] they have used are not that this thing [good]** and even **the desks… the texture of the wood is not good for the desks and so as the texture of the building** itself, in fact there is no you can't see any cracks **but the quality is not as expected.** … I have always suggested that maybe the even basic schools should be storey building, it shouldn't be … because let's for instance look at the land may be when you go to the rural area or may be the land the community would afford for you is not all that this thing. ... Even **the computer lab … there must be a computer lab; there must be a library**, a lot aha. **No staffroom, there must a staffroom** and all these things aha. Therefore, if it is a storey building, all these things will be there…*

*… **The classrooms are not adequate. There is no classroom for KG. Where we have as KG is supposed to be the library … The school needs more structures ... the school needs a library … The classrooms, oh in fact the … is spacious it is OK.** It is OK. **The ventilation, in terms of ventilation the primary classrooms are OK, but the JHS is not OK. I learnt the JHS because of shaving honeycombs so the natural light is somehow a problem.** For the primary, they have the windows and all these things so the natural light and the ventilation everything flows nicely. …*

… Because even in a class the class should be the thing the enrolment in the class should be thirty to thirty-five (30 – 35) but here because of the enrolment population about even fifteen (15) in a class aha so more spaces.

*… **As for the library, now we do not have one**. The point is that, the library room is there (pointing to the next room to his office) … but we have converted the thing [/library/] to the KG. … **No ICT Centre**. [Short sharp laugh].**The computers are not yet ready**. … So, I hope as time goes on what I have mentioned the football pitch and gradual, gradual, gradual, things will be put in place I mean nicely. … Playground, as for here we have a land the land is very big, but even **the arrangement is very bad** so here **we have a lot of land here** your left side, your right side, but if the structure is in order then…*

*Canteen, **we have canteen ... we have the food vendors over there**. … They [/vendors/] have a shed ... **the condition is not well structured** … um … it is not well structured. .. I [short laugh] **I have to take my food from home and then I would just eat it here or in the storeroom.**… **For the teachers to eat, they have to eat in their classrooms because there is no class staffroom**…*

We have three toilets for teachers and three for pupils, it seems one is not functioning so we are using the two**. But for now, **I do not want the two to get spoiled … before … so we need to so I even locked one** and **all of them are using one.** But **I always make sure everything is neat is clean** for **to protect the other one we are waiting for them to repair the spoilt one** but for **the teachers' [toilet] is OK.** It is OK but only **that the washroom door for the pupils the entrance is rotten.** Everything is rotten. This is dangerous thing and can cause something. Because when you are opening you have to if **you are

not strong, you have to ask someone to help you to open the thing [/door/]. *So is very something [bad]. So **I even told the teachers to take good care of the thing [/washroom doors/]** if any of the thing [/kids/] wants to go there **they should attend to the person so the does not get harmed or injured.** **Something needs to be done about it.** As the head [/head teacher/] **I am not happy about it.***

We do not have sickbay here ... [long pause]. When a pupil is sick, I only ask him or her to go home. Um ... we do not have a well-furnished staffroom for the teachers.

*. Even there, this thing [/staffroom/], **when it is time for break for them [teacher] to even have a comfortable place to eat they have to eat in the classroom.** Therefore, that is another thing [/problem/]. ... Um … Store room … **We have a storeroom here but it is very small it is very small** so for them to sit here I do not think they will come. So it is for the books the books and … um … so **there is not spacious. We do not have a change room for the kids, especially the JHS pupils.***

Look at this window ... look at the frame … the wood is not good. *… In addition, this is the path between the primary block and the JHS block. I learnt the community people are encroaching on the land, so, that is why they put up JHS block here. **When it rains … it is impossible to pass here to the other block.** This thing … sometimes we have to go round. You see, this is part of the school land, but this thing … the people putting up buildings on it. **This is where we have the toilets … look at the door to the place … it is very bad. This is the thing [area] I was telling about earlier … look at the whole areas is bushy … It does not speak well about the school. ... The fence … as for the fence that one, I do not think the PTA can do it now ... it is not in their capacity. I do not think they can.***

