

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE SELF-EFFICACY OF  
UEW STUDENTS FROM MARGINALISED GROUPS  
WINNEBA, GHANA, WEST AFRICA**



**CASSANDRA JUANITA MARTIN-WEILER**

**2016**

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UEW STUDENTS FROM MARGINALISED GROUPS  
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**(9130170001)**



**A THESIS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND  
EDUCATION, FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES, SUBMITTED  
TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF  
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REQUIREMENTS FOR AWARD OF THE DOCTORATE OF  
PHILOSOPHY (GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING) DEGREE.**

**DECEMBER, 2016**

## DECLARATION

### Student's Declaration

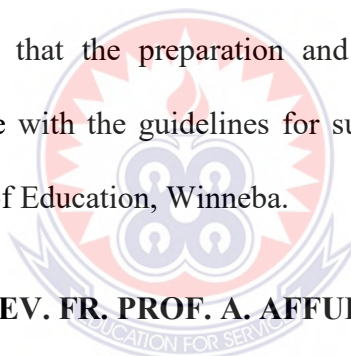
I, Cassandra Juanita Martin-Weiler, declare this Dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....

### Supervisors' Declarations

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



**Name of Supervisor: REV. FR. PROF. A. AFFUL-BRONI, PHD**

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**DATE:** .....

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.

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**DATE:** .....

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to:

- God Almighty for the strength He has given and continues to give me daily in Jesus' name;
- God (again) for authentic **Love**, abundant **Faith** and brilliant **Hope**;
- People from marginalised categories;
- And my mother, Juanita Martin and my father, John Richard Martin.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfriNEAD – African Network on Evidence to Action on Disability

AIDS – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CDT – Critical Disability Theory

CEPS – Complementary Education Programmes

DVD – Digital Video Disc

GES – Ghana Education Service

GTV – Ghana Television

HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HOD – Head of Department

MDGs – Millennium Development Goals

MhAPP – Mental Health and Poverty Project

PLWHA – People Living with HIV/AIDS

JHS – Junior High School

SHS – Senior High School

UEW – University of Education – Winneba

UN – United Nations

UNAIDS – United Nations on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

UNECA – United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

WASSCE – West African Senior School Certificate Examination

WHO – World Health Organisation



## ABSTRACT

This study took a phenomenological look at how students from marginalised categories effectively outsmarted marginalisation in a neo-colonial setting, Ghana, West Africa. In-depth, semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted with ten University of Education – Winneba (UEW) students. The participants were first-generation students, and they represented various categories of people who were different and were often marginalised by general society. The categories represented were: positive HIV status; visual, hearing/speech, physical and learning impairments; perceptions of sexuality and citizenship; albinism; gender; and quasi-orphaned status. After fully developing the narratives of each study participant and combing through the data, themes were identified. The study found that, for various reasons, the students had little to no support from family. Additionally, many of their parents were absent from their lives. They therefore did not have benefits of cultural reproduction, whereby norms and values are passed down through the generations. The study also found that the students endured many slights and discouragement through situations and with people and institutions. Although they had to deal with the same social structures that prevent marginalised people from meeting their goals, the participants, through self-efficacious means, advanced their higher educational aspirations; they persevered and effectively transformed negativities into fuel which buoyed them and their self-efficacy towards their goals. Their lived experiences at times affected their senses of belonging, but they were not to be left out of the institution of higher education. The students used negativity in their lived experiences to successfully deal with and overcome hurdles. In terms of implications for theory, the study uncovered an additional source of self-efficacy, *converted* or *transformed social persuasion*. This study serves to inform policies and psychosocial practices in Ghana and in Africa generally, with respect to marginalised populations, those who are often expected to fail in attempts at far-reaching goals.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

This study was about those who beat all odds to become thriving university students. The researcher, having worked at the University of Education – Winneba (UEW) Counselling Centre in Winneba, Ghana since 2006 as a part-time counsellor, met scores of students. Each student had his/her own story, and the researcher was struck by some students' abilities to overcome the adversities they faced. The researcher held a sense of awe at the level of resilience and resolve they demonstrated in light of their life experiences, even while carrying a full load of courses.

Preliminary investigations have revealed that some students from marginalised<sup>1 2</sup> categories had experienced harsh circumstances in their upbringing and continued to deal with situations that could have discouraged many others. The preliminary investigations were done in two ways. Firstly, through interactions with students who came to the University Counselling Centre, the researcher met several who seemed to have experienced adverse situations in their lives, yet they were enrolled in the University setting. Examples of those situations included: being an orphan, homelessness, abuse, victimisation in childhood, mental illness, physical impairments, having visual and/or hearing challenges, single parenthood, obesity or having some difference in their body type/shape.

Secondly, at the same time, the researcher met some students after informally observing them on campus as they went about their daily activities. The researcher

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<sup>1</sup> Marginalisation is being utilised in this research as the notion of being pushed to the edges of society and leading to disempowerment.

<sup>2</sup> British spelling is utilised throughout the paper, except for direct quotations.

was deeply moved while viewing visually and physically impaired navigating campus terrain, sometimes unaided. One visually impaired student often passed by the Counselling Centre to and from his living quarters. The researcher made contact with him and established a relationship. The student began making regular visits to the Counselling Centre, informally sharing his story. Through these observations and discussions, the researcher was inspired to look into the experiences of a wider group of “unlikely” students, those from various categories of marginalisation. Each student in the study was different in some way, some based on physical features, and some were perceived as different in other ways.

The next section discusses the setting in which the study took place, Ghana.

## **1.2 Setting**

Formerly called Gold Coast, Ghana is located in West Africa and is the first country in sub-saharan Africa to gain its independence from its colonisers in 1957. Although Ghana has been a sovereign nation for six decades, echoes of colonisation persist. Hence, this study looks at marginalisation and the resistance thereof through an anti-colonial lens.

Marginalisation in its disempowering nature mimics colonisation in that it can remove any semblance of agency or self-efficacy. Marginalisation, difference and stigma seemingly go hand-in-hand; those who are different from the majority are subjected to marginalisation. Parker and Aggleton (2003) went further to suggest that stigma can be understood through interaction as it is a social process which functions along with difference as well as social and structural inequalities. In the context of Ghana, in this process of looking at students from marginalised group representations, it was appropriate to also acknowledge the lasting negative influences of colonialisation.



The following section highlights difference, another potential threat to students' educational success because of how it is viewed and regarded in society.

### 1.3 Difference

In society in general those who are different from the societal majority are sometimes given special treatment. This treatment is not necessarily positive, particularly in cultures where difference is not wholly embraced. This is true of most cultures, including Ghana and is reflected in the statement of Dei, Asgharzadeh, Bahador & Shahjahan (2006): "There is fear of difference everywhere" (p. 3).

Part of the problem with difference generally is that those in the majority are considered *normal*, and any way in which one deviates from the "norm" in any culture is subject to scrutiny and judgment. This puts individuals and entire groups in the position of being relegated to undesirable places in society. However difficult and different life circumstances may be, some believe in their abilities in ways that direct their path(s) to success. Malcolm Gladwell – who authored *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* – encouraged all with this statement: "We think of underdog victories as improbable events: that's why the story of David and Goliath has resonated so strongly all these years" (2013, p. 22). He asked, "Why do we automatically assume that someone who is smaller or poorer or less skilled necessarily at a disadvantage?" (2013, p. 22). It could be that general society perceives that this person believes the same about him/herself. This line of thinking is reminiscent of Fanon's (1963) declaration that people who are oppressed will invariably accept as true the worst that is presumed about them.

As Gladwell indicated, there are often marginalised people who buck the trend when the odds are against them. These are the people who provide powerful insights as to what is possible through agency, self-efficacy and grit. This study contributes to

the understanding of how they developed and leveraged their self-efficacy in ways that enable them to thrive academically. The major task for this study therefore was to tell the stories of students from marginalised categories at University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and explore how they made it to this point, and how they are meeting their goals against all odds through self-efficacy.

In addition to Bandura, this study draws upon the writings highlighting the importance of difference and diversity in Ghanaian education of Nana Professor George Sefa Dei, a Ghanaian scholar and Chief of Koforidua, Ghana who wrote of society's failure to embrace and value diversity. He stated:

The notion of shared identity is relevant to the extent that it connects a people to a shared history, continuing present and future; however contested these may be. Beyond the myriad difference and complexities of identities, religions, spiritualities, cultures, religion and language there is a connection that can appropriately be labelled a „community of difference.“ The failure to make this important distinction in pedagogic, instructional and communicative practices has led to some Ghanaian educators reading difference as negative or problematic (2005, p. 282).

A person who is different in either a physical, social or emotional sense could be treated in an unfair way based on their physical characteristics, their socioeconomic background or based on emotional factors in their lived experience. This study shines a light on these experiences and explores how people overcome negative societal structures. Dei (2005) indicated that, instead of accepting marginalisation of some as the norm, positive change can be effected if we are willing to explore issues of difference and how they impact educational opportunities. Dei continued:

By failing to speak out about the ways in which schools refuse to address questions of difference critically, we have become complicit in the continued marginalization and negation of certain bodies in the educational system. We must consider how power-saturated issues of academic social relations tend to validate different bodies, experiences and knowledges to serve particular interests (2005, p. 284).

As such, and as this work progressed, it became necessary to delve into issues of power in relation to the educational successes of students who represented various marginalised groups. In addition to dealing with ways they were perceived as different from other Ghanaians and how to circumvent obstacles due to their differences, the participants had an additional layer of hurdles, which included the aftermath of colonisation. The ways that the students represented marginalised groups are discussed in the next section.

#### **1.4 Categories of the Marginalised Represented in this Study**

The issues in this study involved students who were in various ways different from the many of their counterparts. The study focused on students who were in marginalised categories as a result of: having the condition of albinism, being a female, being a person living with HIV, having others' perceptions of their sexuality impact their lives negatively, having a mentally ill and/or otherwise absent parent, having visual impairment, having hearing and speech impairment, having physically impairment, having a learning impairment. The study looked at their lived experiences and the meanings they derived from them.

We live in a world where the able-bodied population is seen as dominant and as the norm. This thereby forces persons with physical impairments – whether

visually, or regarding hearing and speech, learning, or with respect to the use of one's legs – into marginalised categories.