*Well, I do not know… I do not know, but as you can **see it is not motivating at all** ... it is uninviting … Few **teachers would want to be in a school like this. This place is supposed to be a second home for not only the children** but also all the people here... You just imagine working in an environment like this. **I do not think you will be comfortable teaching or working here … it is difficult.** For me, **I do not think this place is supporting the children and the teachers to do their best.** This place is supposed to be the second home for the children ... but **I do not think the facilities we have here are allowing the school to perform that role well. Some of the parents have even withdrawn their wards from the school. More needs to be done to make the school look attractive to the community members.** But as I said, it is not perfect … Looking at the this thing [/school/], we are talking about the fence, **if the fence is there it will protect the kids and even the weeding** … **if some parts [of the land] are tarred like concrete type** …*

We need to improve upon it** aha. We have to improve because **when I came there is no water or light all these but now we are having all these things.** Therefore, as times goes on I think all **the rest of the things will be OK** or will be better. ... Ah, kids without water will be something. Kids without water? …because everything, everything … **when they go to washroom they have to use water**, **after eating they have to use water to wash their hands too drink so without water in the school is going to be something serious for them.** Moreover, even the light too, **because of the ICT so we have to fight for the light to come before the computers.

*… **The performance is not as we are expecting** ... **the performance of the children at the BECE level is not the best** … is not the best. **I think part of the problem aha … is due to the lack of good facilities in the school. For example, the absence of school library is affecting the children …***

*__I do not think I am satisfied with the situation here__. The PTA needs to do more … Sometimes **I feel as if the community has neglected the school** ... **they hardly support the school**. Meanwhile, **they are always blaming us, the teachers, for the poor performance of their children**. However, I have already told you that **we trying our best under the circumstance**.*

Excerpts from Ika's Transcript

*I have been in the school for about 9 years. **The school is not a comfortable place** … sometimes when you are **in the classroom you will be sweating** and it is too bad and **we do not have a canteen too so we eat anywhere.***

*__The classrooms are good but sometimes we sweat__ when we are in the class. **It affects me by getting a headache** or something. ... **We do not have a school library** ... we do not have one ... We only sit in our classrooms. ... **We do not have [Science laboratory/resource centre].** We do not go anywhere, just that the teacher comes and teach us and go. Sometimes **the teacher would tell us prepare an experiment but because we do not have a science lab we cannot do it.** ... No, **we do not have [ICT or Computer laboratory]** [pause] … **We only learn about it in classrooms**. ... **We have playing grounds and they are good**. The volleyball field and the football field ... [long pause]*

*__The canteen we do not have … and it affects us because people eat anywhere they like. We buy our food from the junction over there__. There is a woman selling rice there. Moreover, **you do not know what you would get from what you are eating** … maybe a fly has stepped on [/entered/] it [the /food/] but you do not see. **Some people sit there to eat but at times you bring it here [/classroom/].It is a good place** ... because the place is neat. **Where the woman sells is neat**. ... Hmm, as for **the toilet it is not good. The place is not neat** … so **I like going into the bush somewhere thereto attend nature's call. There are snakes but we go … we are afraid sometimes. I feel afraid but** ... [Sickbay] **we do not have anything like that**. I just go home when I am not well. ... We have staffroom but some of the **teachers sit outside there** ... they do not sit in the staffroom. …**There is a small storeroom in the headmaster's office**. **We do not have a place to store our books in the classroom**. During P. E., we change in the classroom … and **some play in their school uniform**. It is changing bad changing in the classroom … sometimes the boys do not want to go out so that we can change. **It is bad because some of the girls feel shy to change**.*

*__The environment is affecting us [learning] a lot. I ... [long pause] ... This place [path between the primary and JHS blocks] is flooded when it rains … because when it rains the water stays there and we have to walk in the rainfall before we can get to the classroom ... so it is too bad. ...__ Sometimes we [pupils] leave their books in here and just go home so someone may just put his or her hands in and take the book away. ... **This is the window… we cannot open it ... [long pause]. If it is dark, we do not know**. We just sleep. ... **This place is bad [noisy] because birds come and … make noise, they just make noise**. .... **See someone urinating over there**. Because **we do not have***

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any place to urinate, she is doing it there….This place is bushy and snakes can come in anytime.