Issues of perceived sexuality also play into a person's place in a community and society. In Africa generally, "homosexuality is not legally acceptable" (Umar, 2015, p. 3). More directly related to this study was the view of homosexuality by society in Ghana, where it is seen as unacceptable, illegal and morally wrong (Umar, 2015). Hence, when someone is attracted to the same sex or is just perceived to be so, it puts that individual in the position of marginality by pushing them to the fringes of society, as they are seen as an outlier, someone too different to be included in the rest of society.

Albinism is another issue that causes persons with the condition to be located in societal margins. Because of the difference in appearance of those with albinism and the rarity of its occurrence, there is a stigma attached to albinism. In many African countries, including Ghana, people with albinism have been shunned and threatened with being sacrificed or maimed for ritualistic purposes.

Girls are often pushed to the side because parents put more emphasis on boys' educational success than that of the girls. In developing countries, females are in subservient positions and the highest expectations of them often include marrying and birthing children.

Moreover, issues of HIV and AIDS cause those living with the virus to be placed in a position of relegation or to be seen that way. Due to lack of information, some believe they are at risk from casual contact with someone carrying the virus. Therefore, adding to health issues, those infected with the virus also face stigmatisation and judgment, if their condition were to become known to others.

When individuals grow up without parents who are willing and able to perform their parental duties, there can be serious repercussions in their lives. In comparison to someone being raised by one or two responsible adults, the person without these supports can live markedly different experiences. They often suffer and struggle to survive. Without the presence of strong parental leadership and guidance, they often find themselves in vulnerable, very difficult circumstances. Familial support is compromised when a variety of situations arise. Some of those reflected in this study were: mental illness, divorce, quarrels, and other de-stabilising factors.

As a result of meeting and working with some students from marginalised categories at the Counselling Centre and seeing and meeting others on campus, the researcher became intensely curious and wanted to know how these students reached the university level. Even with many obstacles to university education, these students broke through those barriers, stereotypes, rejections, systems of exclusion and fears to do what many in their situations simply would not attempt. It seemed to take a high level of resolve for an aspiring student who was marginalised to rally against systems of marginalisation, structuration, and discouragement to gain entry into a university.

Hence, this study focused on UEW students from marginalised groups. Marginalised group members are often excluded from institutions and often feel that their opinions, feelings, experiences and desires carry little weight or that they are not taken into account, particularly with those who hold positions of authority. The students in this group were unique, meaning that they were somehow different and, based on their difference(s), they had lived experiences of being on the periphery of society.

## 1.5 Marginalisation as a Global Issue

Contributing to the problem of marginalisation are the many assumptions across the globe about the abilities of those found on societal peripheries. It seems that, to many, those who have been affected by negative life circumstances do not generally meet all of their life goals or must somehow alter aspirations because of their situations. This may have been true with some, but there were others who did not fit into this category. They may have acknowledged their differences while holding firmly to their goals. More specifically, they believed in themselves, even when others did not.

Marginalisation is a global issue and its impact on education is very significant. There are numerous ways that students find themselves to be marginalised or somehow viewed as different. For instance, people from minority groups often attend universities at lower rates and drop out at higher rates. By way of example, in the United States, one of the biggest challenges for “universities is the number of students who fail to graduate. Nearly one out of five four-year institutions graduate fewer than one-third of its first-time, full-time degree-seeking first-year students within six years” (Carey, 2004, pp. 6-7).

People from marginalised categories often are unable to figure out and tap into the socio-economic advantages that seem to be related to university success. Pizzolato (2003) wrote about high-risk students: “These students” stories suggest that information about higher education is not necessarily easily accessible in secondary education and that students have vastly different experiences applying to college and making choices about college attendance depending on their levels of privilege” (p. 810). This suggests that those less privileged, who are often first-generation college

students are left without the benefit of learning from their predecessors how to succeed at this level.

Marginalisation is not only a global issue, but it also cuts across disciplines. Vasas (2005), a registered nurse who analyses the process of marginalisation and its effects, defines marginalisation as “the process through which individuals or groups are peripheralized on the basis of their identities, associations, experiences, and environments” (p. 194). She wrote that the term “marginalisation is rarely used as an independent concept” but argued that “we can gain insights into how vulnerable groups are created and situated along the periphery of mainstream society” (2005, p. 194).

Vasas (2005) defined marginalised populations as “groups of people who are socially excluded and experience inequalities in the distribution of resources and power” (p. 195). She went on to discuss marginalisation in terms of those being in the centre and those not in the centre (non-centre), thus leading to separations in society between the “center” and the “other” (2005, p. 196).

Cuadraz (2005), who has written widely about Latinas in higher education, seemed to concur with Vasas on the point of exclusion and indicated that “marginalised participants in an organization do not have the same access to resources and decision making as those playing more central roles” (1992).

Ghanaian scholar Dei highlights students whose lived experiences and daily “realities prevent them from focusing on the task on hand” as a group which often cannot gain similar benefits to dominant groups (2003, p. 143). An example of that is found in a study on school inattendance in Ghana, through which it was discovered that there is a continuum of school dropout, as developed by Ananga (2011), ranging



from a specific incident “event dropout”, to the category of “settled dropout.” While many people who are in marginalised groups find themselves somewhere along this scale, some do not. Even as they often unconsciously take on the hegemonic influences of power (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991), some Ghanaians seeking higher education find ways and means to battle the structures that threaten their success.

Being unable to stipulate rules and regulations that lead to goal attainment in this environment can result in people developing creatively. Bandura (2002) discusses “social modelling and other experimental means” as ways people can follow plans for reaching goals while acclimating themselves to particular settings (p. 272). The courage and trust in oneself to develop “experimental means” required to pursue and study for a university-level degree were reflected in the stories of the study participants.

There are different terms which connote the idea of trust in oneself. Bandura uses the term “self-efficacy” to describe the belief in oneself to accomplish goals. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) call this quality “grit” and define it as: “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (p. 1,087). It “entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress” (2007, pp. 1,087-1,088). While the work by Duckworth et al focused on professionals in the U.S. and their successful adherence to goals, the current research dealt with unlikely UEW students who were working to academically achieve despite being in marginalised categories.

Some people from marginalised groups seem to possess some qualities and beliefs – and seem to exhibit behaviours – which conspire to elevate them above their circumstances. “Adaptation in the context of significant threats to development” is



termed *resilience* (Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmezy & Ramirez, 1999). Personal factors, behaviour and environmental influences form the basis of Bandura's reciprocal determinism (Bandura 1986). This model described the interplay amongst factors which affect self-efficacy development. Using Bandura's model, Pajares went on to state: "These beliefs of personal competence affect behaviour in several ways. They influence the choices individuals make and the courses of actions they pursue" as well as "thought patterns and emotional reactions" (Pajares, 1996, p. 544).

Students with positive beliefs in their abilities are in a better position to excel. Those with positive self-efficacy shatter the assumptions that their circumstances will hold them back. It was important to look closely at the elements of self-efficacy which some marginalised UEW students develop and employ to succeed. The stories in this research dealt with the self-beliefs of students from marginalised groups; in later chapters, their beliefs and qualities are teased out, documented and shared for use in professions such as academic and mental health counselling.

## **1.6 Statement of the Research Problem**

Students who represented marginalised groups are often expected to succumb to their circumstances because they are different from the remainder of society, they are perceived and treated in ways that often negatively affect their abilities to do well. Moreover, "the categories are so well constructed, in fact – so hegemonic – that they appear to be natural and true" (Grinker, Lubkemann & Steiner, 2010, p. 428). Even with society's seemingly low expectations, many do not become victims of their situations. Instead, they succeed. And they soar. The study participants rose above the struggles associated with respective marginalised categories.

The problem was that the lived experiences of this group and the meanings they assigned them were not known in terms of how students from difficult circumstances overcame their situations in order to reach such heights. Moreover, participants' qualities that contributed to their abilities to overcome structural, cultural and societal barriers begged to be known.

### **1.7 Purpose of the Study**

These stories of students from marginalised groups are being shared because they are powerful, meaning they will inspire others. Hence, the purpose of the study was to elicit and document the lived experiences of the participants, while searching for the qualities they possess. The general aim of this work was to look at ways these students developed and utilised a belief in themselves in order to become resilient enough to resist the forces of marginalisation often promulgated by powerful societal structures, as they successfully pursued their goals to attain higher education.

### **1.8 Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to:

1. Identify students who experienced various forms of marginalisation yet succeeded at the university level
2. Identify characteristics which these students possessed and describe how they used these qualities to be successful
3. Elicit and document the issues that faced this group prior to (and since) reaching university level
4. Identify and describe ways that students from marginalised groups overcame hurdles to university education
5. Explore ways this group developed self-efficacy and resilience

## 1.9 Research Questions

The study was based on answering the following questions:

1. What are the stories, the lived experiences, of students from marginalised groups who are successful at UEW – Winneba?
2. What hurdles to university education have these students faced?
3. How do the lived experiences of these students in marginalised categories affect their education?
4. Which qualities do these students from marginalised categories possess?

## 1.10 Significance of the Study

This study serves to contribute to the understanding of how students from marginalised categories developed and used self-efficacy and personal agency to attain university admission and succeed at university level – while resisting forces of marginalisation. These forces include societal expectations and the echoes of colonisation. Through the rich information contained herein, this study offers readers several benefits.

Firstly, there are many hurdles to general goals which individuals set. When roadblocks are added to lofty goals, they can be overwhelming to some. This work provides an appreciation of the challenges facing marginalised university students, regardless of the reasons behind their marginalised status.

Secondly, this study adds to the understanding of how students from marginalised groups overcome hurdles to university education. This understanding is likely to enlighten leaders in education so that when they write policies for the students of Ghana, the marginalised, along with the issues they encounter, can be taken into account. Hence, this study contributes to the direction of policies which

enhance the lives of the marginalised, including potential students, their families and the communities in which they live.

Thirdly, this study also contributes to the body of knowledge on self-efficacy and resilience, especially with regard to people who are different and are sidelined based on that difference. Whether a person is deemed to be in a marginalised category by virtue of some physical impairment or because of some other aspect of their lived experiences, this information expands knowledge of how self-efficacy impacts one's success in academic pursuits in Ghana.

Fourthly, the current study offers educators and policymakers solid evidence for including, promoting and valuing diversity. Hence, it highlights the important notion that difference is often a source of strength and depth for everyone to learn from. The narratives of the students' lived experiences are included and are used to encourage professionals to assist students beyond perceived limits so that they dream bigger dreams, leaping over boundaries along the way. In other words, people in positions of influence in children's lives, such as teachers, counsellors, headmasters/headmistresses, will also be motivated by this research to encourage students, especially those from difficult and different backgrounds to resist negative influences which linger into this post-colonisation era.

This study also serves as an inspiration to teachers across Ghana to use their agency with their students to highlight and honour the differences and diversity among student populations. When leaders start to place more value on the richness of difference and diversity, they will – by extension – teach our children to do the same. These changes will teach our youth to move past obstacles through self-efficacy, the belief in oneself.

In sum, the subjects of the narratives trudge on, even when there are challenges which would “signal to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses” (Duckworth et al, 2007, p. 1,088). Being able to identify the qualities, beliefs and backgrounds of this set of students will assist professionals better understand how to support those in need. The study adds to the knowledge which informs educators, counsellors and other mental health workers while it also helps identify and support those who have been or could be overlooked by their families, their wider communities and, ultimately, themselves.

### **1.11 Delimitations of the Study**

The study was situated in Ghana, West Africa and involved full-time, undergraduate UEW – Winneba students who were located on the three campuses in Winneba. The criteria for inclusion in the research in terms of marginalised statuses involve physical, emotional and societal realms.

In addition to the fact that the researcher lives and works in Winneba at the University, a key factor in conducting this study at UEW – Winneba had to do with UEW’s status as one of the first universities of education in Africa. Education is the gateway to success, and as Nelson Mandela (1994) stated, “Education is the great engine of personal development” (p. 144). Plans for increased “access and equity” for marginalised groups are laid out in great detail in UEW’s Strategic Plan (2014, pp. 52-55), demonstrating that this University is committed to equality for all. Hence, this university was a good place to find thriving students.

### **1.12 Definition of Terms**

**Marginalisation** – the process of pushing certain people to the edges of society while leaving them behind

**Agency** – the ability to take independent action.

**Self-Efficacy** – the belief that what is envisioned will come to fruition.

**Grit** – diligence in working on longstanding goals.

**Resilience** – the ability to recover or succeed, despite difficult circumstances.

**Structuration** – creation and reproduction of social systems.

**Cultural Reproduction** – passing down cultural values and norms from one generation to the next.

**Social Reproduction** – the maintenance of social inequalities over long periods.

**Hegemony** – a form of power which is unseen, unwittingly accepted as true

### 1.13 Theoretical Model

There are different ways that people can be marginalised. The most obvious way is based on some physical attribute whereby something is different about a person's physical being that somehow sets them apart. However, there are other ways of peripheralising people; marginalisation can involve not being allowed to enter certain circles due to their differences and/or lack of knowledge of how to interact in those spheres. This type of marginalisation is termed "social" in the Figure One.

It seems that differences among people are often not appreciated by society in general, hence people deemed to be different are often pushed aside. Diversity apparently makes people – and the systems we are all a part of – uncomfortable. Two of those systems are cultural reproduction and social reproduction. The reproduction of culture involves the passing down of values and norms from one generation to the next. Social reproduction involves the maintenance of social inequalities over long periods. These systems are at work ensuring that society remains as it is; as an

example, wealth is handed down from one generation to another through educational expectations and opportunities.

If someone goes to a university, it is likely that their children will do the same. On the other hand, if one's parents have not gone to a university, tertiary education is often much lower on the list of possibilities for the children – if at all.

At the end of this chapter is a theoretical model for this study on the self-efficacy of students from marginalised groups at UEW in Winneba, Ghana. It depicts various factors, including institutional norms, which impinged upon students who were different, thereby placing them into categories of marginalisation. Some were physically and noticeably different, while some had social dynamics in their lived experiences which in turn deemed them different from the majority in ways which contributed to the threat of being of pushed aside and left behind.

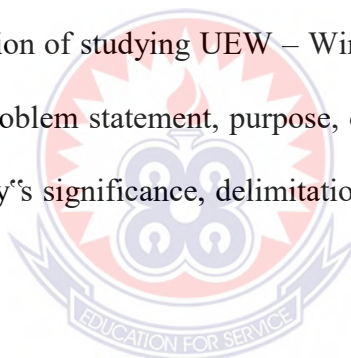
The unshadowed arrows show how some people from marginalised groups deal with societal influences, in terms of attaining higher goals. Firstly, some succumb to their difficult circumstances and leave aspirations unachieved. Generally, some develop a measure of cultural capital, figuring out parts of systems to move them forward. For some, despite the challenges, there is development of self-efficacy and determination that they use to rival the systems seeking to keep them out.

Each of the students who represented marginalised categories in this study employed agentic and self-efficacy skills that shored them up through every blow they experienced. They came out as resilient beings, having successfully navigated the sometimes unforgiving physical and social terrains of society. Instead of plummeting, giving up, they overcame and they soared.

### 1.14 Organisation of the Study

This study is organised in the following manner: Chapter Two details literature relevant to the issues raised in the study, including each area of marginalisation represented by the participants. Chapter Three lays out the methodology and methods which guided this research. Chapter Four follows with a presentation of the data collected through interviews and observations. A discussion of the analysis of the data, explicating meanings derived from the participants' lived experiences is found in the fifth chapter. Chapter Six discusses conclusions and recommendations which arose from the research analysis.

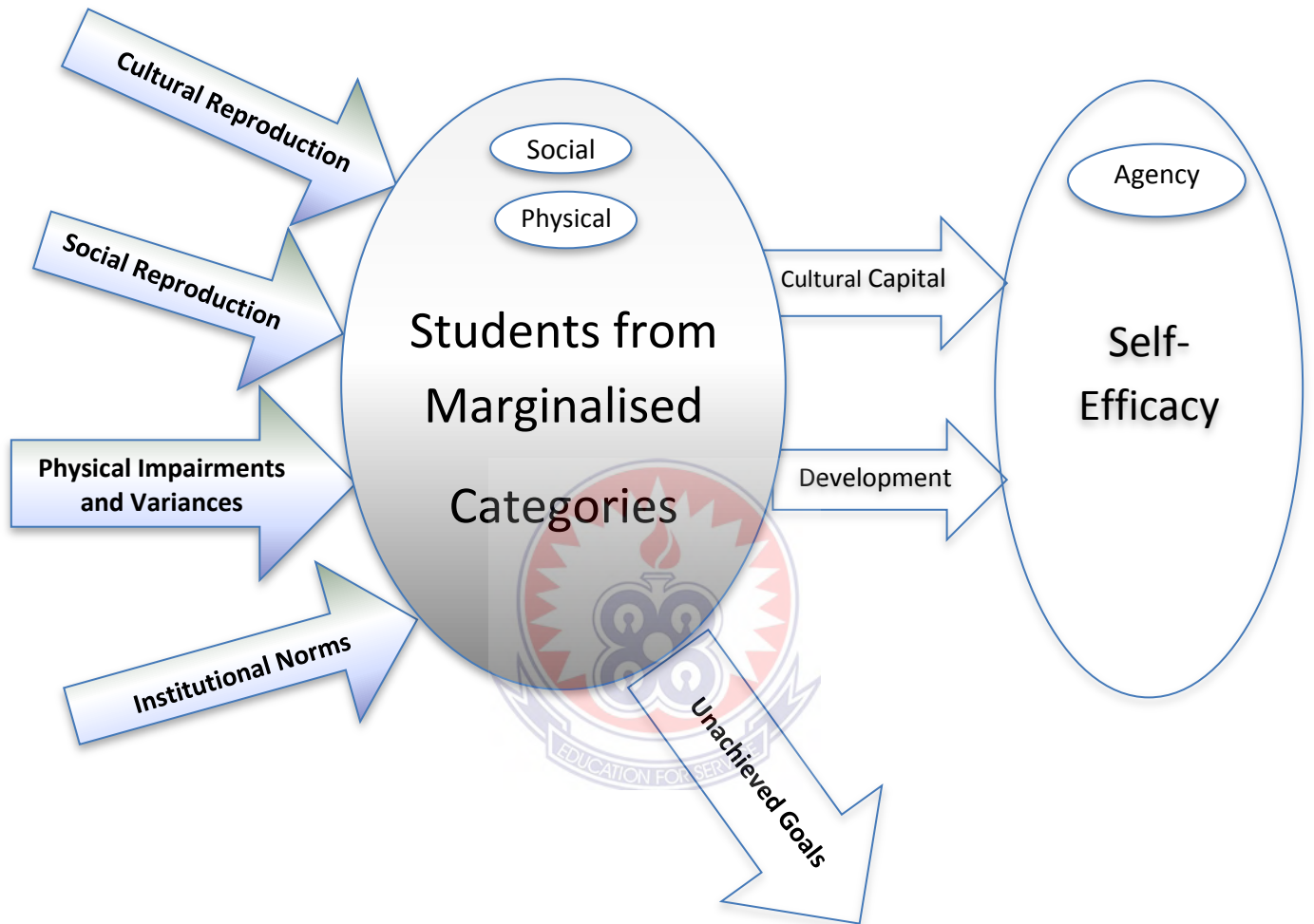
In conclusion, Chapter One sought to introduce the study and gives a brief overview of how the notion of studying UEW – Winneba students from marginalised categories arose. The problem statement, purpose, objectives and research questions were outlined. The study's significance, delimitations and key definitions, were also explained.



The theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1.1, after which, Chapter Two highlights relevant literature as it relates marginalised groups and ways people who are different attribute meaning to their lived experiences.



**Figure 1.1. Theoretical Framework for the Study**



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This study focused on people whose life circumstances placed them in marginalised categories but, despite this, they became thriving University students in Winneba, Ghana. This chapter reviews the related literature and is presented in four parts. Firstly, agency and its central features are discussed. Agency is the ability to take independent action in order to cause some chosen result. One of agency's three mechanisms is self-efficacy; hence, the intricate alignment of these concepts is apparent in this review. The concept of self-efficacy is the belief that what is envisioned will come to fruition and constitutes the main theory underpinning this study.