*It [school built environment] tells me that **the place is not comfortable. I do not know ... the desks in the classrooms are not comfortable ... [Long pause] the school is not beautiful ... we do not have so many things in this school ... [pause] a comfort place to sit and learn or to eat. No proper toilet ... you cannot use the toilet because the place very bad.***

This place it is just bushy. Sometimes we see snakes around** ... they come from there ... the bush and come in. It tells me the school is not nice [safe] **… sometimes I feel may get hurt** when you come, so **is not comfortable**. This place is too ... [short pause] is not good. Sir, they are also bad. ... **I feel better because the teaching goes on well**. .. Sir, it affects us because … when we are coming to school… **even some people don't come to school at all** because **when it rains they have to come and cross the rain before they come so they don't like it. It means a great thing**. Um ... I am **not satisfied.

Excerpts from Kojo's Transcript

*I started here when I was 3 years in nursery. **We have all the environment and facilities that we need for our studies. …** and the teachers too are educated, they teach us very well, when someone doesn't understand sometimes the students feel shy confronting the teacher that they do not understand so when they come to a friend and say I did not understand what the teacher said and then the friend would teach him what the teacher said. **[Basic school B] is a beautiful school and it has almost all the facilities we need to learn and play.***

*The classrooms are nice. **Is only [Basic school B] that I have seen classroom wall with tiles and floors with tiles. ...**and **we are having one man with one seat and a table** compared with schools 2 or 3 pupils would be sitting on one seat and a table but **in our school we are having our own tables and our own chairs that we sit on and feel comfortable when learning.***

*The school library was formerly there in front of the classroom but when they finished with the new block there they removed all the books to the down part of where the office is and **we were allowed to go there sometimes**.*

*Yes, **we have a very big science lab where we go to learn practical** ... we study there but just that sometimes if you don't use some equipment … to do the experiment for us to see that what is in the book is true. **That is the problem that I think we are facing because they [teachers] don't do the experiment for us to see oh this is what is in the book** and this is what we have done so compare it then you see that it's OK they are the same.*

We have the ICT centre and we are learning how to use the computer**. I think we go there **because if it's not there ICT centre some people may not have seen a computer before**. Because they have been staying in the villages and they have not even touched a computer before. When they see it ... and the teacher too is very friendly ... it helps you understand this ... **so you feel like at home in studying the ICT. …We are having all sorts of playgrounds like the basketball field, the handball field, the football field and volleyball field
The washrooms are very good just that the students do not use it or do not take good care of them. Sometimes if some pupils urinate, they refuse flush. This makes the place to smell badly**. So, is just that **we the senior when you go there and see that you just flush it** or **they would even open the tap and it

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would be flowing and they leave and go and so you see that waste of the pipe and other things.

As for that one [/sickbay/] we do not have it. It is our major problem here. However, sometimes when somebody gets sick the person would go to the nursery block and the madam would give him/her some medicine. The medicine is for the kids. If you are not feeling well, it is your parents at home or a guardian at home that would take care of you. Therefore, they would tell you to go home so when if tomorrow you are not still feeling better, you go to the hospital and after that, you can come to school.

Staffroom too is very nice. It is a nice place and I think with this the teachers too have the space and deal with you free. They have something that would make them comfortable to dedicate themselves to do the work that is sent to do.

In addition, this is the school mower. In some schools they will spend their time ... the study hours to weed their fields and all those things but with the mower we don't have to weed the field and we would be even studying in the classroom without going there to weed or spend all the time so …because we don't spend our time weeding.

This is our classroom. The atmosphere is always good and we are comfortable.

I even found out that our school has roads and spaces for pedestrians. I feel safe in this school because the school is fenced and has fire extinguishers. … I see that our school built environment is the best you can find anywhere. It has the environment for learning and all the facilities that every students need to learn.

The school is a beautiful school ... the facilities beautify the place at the same time it helps other people achieve their talents. ...