Hence, the second part of this chapter covers self-efficacy, and its origins (social learning theory and social cognitive theory). Because Albert Bandura was the one who coined and developed the term *self-efficacy*, his work is most prevalent in existing literature. Others' works regarding self-efficacy have built off Bandura's ideas, and they are also included in this review and often reference Bandura, as his contributions to the literature are prolific and widely cited.

Thirdly, issues contributing to marginalisation, such as socioeconomic matters, how differences are viewed, and power structures are discussed. Marginalisation was operationalised in this study as the process of pushing certain people to the edges of society. To go further, marginalisation deprives some from fully benefiting from certain areas in life by removing them and their voices from

sources of power; hence, leaving them behind and in vulnerable situations. The notion of vulnerability was incorporated into the use of marginalisation in this study because vulnerability of marginalised people is associated with the lack of higher education, as those with lowest education levels are generally more susceptible to poverty and have fewer opportunities in life. These opportunities are related to prospects regarding social class and meaningful employment.

In the last section, gaps in the literature are discussed, highlighting the niches this study fills.

The following discussions lay out the theoretical framework of this study and speak to ways which people facing formidable obstacles prevail over layers of opposition.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study explored past and current experiences which contribute to students' abilities to be agents for themselves. More specifically, it explored how they attained a certain level of academic achievement and how they have developed and continued to utilise their human agency to "shape their life circumstances and the courses their lives take" (Bandura, 2006, p. 164). To this end, the theoretical framework of this study of marginalised students is based on Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory.

According to Bandura (2002), a requirement for "successful functioning, is an agentic blend" of three modes of agency (p. 270). The three modes are: proxy, collective, and direct personal. With proxy agency, others assist with an individual's goals to bring them into fruition. Collective agency refers to group action. Personal agency is applied independently (2002, p. 269) and forms the basis for self-efficacy.

Because agency is intricately woven into the concept of self-efficacy, the following sections cover agency and its central features.

### 2.3 Agency

Bandura (2001) states: “To be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions” (p. 2). In 2006, he discussed “agentic management of fortuity” whereby chance encounters can lead to a “unique confluence of influences that can alter the course of lives” (Bandura, 2006, p. 166). In other words, individuals who have personal agency are able to parlay situations into opportunities that assist them in meeting their goals.

Sociologists Emirbayer and Mische (1998) also took an in-depth look at agency and place more of an emphasis on time. They asserted that the key to fully understanding its dynamic possibilities is “to view it as composed of variable and changing orientations within the flow of time” (p. 964). They added that when we perceive agency this way, “only then will it be clear how the structural environments of action are both dynamically sustained by and also altered through human agency – by actors capable of formulating projects for the future and realizing them, even if only in small part, and with unforeseen outcomes, in the present” (p. 964).

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) described agency as:

the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations” (1998, p. 970).

Agency and self-efficacy are key concepts in this study because, as Bandura (2001) stated, “efficacy beliefs are the foundation of human agency” (p. 10). As noted by Gecas (1989), self-efficacy inhabits a part of the wider topic of human agency (pp. 291-292). With the acknowledgement that neo-colonialism represents the antithesis of agency, the next section explicates human agency and its central features.

### **2.3.1 Central Features of Human Agency**

Bandura (2001) stated: “Agency embodies endowments, belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities and distributed structures and functions through which personal influence exercised, rather than residing as a discrete entity in a particular place” (p. 2). Bandura’s thoughts on human agency centre on four main ideas: “intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness” (Bandura, 2006, p. 164-165). Each of the four ideas is described separately below.

### **2.3.2 Intentionality**

Firstly, intentionality involves one’s anticipation that a particular act will be done (Bandura, 2001). “It is not simply an expectation or prediction of future actions but a proactive commitment to bring them about” (Bandura, 2001, p. 6). He went further to state: “outcomes are not the characteristics of agentive acts; they are consequences of them” because sometimes an individual’s actions yield unintended results (p. 6).

The concept of the power to act with intention was important in this research, as most people who are marginalised often do not feel that they have the power to act or take actions in a way that would net the desired result. With the following statement, Bandura (2001) touched on this foundation of agency which has to do with

control: “The power to originate actions for given purposes is the key feature of personal agency” (Bandura, 2001, p. 6).

### **2.3.3 Forethought**

The mere act of using the mind’s eye to see oneself attain a goal serves as an encouraging factor in being successful. This is referred to as forethought, the second main idea of human agency. Bandura (2001) stated: “Through the exercise of forethought, people motivate themselves and guide their actions in anticipation of future events. When projected over a long time course on matters of value, a forethoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence, and meaning to one’s life” (p. 7). To be able to take on the role of university students, it was possible that the participants in this study used some form of forethought.

People who are marginalised often find it difficult to break the moulds of their situations to make meaningful growth. Bandura (2001) discussed forethought as a way for people to change their lives: “The ability to bring anticipated outcomes to bear on current activities promotes foresightful behavior. It enables people to transcend the dictates of their immediate environment and to shape and regulate the present to fit a desired future” (p. 7).

### **2.3.4 Self-Reactiveness**

The third main idea in human agency is self-reactiveness. To further clarify this notion of self-reactiveness, Bandura (2001) stated: “Actions give rise to self-reactive influence through performance comparison with personal goals and standards” (p. 8), meaning that when one sets a goal, their perseverance is fortified by

gauging their standards by others, and creating “self-incentives” to remain encouraged (p. 8).

However, a person who feels disempowered may feel overwhelmed by the thought of setting his/her sights on a major, far-reaching goal. Breaking down a long-term goal into various, immediate short-term actions is one way to overcome the enormity of a task. Bandura (2001) addressed this issue with discussion of “proximal subgoals”, which “mobilize self-influences and direct what one does in the here and now” (p. 8).

### **2.3.5 Self-Reflectiveness**

Bandura’s fourth cornerstone of human agency is self-reflectiveness. This construct represents an aspect of paramount importance in terms of the issues in the current study because, as Bandura (2001) stated: “Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s beliefs in their capability to exercise some measure of control over their own functioning and over environmental events” (p. 10).

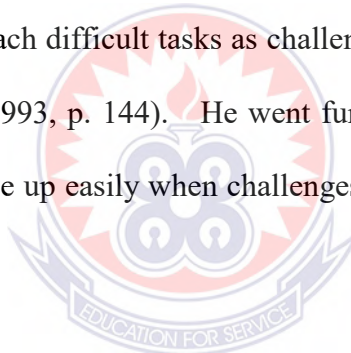
In summary, the four main ideas of agency are: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. They must each be fulfilled in the use of agency; this can lead to an aspiring student setting his/her goal, envisaging student status and then going further to “give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution. This multifaceted self-directedness operates through self-regulatory processes that link thought to action” (Bandura, 2001, p. 8).

The participants in the current research endeavour were striving to take control of their lives through higher education. “Whatever other factors serve as guides and

motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to produce desired effects” (Bandura & Locke, 2003, p. 87). Taking this in-depth look at their lives through the lens of their core beliefs – their self-efficacy – and how they utilised their agency was thought-provoking and instructive. A person’s wish to become a successful university student would not go far with desire and thoughts alone. It is important to go further; hence, the following section explicates self-efficacy and ways it can interface with agency to propel people towards their goals.

#### **2.4 Agentic Action and Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is one of three mechanisms of human agency. Bandura stated, “A strong sense of efficacy enhances personal accomplishment in many ways. People with high efficacy approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided” (1993, p. 144). He went further to indicate that those with a low sense of efficacy give up easily when challenges arise, as opposed to re-doubling their efforts.



Bandura (2002) used the term *agentic action* as the way individuals work within society to reach their goals while simultaneously dealing with issues related to marginalised statuses.

He wrote:

Through agentic action, people devise ways of adapting flexibly to remarkably diverse environments. Moreover, they use their ingenuity to insulate themselves from selection pressures. They create devices that compensate immensely for their sensory and physical limitations, circumvent environmental constraints, redesign and construct environments to their liking, create styles of behaviour that enable them to realize desired outcomes and



pass on the effective ones to others by social modelling and other experimental means (Bandura, 2002, p. 272).

When a person has a firm sense of self-efficacy, their willingness and ability to tap into their agency are stronger. The belief in one's ability to meet one's goals is at the heart of self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997, p. 79). Self-efficacy theory is rooted in social cognitive theory. Each time an individual accomplishes a particular task, s/he improves her/his knowledge about the self. Also, each time one experiences a failed attempt to meet a goal, one acquires knowledge about their ability to succeed (Bandura, 1997).

Therefore, experience is a key factor in both self-efficacy and human agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) explored past experiences in terms of "habit and repetition" and stated that these two constructs impact the effort one expends. The past is said to become:

...a stabilizing influence that shapes the flow of effort and allows us to sustain identities, meanings, and interactions over time. The primary locus of agency for the iterational dimension, we argue, lies in the *schematization* of social experience. It is manifested in actors' abilities to recall, to select, and to appropriately apply the more or less tacit and taken-for-granted schemas of action that they have developed through past interactions (p. 975).

In terms of reaching lofty goals, it is the *actions* we take which are paramount in attaining these goals. At the same time, of equal importance is what we *believe* about our abilities to be successful. It is what we believe about our abilities that guides what we do through every step of the way. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) used

the term “iteration” to describe the way that people proceed, in terms of habits, in reaching the dreams they set. They stated:

The concept of iteration is crucial for our conception of agency since we maintain that both the projective and practical-evaluative dimensions are deeply grounded in habitual, unreflected, and mostly unproblematic patterns of action by means of which we orient our efforts in the greater part of our daily lives (p. 975).

Thus, when we are meeting goals, these successes build upon one another in our belief systems and buoy us to continue. This quoted statement on the importance of *iteration* by Emirbayer and Mische’s supports Bandura’s views on human behaviour. In examining self-efficacy in human agency, Bandura (1982) stated:

Efficacy in dealing with one’s environment is not a fixed act or simply a matter of knowing what to do. Rather, it involves a generative capability in which component cognitive, social, and behavioral skills must be organized into integrated courses of action to serve innumerable purposes.

In sum, human agency involves the ability to consciously act. And, as Bandura (1982) stated: “A capability is only as good as its execution” (p. 122). He continued, “Operative competence requires orchestration and continuous improvisation of multiple subskills to manage ever-changing circumstances (Bandura, 1982). This seems to, in part, reflect the emphasis on “iteration” espoused by Emirbayer and Mische (1998).

The following section discusses mechanisms of human agency, self-efficacy and related phrases.

### 2.4.1 Self-Efficacy and Related Expressions

According to Bandura, when people believe that their actions can lead them to their dreams, they have what it takes in terms of incentive to move forward in their goals, even during difficult times (2006). He also stated: “Belief in one’s efficacy is a key personal resource in personal development and change. It operates through its impact on cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes” (p. 171).

“Efficacy beliefs affect whether individuals think optimistically or pessimistically, in self-enhancing or self-debilitating ways. Such beliefs affect people’s goals and aspirations, how well they motivate themselves and their perseverance in the face of difficulties and adversity” (p. 171).

Self-efficacy theory shows up in many different ways in the psychological branch of social psychology (Gecas, 1989, p. 292). With regard to motivational theories of self-efficacy, White’s effectance motivation looked at the person and their desire to act (Gecas, 1989, p. 292). In his article reviewing the essence of self-efficacy and related expressions, Gecas stated:

Motivation theories tend to emphasize the *experience* of causal agency and to see it as a fundamental human need and a basic element in one’s sense of self. White’s (1959) influential theory of “effectance motivation” was an early statement of this position. Effectance motivation was conceptualized as an intrinsic motivation to produce effects on the environment, that is, to make things happen (Gecas, 1989, p. 292).

Alongside White’s views on the desire to take action, is Harter’s (1978) use of the term *competence motivation*, which he delineated into two categories; “one is striving to master challenges; and the other is a striving to encounter challenges” (Gecas, 1989, p. 292).

While social cognitive theory's self-efficacy includes perseverance, the noncognitive term "grit" describes diligence in working on longstanding goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). It is defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" and entails "working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years" regardless of challenges (Duckworth et al 2007, pp. 1087-1088). Those who possess this noncognitive trait are said to log more hours in activities dedicated towards a specific target, without wavering from that goal (Duckworth et al, 2007).

A study by Pizzolato (2003) discussed issues that seemed to parallel agency in terms of "self-authorship" through her examination of two main questions.

- a) To what degree do high-risk college students possess self-authoring ways of knowing?
- b) What types of experiences are associated with development of self-authoring ways of knowing? (p. 797).

Using these are important questions, Pizzolato's study was conducted with mostly first-year students. The author acknowledged this as a limitation of the study, as "interviews during only the first semester do not allow for examination into the degree to which students are able to maintain self-authoring ways of knowing" (Pizzolato, 2003, p. 810).

Self-efficacy, with its emphasis on how one thinks about his/her ability to succeed at some goal, is derived from social cognitive theory, which was originally termed "social learning theory." Hence, the following sections cover social learning theory and social cognitive theory.

#### **2.4.2 Social Learning Theory: The Forerunner of Social Cognitive Theory's Self-Efficacy**

The theoretical underpinning of this study is self-efficacy theory. This theory has a basis in social cognitive theory, which Bandura (1977) originally termed “social learning theory” (Weiten, 2013, p. 467). Thus, this section highlights social learning theory, the predecessor of social cognitive theory.

Social learning theory argued: “We learn social behavior by observing and imitating and by being rewarded and punished” (Myers, 1993, p. 434). This theory, espoused by Bandura (1977), plays an important role in this study because it details the origins of Bandura’s self-efficacy theory. He stated, “Social learning theory emphasises the prominent roles played by vicarious, symbolic, and self-regulatory processes in psychological functioning” (p. vii).

Social learning theory looked at human behaviour “in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental determinants” (Bandura, 1977, p. vii). This allows actors to bring to bear the desires of their minds and hearts on their lived experiences, but as Bandura (1977) noted, “both people and their environments are reciprocal determinants of each other” (p. vii).

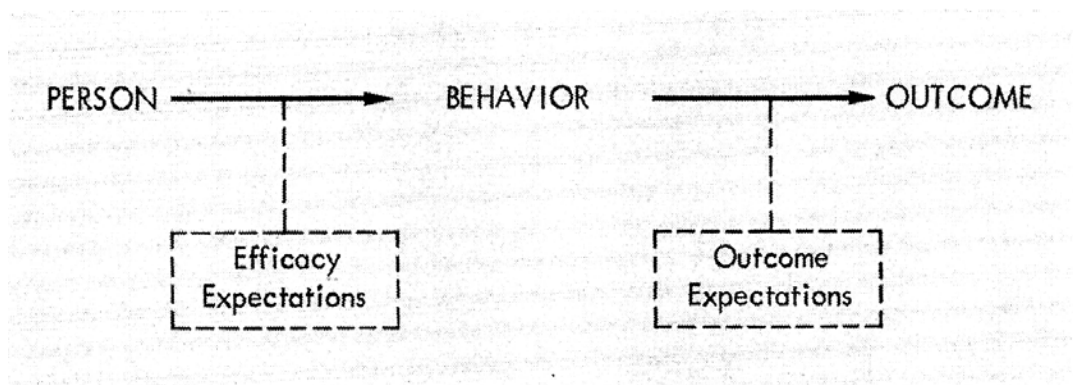
In 1977, Bandura laid the groundwork for the emphasis placed on time by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) when Bandura marvelled at humans’ utilisation of symbols: “The extraordinary capacity of humans to use symbols enables them to represent events, to analyse their conscious experience, to communicate with others at any distance in time and space, to plan, to create, to imagine, and to engage in foresightful action” (p. vii).

Another defining characteristic of social learning theory was that it gave recognition to people's abilities to control themselves, as opposed to simply responding to stimuli from the environment (Weiten, 2013). "By arranging environmental inducements, generating cognitive supports, and producing consequences for their own actions, people are able to exercise some measure of control over their own behaviour" (Bandura, 1977, p. 13). Bandura clarified this point: "People are not simply reactors to external influences. They select, organize and transform the stimuli that impinge upon them" (Bandura, 1977, p. vii).

With social learning theory, Bandura looked at self-efficacy through two lenses of expectation, outcome and efficacy (1977). He posited:

An outcome expectation is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes. Outcome and efficacy expectations are differentiated because individuals can come to believe that a particular course of action will produce certain outcomes, but question whether they can perform those actions (p. 79).

The diagram below is from Bandura's *Social Learning Theory* (1977) and depicts the described difference between efficacy expectations and outcome expectations:



**Figure 2.1. Efficacy and Outcome Expectations (Bandura, 1977, p. 79).**

Bandura coined the phrase “reciprocal determinism” which connotes the idea that the “environment does determine behavior (as Skinner would argue). However, behaviour also determines the environment” (Weiten, 2013, p. 467).

“Reciprocal determinism is the idea that internal mental events, external environmental events, and overt behavior all influence one another.” According to Bandura, humans are neither masters of their own destiny nor hapless victims buffeted about by the environment (Weiten, 2013, p. 468).

With Bandura’s reciprocal determinism, he discarded Skinner’s ideas that one’s behaviour is “determined by environment and that freedom is an illusion” (Weiten, 2013, p. 468). In addition, Bandura added the idea that “personal factors (cognitive structures such as beliefs and expectancies) determine and are determined by behaviour and the environment” (Weiten, 2013, p. 468).

It was this acknowledgement by Bandura that behaviour and the environment work in conjunction with expectations and beliefs that led to the change in terms from *social learning* to *social cognitive theory* (Weiten, 2013, p. 468). The components of social cognitive theory are explicated below.



### 2.4.3 Social Cognitive Theory

As indicated, social learning theory evolved into social cognitive theory. The components of social cognitive theory are: modeling, outcome expectation, self-efficacy and identification (Bandura, 1986).

The current study looked at the self-efficacy component of social cognitive theory that UEW students from marginalised groups displayed in overcoming structures, conditions and statuses which often acted as deterring factors. Pajares (2002) highlighted key considerations on social cognitive theory below, thus highlighting the importance of its use in this study on the self-efficacy of students who were representative of the marginalised:

Bandura's social cognitive theory posits that factors such as economic conditions, socioeconomic status, and educational and familial structures do not affect human behavior directly. Instead, they affect it to the degree that they influence people's aspirations, self-efficacy beliefs, personal standards, emotional states, and other self-regulatory influences (Pajares, 2002, pp. 2-3).

Social cognitive theory plays an important role in this research for at least three reasons. Firstly, as mentioned, self-efficacy theory, which highlights the belief in oneself, falls under social cognitive theory. Secondly, as stated by Pajares (2002), "Social cognitive theory is rooted in a view of human agency in which individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development and can make things happen by their actions" (p. 2).

Thirdly, Pajares (2002) went further to illuminate the effect that societal influences bring to bear on individuals' goals. The following statement cuts to the heart of the current research study which was conducted in order to understand how participants developed and used self-efficacy to overcome structures of



marginalisation to become thriving UEW students. Pajares (2002) supported the use of self-efficacy and the foundation of the explored issues with the following:

Social cognitive theory posits that factors such as economic conditions, socioeconomic status, and educational and familial structures do not affect human behaviour directly. Instead they affect it to the degree that they influence people's aspirations, self-efficacy beliefs, personal standards, emotional states, and other self-regulatory influences (pp. 2-3).

Efficacy is attained through four sources, delineated in the following section.

#### 2.4.3.1 Efficacy Expectation Sources

There are four sources of efficacy expectations as developed by Bandura, which include: *performance accomplishments*, *vicarious experience*, *verbal persuasion*, and *emotional arousal* (Bandura, 1977).