To me I see it like it is a place … a good place that would help you in just having fun enjoying yourself learning and so on. … Our school built environment means a lot to me because with all these facilities and how the environment is very nice I would be able to learn without even getting infected with other diseases concerning the gutters that would be choked and all those things.

I'm very satisfied with our school built environment and I would tell you that if you are having a child you can bring that child to the [Basic School B] and that you would feel that oh my child there it would be safe for my child to study there and achieve their goals. [The school built environment] It is helping us to learn … that the science lab we learn but not engaging ourselves in the experiment situation.

Excerpts from Zuki's Transcript

I have been here for 6 years. I can say that it is a very good place for teaching and learning because looking at the built environment it motivates the students and the teachers as well. Looking at the classrooms, they are very spacious but the number in all is 40 so looking the classes it is [they are] enough and very comfortable for the students so controlling the students because the space is enough for us. I think we are able to control the students a well. Because the place is very neat and the student behave well in class. Because sometimes when you go to school if the place is not all that neat students they also involve in that. However, looking at the environment they

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also seem to be in a very good environment so they also comport themselves a little.

We have a school library. These serve from KG up to JHS3. We are having about 2000 and over books, storybooks and textbooks and other things so it is also helping the students. The library has a lot of space and it is well equipped. *They use the library when they have a library period with the English teachers. Because the primary they have 2-2 teachers and from KG up to P4 they have 2-2 teachers. Therefore, the assistant teachers would be taking them to the library to assist them how to use this and other things. Therefore,* **I think the library is also helping the students and the teachers as well. ... We have a science laboratory or resource centre in the school for the students. The centre has all the equipment a science lab should have.** *In terms of using the centre, the science master must send them to the science lab when there is some practical aspect to do. Even the pictures I took they are in the pictures there for the students to know the actual thing. ... Yes***, we have ICT centre, which has about 40 computers so when they are having ICT and they are supposed to do the practical work**. *The ICT master is supposed to send them to the ICT centre for the specific work they need to do.* **The ICT centre is well equipped and comfortable**. *...* **We have enough playing grounds. We have a basketball court, we have a volleyball pitch, we have a soccer or football field, we have a handball and the KG they have another equipment which they use. In addition, I think equipment is safe and enough for the students. They [children] are always excited when they are playing on these playgrounds**.

… The canteen is very spacious each person is entitled to a seat. There is nothing like struggling for tables, chairs, other things, and the place everything is neat. *It seems there is a picture taken over there the kitchen looks so. Even we have professionals who are also working over there. Therefore, I am thinking that the food is hygienic. T***he place is neat for the students to have their lunch over there.**

We have toilets ... they are water closets. The lower and upper primaries are having four for the girls and four for the boys. Nurseries are four for the boys and four for the girls. JHS we have6for boys, 6 for girls, you can see over here. The teachers we have two for male and two for female. The washrooms are always kept clean to maintain their sanitary conditions so they are not sources of offensive smell. Inthis school, no one complains about the washrooms because theyare adequate and clean. *...* **We have a sick bay for the nursery even for the school because when somebody is sick whether you arein JHS or primary you have to be taken to the sick bay.** *We have two beds, one for KG's and one for primary and JHS.*

The big one is the office in the administration block and this is **where we are sitting now is the staff common room with about 15 or 20 chairs and tables and is better and you will be happy even being a staff. As you can see, there is good ventilation, and adequate space to move about. Teachers come to the staff common room, sit down to relax or interact with other teachers when they are free. The atmosphere here is very welcoming. ... We have change room that is the sports room.** *When we are having PE, the girls have their sports room where they change and the wash room and the boys also have their wash room and sport room where they do change when they have PE, you have to go to the place and go and change.*

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That is the JHS canteen. It has 96 or something like that chairs and tables. Each person is entitled of a chair and there nothing likes struggling for chairs and other things. Therefore, I think is very nice place … That is one of the teachers' WC. It helps the teachers and the same thing the students are also having. If you're in a school without all these things you sometimes feel it is not safe to go to the bush, you cannot be going to the bush so whiles you are in the school with these materials [facilities] there is nothing to bother you to go out, you will do everything in the school. The students also have toilet facilities. There is nowhere to move because the school is fenced you cannot go out so it makes the school very easy for us to control the students. … This is one of the classes. In addition, looking at the picture you see that everyone is ready to listen to what the teacher is teaching. There is nothing like overcrowding in the class, the space is a little bit enough. Then you look at the room is in order you do not see toilets in front and structures.