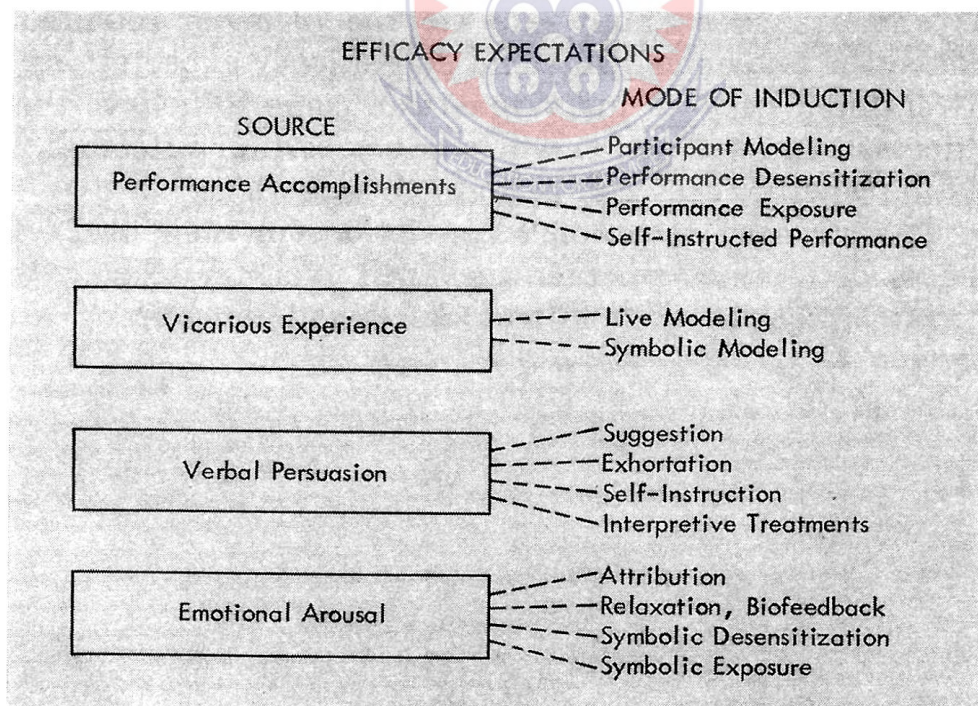


Figure 2.2: Efficacy Expectation Sources (Bandura, 1977, p. 80.)

Each source is delineated below, beginning with performance accomplishments. Bandura stated:

*Performance accomplishments* provide the most dependable source of efficacy expectations because they are based on one's own personal experiences. Successes raise mastery expectations; repeated failures lower them, especially if the mishaps occur early in the course of events. After strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated success, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced (Bandura, 1977, p. 81).

Secondly, by witnessing others' success, individuals are able to see goals as achievable, and are therefore inspired to reach higher in attaining goals. This constitutes Bandura's efficacy expectation called "vicarious experience". He stated:

Many expectations are derived from *vicarious experience*. Seeing others perform threatening activities without adverse consequences can create expectations in observers that they too will eventually succeed if they intensify and persist in their efforts. They persuade themselves that if others can do it, they should be able to achieve at least some improvements in performance (Bandura, 1977, p. 81).

Thirdly, "in attempts to influence human behaviour, *verbal persuasion* is widely used because of its ease and ready availability. People are led, through persuasive suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past" (Bandura, 1977, p. 82).

Fourthly, the way in which a person feels physically also affects their ability to develop self-efficacy through Bandura's efficiency expectations lens.

*Emotional arousal* can influence efficacy expectations in threatening situations. People rely partly upon their state of physiological arousal in

judging their anxiety and vulnerability to stress. Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than when they are tense, shaking, and viscerally agitated. Fear reactions generate further fear” (Bandura, 1977, p. 82).

The current study was situated in an educational setting, University of Education – Winneba; thus, the following section discusses the four constructs of self-efficacy in terms of its development in people located in academic settings.

#### **2.4.3.2 Self-Efficacy Sources in Academic Settings**

Sources of self-efficacy developed by Bandura (1997, 1986) are: “previous attainments or mastery experience”, “vicarious experience”, “verbal and social persuasions”, and “emotional and physiological states”.

Usher and Pajares (2008) described Bandura’s mastery experience as “the most powerful”, representing “the interpreted result of their own previous attainments” (p. 752). Usher and Pajares (2008) placed this aspect of self-efficacy in an educational context with the following: “After students complete an academic task, they interpret and evaluate the results obtained, and judgments of competence are created or revised according to those interpretations” (p. 752). Once a person achieves certain goals, their levels of confidence and beliefs in him/herself grow, and this adds to their beliefs that they can achieve additional tasks (Usher & Pajares, 2008, p. 752). Mastery experiences are even more significant in cases where people prove particularly powerful when individuals surmount hurdles or achieve a lofty goal (Bandura, 1997).

“In many academic endeavours, there are no absolute measures of proficiency. Hence, students gauge their capabilities in relation to the performance of others” (Usher & Pajares, 2008, p. 753). By comparing results with their peers, a student is able to assess their own performance, which results in increased or decreased levels of self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares 2008, p. 753). Usher and Pajares (2008) continued with: “Vicarious information gained from others perceived to be similar in ability yields the most influential comparative information, but the experiences of those perceived as having similar attributes (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) are often powerful sources of self-efficacy information” (p. 753).

A third way that self-efficacy is developed in academic goals is with verbal and social persuasions. This comes in the form of “encouragement from parents, teachers, and peers whom students trust” and “can boost students’ confidence in their academic capabilities” (Usher & Pajares, 2008, p. 754).

The last pathway to self-efficacy development, as described by Bandura (1997), is emotional arousal. Usher and Pajares (2008) used the terms *emotional and physiological states*. They offered examples of these states as “anxiety, stress, fatigue, and mood” and went further to state that students appraise their abilities by noting their physiological arousal during different circumstances (p. 754). Emotional responses to certain subjects or assignments can give an indication of how they are going to perform (Usher and Pajares, 2008). “High anxiety can undermine self-efficacy. Students who experience a feeling of dread when going to a particular class likely interpret their apprehension as evidence of lack of skill in that area” (2008, p. 754).

Conditions that appear to facilitate positive self-efficacy offered by Bandura (1997) who “suggested that people tend to function optimally when their

physiological arousal is neither too high nor too low; that is, physiological arousal may be related curvilinearly to self-efficacy. In general, increasing students' physical and emotional well-being and reducing negative emotional states strengthens self-efficacy" (Usher and Pajares, 2008, p. 754).

In a meta-analysis of self-efficacy beliefs and academic outcomes, Multon, Brown and Lent (1991) found that "self-efficacy – enhancing manipulations used in the experimental studies (e.g., guided mastery, modelling, and feedback) may not only be associated with changes in efficacy beliefs but also may serve to enhance self-efficacy – performance relationships" (p. 34). The next section covers other ways that self-efficacy is affected.

#### **2.4.3.3 Various Routes of Influence – Self-Efficacy and Education**

There are various ways that self-efficacy impacts students. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli (1996) conducted an empirical study involving 279 children with a mean age of 12 years using quantitative methods. Scales were administered measuring: perceived self-efficacy, perceived self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, and efficacy for leisure and extracurricular group activities (p. 1211). In addition, scales "assessed children's self-regulatory efficacy to resist peer pressure to engage in high-risk activities involving alcohol, drugs, unprotected sex, and transgressive behaviour that can get them in trouble" (p. 1211).

The study also looked at students' "beliefs in their capabilities to form and maintain social relationships and manage different types of interpersonal conflicts", to speak up and resist ill-treatment (p. 1211). Through a principal components factor analysis, the results were distilled into three factors.

The first factor was “perceived academic self-efficacy” (Bandura et al, 1996). This element “included high loading on items measuring perceived capability to manage one’s own learning, to master academic subjects, and to fulfil personal, parental and teachers’ academic expectations” (p. 1211).

The second and third factors were “perceived social self-efficacy” and “perceived self-regulatory efficacy” respectively. Perceived social self-efficacy embodies “perceived capability for peer relationships, for self-assertiveness, and for leisure-time activities” (p. 1211). With the perception of self-regulatory efficacy, students’ perceptions of their ability to exert control in their lives were explored and involved their views on their ability to overcome negative peer pressure (Bandura et al, 1996, p. 1211).

Some of the research questions asked in the semi-structured interview guide which was developed for this study addressed issues of each participant’s upbringing in order to explore how they cultivated self-efficacy beliefs, particularly with regard to their educational ambitions over time. Hence, the connections Bandura et al (1996) drew between self-efficacy and future success are particularly relevant. They stated that beliefs affect:

...career aspirations and pursuits during early formative years. The stronger the students’ beliefs in their efficacy, the more occupational options they consider possible, the greater the interest they show in the, the better they prepare themselves educationally for different career pursuits, and the greater their persistence and success in their academic coursework (Betz & Hackett, 1986; Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994).



In a study on the complexities of self-efficacy and the ways that one arrives at a strong sense of efficacy in education, Bandura et al (1996) examined the perceptions of young students, their parents, teachers, and their peers.

Adults with strong parenting skills create and surround their children with appropriate challenges and support them in their development. With respect to parental influence on children's development of self-efficacy, Bandura et al (1996) support the notion of parental influence. They found:

Self-efficacious parents hold high academic aspirations for their children. Parental perceived academic efficacy and educational aspirations are both consistently related to their children's perceived academic efficacy and aspiration, prosocial orientation, low depression and problem behaviors, and high scholastic achievement (p. 1213).

The authors highlighted that parents who have strong, positive beliefs in their abilities to parent create settings that promote learning and growth and act as staunch supporters (Elder & Ardel, 1992, Elder, Ardel, & Lord, 1993; Bandura et al, 1996).

Aside from parents' influence on children's efficacy development, children's ability to take charge of their educational undertakings also makes an impact in the process (Bandura et al, 1996). "Children's beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning activities and to master difficult subject matters affect their academic motivation, interest, and scholastic achievement" (Bandura, 1993; Schunk, 1989).

#### ***2.4.3.4 Motivation, Perceived Efficacy and Interest***

In 1992, Zimmerman and Bandura published a study looking at motivation students possess for academic aspirations. They found that students' "beliefs in their

efficacy for self-regulated learning affected their perceived self-efficacy for academic achievement” (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Ponz, 1992, p. 663).

In the following two statements, Counselling Psychologists Multon et al (1991) concurred with Bandura. Firstly, “this investigation provides support for the hypothesized facilitating relationships of self-efficacy beliefs to academic performance and persistence”; secondly, they stated: “Across various types of student samples, designs, and criterion measures, self-efficacy beliefs account for approximately 14% of the variance in students’ academic performance and approximately 12% of the variance in their academic persistence” (1991, p. 34).

Furthermore, a time factor was also highlighted by Bandura & Schunk (1981) who reported the findings of an empirical study which linked “proximally self-motivated children” to self-efficacy and interest. Bandura (1982) noted that breaking down goals into short-term goals or “subgoals,” can also play a role in developing self-efficacy (p. 134).

The subjects were children who had underdeveloped skills and interests in mathematics who were working in a programme with short- and long-term goals. The findings showed, “It was mainly children in the proximally self-motivated condition, all of whom felt highly efficacious, who displayed the notable level of intrinsic interest” (p. 134). The researchers concluded that children advanced quickly using “proximal subgoals” in mathematics, in terms of independent learning and significantly developed their beliefs in their abilities (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

In the study by Bandura et al (1996) with a group of 279 students, they found that “Children’s belief in their social efficacy had no direct impact on academic achievement, but instead exerted its effect by promoting academic aspirations and reducing vulnerability to depression” (p. 1215).



Interestingly, Bandura (1982) addressed how negative factors such as negative mental states play into self-efficacy and goals. He stated:

Inability to influence events and social conditions that significantly affect one's life can give rise to feelings of futility and despondency as well as to anxiety. Self-efficacy theory distinguishes between two judgmental sources of futility. People can give up trying because they seriously doubt that they can do what is required. Or they may be assured of their capabilities but give up trying because they expect their efforts to produce no results due to unresponsiveness, negative bias, or punitiveness of the environment (p. 140).

Continuing with negative factors which could affect self-efficacy, the next section covers relevant literature on marginalisation.

## 2.5 Marginalisation

For the purpose of this study, *marginalisation* is being used as a term to convey the idea of people being pushed to or being situated along the edges of society in ways that leave them out. The process of marginalisation causes the voices, desires and experiences to be minimised and ignored by individuals and powerful structures. The notion of marginalisation was the place where this study began, with those who represented groups that are often disregarded in society. It started here because the researcher wanted to understand the perspectives and experiences of students who are often pushed aside in terms of higher education. There are structures that come to bear on the personal aspirations of members of minimised groups, and they often do so in negative ways which often result in diminished or unattained goals.

The term *marginalisation* itself presented challenges as it is broad and, as indicated in the operationalised definition, it is based on the feelings, beliefs and

experiences of those involved. Hence, it is difficult to show that an individual is being marginalised; there are many nuances to the process, as Ferguson (1990) acknowledged:

When we say marginal, we must always ask, marginal to what? But this question is difficult to answer. The place from which power is exercised is often a hidden place. When we try to pin it down, the centre always seems to be somewhere else. Yet we know that this phantom centre, elusive as it is, exerts real, undeniable power over the whole social framework of our culture, and over the ways that we think about it (p. 9).

People who are different are vulnerable to marginalisation. As laid out in Chapter One, the participants in this study represented marginalised populations. Some of those were persons with issues relating to HIV/AIDS, quasi-orphan status (due to familial mental health and instability), perceived homosexuality, various impairments (physical, learning, hearing and speech and visual), as well as gender. To people in groups similar to those exemplified in this study, pathways to high education are often blocked. Moreover, individuals in these groups are less likely to be encouraged to set lofty goals. This study focused on individuals who were from groups which have clearly been marginalised across the globe.

There can be threats to marginalised students' completion even when they gain access to an institution – whether or not that marginalised status stems from physical differences. Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart & Lyner-Cleophas (2012) explored issues of inclusion for people with disabilities and called for the “dissemination of success stories about disabled students; and more stories about the personal experiences of disabled students in higher education” (p. 395).

One study regarding physically impaired students had undergraduate medical students in South Africa live the experience of a wheelchair-bound person to give a sense of living with this disability. In addition to the surprising challenges they experienced while navigating their campus and homes, the two participants' written reactions reflected feelings of inferiority, being pitied, and ambivalent feelings when people assisted them (Amosun, Volmink & Rosin, 2005). One described the one-week experience as "an emotional roller-coaster" as it gave insight into some of the issues faced by those with impairments (Amosun et al, 2005, p. 964).

The observations of the South African participants were helpful when looking at how some marginalised students experience their lives on campus. Persons with disabilities deal with various barriers, psychological and environmental which often negatively impact their success (Amosun et al, 2005; deKlerk, & Ampoussah, 2003).

With a positive spin on difference, one of Amosun et al's study participants who experienced a range of emotions, including sympathy, described what she took away from her time using a wheelchair. "The greatest lesson from this experience is that people with disabilities are just like you and I, they also have goals, dreams and ambitions. They are not disabled, but differently able" (Amosun et al, 2005, p. 965).

A qualitative study conducted in Malawi focused on another group which is considered disabled there and is marginalised through stigmatisation; people with albinism. Braathen & Ingstad (2006) looked closely at the quality of the lives that people with albinism enjoyed in order to ascertain whether forms of marginalisation came into play. The authors highlighted that people with albinism are seemingly more noticeable on the African continent than in other areas of the world where skin hues vary. The number of people in Malawi with albinism has not been confirmed (Braathen & Ingstad, 2006). Research conducted in Zimbabwe and South Africa

revealed that albinism occurs in one in 4,000 people (Lund, 2001), and by extension, this prevalence was also assumed with respect to Malawi (Braathen & Ingstad, 2006, p. 601), which has a population of approximately 12 million (The World Factbook, 2005).

They stated: “Not many studies have been carried out on the social aspects of albinism in Africa or elsewhere; there is no current literature available about albinism in Malawi, and no previous research in the field of albinism in Malawi currently exists” (p. 600). This statement demonstrated the need for research regarding the experience of albinism in Africa.

Unfortunately, this article made no accounting for the psychological effects of this treatment, even when terms such as “mzungu” were used. This loosely translated to “stranger” and was used to describe persons with albinism in Malawi, therefore indicating that s/he “did not belong in that particular society” (Braathen & Ingstad, 2014, p. 609).

The authors confined their findings of problems faced to the lack of availability of protective clothing, sunscreen and the “lack of knowledge of what special aids which people with albinism need to function in everyday life” (Braathen & Ingstad, 2014, p. 609). What was necessary in terms of mental health and psychological understanding and skills while living a marginalised existence was entirely ignored; and important issues of how participants overcome to pursue higher education were also unaddressed.

This study stood in contrast to one conducted in the West (Wan, 2003) in terms of environment, economy, and education levels. The study concluded that participants were indeed stigmatised based on their albinism in countries such as the U.S. and in parts of Africa. It went further to categorise coping mechanisms used by

people with albinism, such as “The Defiant”, “The Serenes”, “The Internalisers”, “The Hiders” and “The Talkers” (Wan, 2003).

The study conducted in Malawi (Braathen & Ingstad, 2006) also explored the phenomena of albinism and the relationships with others. It revealed that the experiences of people with albinism included “exclusion and hardships related to having albinism” (p. 604). At the same time it noted that there were ameliorating circumstances with respect to albinism in non-African countries. These settings include more financial stability for sun protection, education about albinism and similarities in skin pigmentation (Wan, 2003; Braathen & Ingstad, 2006).

Family is often a safe haven for persons with albinism, but they face discrimination based on stigmatisation outside of that loving environment (Braathen & Ingstad, 2006, Wan, 2003). Braathen and Ingstad (2006), however, concluded that the quality of life of those with albinism in Malawi was not diminished compared to others, even while the findings showed that participants with albinism were called names, shunned, said to be bewitched, laughed at, denied employment, and rejected by some family members.

Chataika et al (2012) used the 2009 AfriNEAD Symposium in Cape Town, as a platform to explore issues of inclusion in African schools:

Despite noting challenges about inclusive education, delegates from Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa provided evidence of the processes and practices of inclusive education in their education sectors. These countries conceptualise inclusion broadly by acknowledging all children and youth as full members of society, and recognising their rights regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status or impairment.

However, delegates indicated that, in practice, inclusion is far from being achieved in their countries (2012, p. 391).

Dorius (2012) used enrolment figures to show the role they play as an indication of a population's academic success. In a quantitative study examining the effect of insurgence of education around the world, Dorius (2012) stated: "Literacy has become an increasingly popular indicator of the degree to which people have the most basic skills necessary to successfully function in the contemporary world. Enrolments represent access to schooling, and schooling attainment measures quality of schooling" (p. 160).

Access to schooling does not necessarily mean that certain individuals (or groups) are not marginalised. Governmental programmes endeavour to open doorways to some who would otherwise be marginalised such as those with disabilities. By way of example, some marginalised populations gain educational access through the Disabilities Act as a requirement of the Ghanaian government. Therefore, as for students with physical impairments, the issue of access was eased with this Act, which was part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, having a policy in place does not translate into everyone with a disability gaining access.

### **2.5.1 Marginalisation in Ghana**

Chataika, et al's (2012) look into inclusive African education stood in tandem with Professor Dei's work in informing the current study in Ghana with UEW students from marginalised categories, whether based on gender, ethnicity, physical impairment or marginalised status based on some other form of social status.

Hence, this investigation into how students from marginalised groups resisted and overcame barriers to higher education was a necessary endeavour. This investigation has shed light on how best all categories of marginalised students who arrive at the front gates of institutions of higher learning can be supported in the future.

Mfum-Mensah's (2009) exploratory, ethnographic case study of a programme, School For Life (SFL), for children in marginalised communities in northern Ghana revealed issues relating to the curriculum development process such as: the use of culturally relevant instructional methods, friendly classroom environments, including children's settings and committed teachers who include children's environments (2009, p. 356).

The importance of using a "nonintimidating assessment model" was also highlighted, as well some of the issues that led to the marginalisation of these students. He wrote:

The need to implement CEPS [complementary education programs] relates to the fact that many marginalized children in the subregion – children who live in rural, remote areas and impoverished urban communities, girls, children orphaned by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, or belonging to communities displaced by natural and manmade disasters – lack access to quality basic education" (Mfum-Mensah, 2009, p. 344).

Such educational programmes support student retention and completion encourage positive participation in civic education, and promote student learning in marginalised communities in developing nations (Mfum-Mensah, 2003).