I just feel happy about being in a school with this environment. Very in imposing ... well structured and painted ... it is just attractive. This shows how the school cares about its image.

In fact, this environment serves the students and me better because in a school with these materials I think there is no need for you to go out to look for information because all what you need is here. What it means is that we are provided with the needed facilities or environment to perform academically well ... and we are doing that. As told you our school is always within the first third best schools in the Municipality.

Looking at science syllabus, there are a lot of practical aspect, which you need to forward, and which you need to go to the science lab. Moreover, if you are having those things there is no need to go outside the school, taking them to one of the secondary schools around and other things, we have all those materials in the school, so I am happy we have them and the students are enjoying. ... As an assistant head, I feel happy…

… when I was teaching at Bantama (a school in the municipality) they were not having these facilities so the students having them over there are from the city [town] but looking at this built environment and the students we have even from rural areas I think the environment is helping the students in terms of the academic aspect. Therefore, I am thinking that the environment is helping the community and the teachers as well in terms of academic performance.

So long as the school facilities are there, functioning well both the teachers and children will continue to be motivated and to excel. With this beautiful environment, they will always do well to pass their exams ... and this is where they write their BECE so it helps them.

Excerpts from Yaw's Transcript

I have been here for almost 5 years, but I do not think this place befit a school. Apart from the classrooms, the school is lacking other school facilities such as library, ICT lab and so on. You cannot be proud of this place ... it does not encourage effective teaching and learning ... Actually, so far as the number of classrooms is concerned, I think it's enough, the classrooms are OK but we don't have library. Yah, we do not have library and a good staffroom for teachers. If you look at the staffroom we have at the JHS, it is nothing to write home about [not good]. The place is not the best at

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*all and it is small ... not well furnished and doesn't have enough space for all of us the teachers ... that is why you can see that some of the teachers are here. **The ventilation there is not also appropriate**. Yeah, so it is not the best for teachers as a staffroom. …*

*Actually, with the spaces, I think **the various classrooms are roomy** that is they are spacious but **bad windows, the type of windows that we have, how it enhances ventilation, I think is not the best, yah. So during the afternoons, teachers and pupils suffer in the classrooms because of heat** that is being accumulated ... **there are no electric fans in the classrooms**. Yah, with the classroom, I think **one major problem has to do with the writing board. The blackboards are not well constructed**; let me put it that way, yah. **When you are writing on the board, there are scratches all over**. So when a teacher is writing on it he really suffer, it eats many pieces of chalk, within a short period. In addition, as I said, **in the afternoon if a teacher is teaching, you realize that pupils do not focus on what are doing, the reason being that the classroom is very hot, they are disturbed, and that pertains to almost all the three classrooms at the JHS block. … The school is not having a library**. The primary block used to have a place for library but now **the room it is being used for the KG**, so now the school is lacking a library, yah. **This is negatively affecting both the teachers and the pupils**. …*

*Actually, **we have a washroom (toilet and urinal) over there but the place is bushy and some of the equipment or things either are destroyed [disrepair]**. Even **one of the doors to one of the washrooms is not in good shape**, so in totality **the washroom (urinal and toilet) is not in good shape at all, as I captured on this presentation**. I would say **most of the teachers do not use the washroom** … some especially the male teachers urinate behind the washroom building. Well, **I always ease myself before I come to school** ... I do not do it in the school. **Though there is one toilet that is reserved for teachers, it is always locked with key kept in the headmaster's office.***

*… **We do not have any meaningful staffroom**. What we have here, as if I told you earlier, is supposed to be an office for the headmaster but that is where we use as our staffroom. **The space in the room is not enough and the place is not furnished to accommodate us**. The way it is, when you are in **there you just experience heat so much that one does not feel comfortable***

*You realize that **the place is bushy and is close to the school environment** and **I think it is not the best to have such a bushy area around a school building**, and can be a harbouring place for bad animals like snakes and things like that. **At any point in time, snakes just invade this school** and most likely, if kids move into such areas I think they can be harmed.*

*If you work or teach in an environment like this, you cannot give of your best because no one cares about the place. The place is not attractive ... just look around. Actually as I said, the classrooms are roomy so with that I think it is OK. It is left with the windows, **the way the windows are made, I think, gives a different signal about the place... it that does not enhance proper ventilation so pupils and teachers do suffer during the afternoon when it is sunny**….*

*Yah, **what it means or portrays is that we need help**. That is the only thing that I can say because the **entire school built environment is not in good shape**. As a user or a teacher, I think **the message that the various issues that I have talked about send to me is that there are much to be done as far as the***

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*stakeholders are concerned. That is the Government, the PTA, and the District Education Offices that link to the government; I think **they must help the school to get proper teaching learning spaces**. ... Really, as **it does not enhance any meaningful academic work definitely, it does not give the joy to teachers to do what they are supposed to do**. Mostly **the pupils cannot give out their best due to the circumstances they encounter within the environment**. **It is really affecting their performance**. Could you believe that **our school was last [/last position/] at this year's BECE**? We have 72 basic schools in the KEEA Municipality and our school was 72nd. In fact, **I feel very bad. It is very discouraging to be teaching here. If I have my way, I will leave this place for another school.**

The school environment is not motivating enough. In addition, the good students are being withdrawn from the school. ... Really, **I do not feel happy here because the nature of the school environment does make me feel good about the school. It is, as the educational authorities do not care about education ... what we do here is not appreciated**. There is nothing motivating about this place*

***Look at where we sitting … it is because we do not a proper or if I should say comfortable staffroom that is why we are sitting here on the corridor. You saw how the place is like … the female teachers sitting there are always complaining and because they do not have any choice they are there**. ... Actually, it seems I have said all that I need to say but the little thing is you know **one major problem that we face has to do with how the classrooms are being constructed** … you know that is with the JHS. **It does not ensure any proper ventilation and it is affecting the kids and us very much** so I think if there is a way out, we need to look at it and find means to cure it. … **I am not satisfied with the way our school built environment is**. Not at all. The educational authorities have to do something about it if they want the best for their children.*

Excerpts from Pat's Transcript

As a place of teaching, in fact the classroom set-up is very nice.** It's very nice like I said earlier on, the **building itself ... the set-up is very good, very inviting** but with the material that we are handling need to be, there is a need for a shake-up. All I can say is that **this is a good school ... well structured, very clean, and attractive.

*The set-ups of **the classrooms are well**, you do not go to any public school, and **you see storeroom attached to classrooms**. **We have teachers table, there is clock for teachers and there are places where can put additional learning materials if you want to hang up any. The classrooms are tiled, enough windows to allow ventilation that helps in learning**. All these are set in place. **There is lighting system. There is a place where you can keep books after classes. There is dwarf wall in the store room where you can keep items besides the extra books, even we used to have cupboards** but [the principal] has taken them, I think to **the newly set-up library**. We used to have bookshelf and then we have this, we have cleaning materials that we use for the weekends to do clean-up, actual clean-up, so that classrooms always is in its best.*

***We have a very beautiful canteen; the set-up is beautiful, with tables and chairs arranged for the pupils, tiled floor and ventilation is very good.** Then*

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we have a kitchen, the kitchen set-up too is very good, that's where the cooking and the dishing out of food is done, then the pupils are seated according to classes and they serve them. When it did start, we had the JHS, the upper primary and then the lower primary too had their own canteen.

You cannot send a child to a nearby village all alone when the child is sick, so there is the need for a sick bay so that we can keep them here and give them medicine or something. *However, even though we do not have the sick bay, we have a teacher responsible for dishing out some medicines here, First Aid I should say to sick children. Then we try to keep them in school until closing but I do not know what sister is had now made up her mind to… But with the first years, the tiny, the KGs I mean… **…. at the nursery area the first room has some sets of bed where I think when the children are tired** … and **remember I sent a child there who was very sick** to go and lie done there. This is one of the classrooms. In fact, **the classrooms are spacious and you easily move about** … **ventilation is good as you can see from there**. All **the classrooms are furnished with good chairs and tables for each pupil as well as the teacher**. I can say **that the classrooms are very bright, comfortable and attractive... This is one the playgrounds and you can see the children playing over there. Play is good for every child's development and here as you can see from the many playing grounds we are always encouraging the children to play** when it is time for them to play … **I know this is helping them grow healthy and strong.*

These are the toilets for the girls … the boys also have theirs. From KG to JHS, they all have adequate and clean toilets … *for example,* **at the upper primary the girls have toilets and the boys also have three … the WCs are always clean** … *we have been teaching the pupils how to flush after use to keep place clean. ...* **The school is well fenced ensuring that both children and teachers are safe, secure and are not disturbed by people or stray animals from the community. Look at this place … flowers, hedges, and dustbins all located at vantage points making the environment look decent and attractive**.

It's beautiful, like I always say, so you um, looking at the environment almost nearly 100% of work, we expect the children to be outspoken, speaking English, *doing the right thing but it is not like others.*

Oh, **these places as I said they are adequate for the pupils in this set-up or in this environment. They are adequate** *except that when they come newly there is the need for guide and occasionally there is the need for the Principal or the teacher on duty to remind the children of how best to use them …*

As for the photographs, I could not take much but I think **this is a beautiful place for any teacher or pupil to be**. *Just take a look around ...* **who will not feel happy here ... we have everything thing that should encourage every teacher to teach and help the children**. *We have a future. Just* **think about a school with all these facilities for the children to use** *now that they are in school it means when they move up they are going to see the same gadgets and use it better and to be better because they have used it in their earlier formation, early years of formation.* **Not everybody in the system I mean in the Ghanaian system have access to these gadgets in their initial formation**

As a teacher in this school, I am satisfied and motivated because we have all the facilities a good school should have and I think it is helping all of us to help the pupils, teach them to excel…

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Overall, our **school is one the best schools in the region or in the country in terms of academic performance. Our children are always doing well at the BECE.** *This is even making more parents to bring their children here.* **This place is more like a home for the children because they feel safe and happy all the time ... and the teachers too** *... [smiling].* **Oh, I am satisfied...I am very satisfied about this place. It is the best you can have.**

An Excerpt from Field Notes

Date: November 7, 2012	
Time of Observation: 11:30	
Location: Basic School A	
Observer: Researcher	
Facts and Details in the Field Site	Observer Comments/Questions
Instructional Spaces *Classrooms* The **classrooms were spacious but the dual desks in the classrooms were few and appeared old**. Some were in good condition the others were not. **They appeared not to provide comfort and back support**. The classrooms were not overcrowded. **The JHS classrooms had honeycomb windows, with poor ventilation. The classrooms did not have electric lights**. The floors were not tiled. There were **no ceilings and electric fans in the classrooms** making the rooms warm sometimes. *Library* **The school did not have a library** or a place for private individual reading. There **were no provision of quiet areas** – spaces to do work outside lessons *Science Lab/IT Resource Centre* **The school did not have a science lab and an ICT resource centre** let alone the equipment to support teaching and learning. *Play ground* **The school did not have well-demarcated playing grounds for outdoor sports and physical education.** The areas designated for football and volleyball were not standard and did not have the appropriate structures to ensure	Observing the instructional spaces is likely to provide a more complete impression about how the spaces in the SBE support teaching and learning activities in the school. What instructional spaces are there? Are they adequate? What are their conditions? Are they supporting teaching and learning in school? Does the overall school built environment motivate users? Do users take pride in their school built environments? What messages is the school built environment likely to convey to the users?

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effective physical training of the pupils. The available outdoor **areas for the pupils to socialize with friends were covered with weeds**.	
Reflective Summary: The existing instructional **spaces conveyed more negative messages than positive ones.** The **absence and poor condition of some key instructional spaces e.g., library, ICT centre**, put users at a disadvantage in terms of the school built environment supporting the national curriculum and pedagogy. This perhaps may communicate a negative meaning about education.	