An important study about challenges facing children in rural Ghana has to do with children dropping out and found that children have various ways of describing how they became school leavers. This work culminated in the development of five terms which illuminate how Ghanaian youth become excluded from education and went further to encourage intermediations which strive to prevent dropout (Ananga, 2011). For example, study participants described temporary issues that necessitated them leaving school for intermittent periods, or longer times away, termed an “event dropout”, such as exiting school due to parental death (Ananga, 2011). Through their study in South Africa, which was previously discussed in this literature review, Case and Ardington (2006) support Ananga’s findings on parental death and the how it comes to bear on school attendance outcomes.

Another relevant study conducted in Ghana deals with difference, specifically those dealing with ethnicity and gender (Dei, 2004). This longitudinal, qualitative study used these two dimensions “as important sites of power and differentiation in Ghanaian schooling” (p. 346). Analysis of the data revealed that some students and educators were critical of the schooling processes. Students were drawn to a critique of their schools around issues of difference – ethnicity, class and to some extent gender inequities. A few of the students viewed the school site as a context for activism, critique and attempts at social change (Dei, 2004, pp. 349-350).

Even though the term *marginalisation* can be difficult to define, there are some conditions and situations that point to a marginalised status. In her 2005 article, *Examining the Margins*, Vasas refers to the use of Giddens’ Theory of Structuration, stating:



Conditions that create social outcomes are the result of an interplay between the social structures that exist in society and the agency of individuals. Social structures, determined by the powerful centre, consist of organized rules and resources that individuals draw on and reconstitute in their daily activities. These structures are the medium upon which individuals interact, and they influence the way people communicate, negotiate interpersonal power, and apply the norms of society. Individuals are active, knowledgeable, and reasoning agents, interacting with these social structures to create and reinforce societal “norms” (p. 197).

Students who are at what Ferguson (1990) and Giddens (1984) both call *the centre* face constant challenges in pursuing goals. Those who are in the group called *other* have more difficulties to deal with. In embarking on this study on UEW students from marginalised categories, it was imperative to figure out the ways that students from marginalised groups attained success by developing and maintaining self-efficacy – while at the same time dealing with and resisting the pressures of real or perceived marginalised existences.

### **2.5.1.1 Marginalisation of People Living with HIV/AIDS**

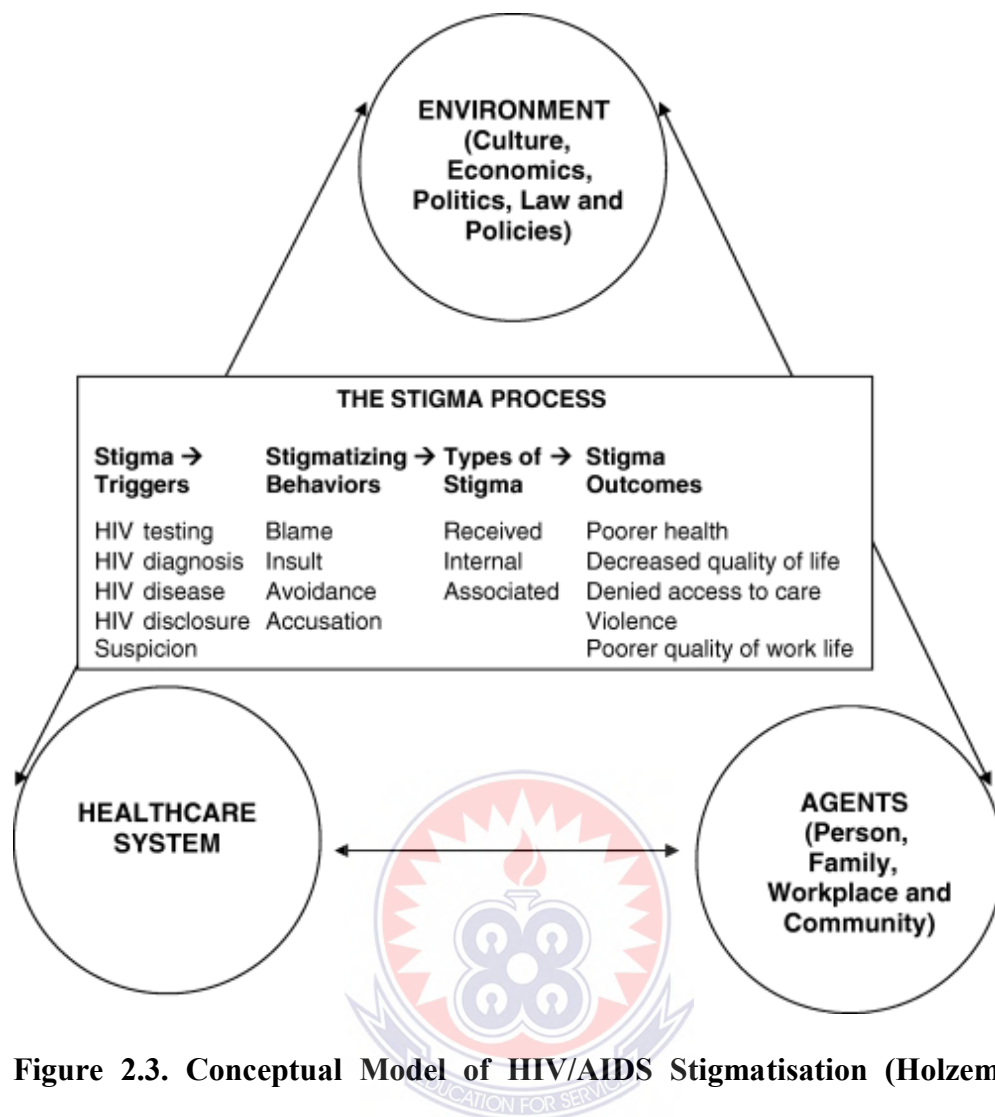
HIV is an issue faced by an estimated 225,000 Ghanaians (Ghana AIDS Commission, 2013). It is an issue that can be a source of marginalisation for those carrying this virus. In a study of Ghanaian university students’ practices and knowledge of HIV, Asante, Boafo and Nyamekye (2014) identified gender differences. The students of both sexes seemed to empathise more with “people who get AIDS from blood transfusions than those who get it from IV drug abuse” (68.3% men and 59.6% women) (p. 15).

While students believed that HIV/AIDS patients should be treated equitably in terms of respect, “82% indicated that people with HIV deserve what they get” (Asante et al, 2014, p. 16). This discrepancy was attributed to Ghanaian students’ lack of personal knowledge of many people living with HIV/AIDS.

Along the same lines of thought and judgment regarding PLWHA was a study conducted in Tanzania. Zou, Yamanaka, John, Watt, Ostermann, and Thielman (2009) investigated the influence of religious beliefs on HIV stigma, disclosure and treatment attitudes and found that stigmatisation towards those with HIV incorporated shame, based on religious beliefs. The study gave an idea of the impact which institutions can have on this marginalised group (Zou et al, 2009).

As a result of how communities often react to PLWHA, some people with the virus self-stigmatise (Holzemer, Uys, Makoae, Stewart, Phetlhu, Dlamini, Greef, Kohi, Chirwa, Cuca & Naidoo, 2007). Holzemer et al (2007) uncovered three types of stigma: “received, internal and associated” (p. 7) in a study of HIV/AIDS stigma from five African countries: Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland and Tanzania. They developed a model of the dynamics of HIV/AIDS stigmatisation, including the behaviours which cause stigmatisation. They are: blaming, insulting, avoiding and accusing (Holzemer et al, 2007, p. 6). The data revealed that healthcare workers stigmatised PLWHA and were also subjected to stigmatisation themselves. Although the study dealt with the healthcare system, it did offer insights into the magnitude of the problem of stigmatisation faced by people from this marginalised group.

The conceptual model developed by Holzemer, et al (2007) is in Figure 2.3 below and depicts the process of stigmatisation.



**Figure 2.3. Conceptual Model of HIV/AIDS Stigmatisation (Holzemer et al, 2007).**

Lastly, results of the study by Asante et al (2014) indicated that many students associated AIDS with homosexuality, and that nearly half of women and half of men agreed with the statement: “I would be worried about my child getting AIDS if I knew that one of his teachers was a homosexual” (Asante, Bofo & Nyamekye, 2014, p. 14). That statement itself left one to wonder whether the authors themselves also made assumptions about homosexuality and HIV/AIDS. The next sub-section deals with marginalisation of people perceived to be homosexuals.

### **2.5.1.2 Marginalisation of People Perceived To Be Homosexual**

Of the women at two universities in Ghana, 39.4% and 51.2% of men agreed with the statement: “If I found out that a friend of mine was a homosexual, I would not maintain the friendship” (p. 14). This indicates that established relationships would be abandoned if a friend was attracted to the same sex, but interestingly, the researchers did not ask whether relationships would be continued if a student found that a friend was living with HIV. This question would have shed more light on attitudes of those regarding PLWHA.

Umar (2015) investigated student awareness, perceptions and tolerance of same-sex relationships in a Ghanaian university and found that people are aware of such practices. Of the 200 respondents, 70% felt that the practice is not African. Moreover, none stated they were engaging in it. Umar noted that the fear of stigmatisation could have prevented students from admitting to being homosexuals. Based on socio-cultural ideals, religion, legal and medical perceptions, the students generally held negative views about same-sex relationships, finding that 83% felt that “integration of known homosexuals into the mainstream” was not tolerable (p. 15).

Owusu, Anarfi and Tenkorang (2013) focused on hostilities and prejudices against those who do not conform to Ghanaian society’s expectations in terms of sexual expression. They also found stigma associated with same-sex relationships.

Interestingly, Pascoe’s (2012) study associated manliness and power. He wrote that the boys at the American school he investigated defined “masculinity as a description of boys’ attitudes, behaviours, and interactional styles” (p. 166). Beyond that, the boys “also defined masculinity as a publicly enacted interactional style that demonstrated heterosexuality and dominance while at the same time repudiating and

mocking powerlessness, usually represented by femininity or the fag” (p. 166). *Fag* is a derogatory term connoting a homosexual person.

### 2.5.1.3 Marginalisation of Persons with Disabilities

In Africa, it is often the societal members’ beliefs about disabilities and how people get them. These beliefs are “often based on fear and misunderstandings, stereotype individuals with disabilities exposing them to prejudice, discrimination and ultimately to the denial of rights and resources that are afforded to all citizens” (Baffoe, 2013, p. 188).

Baffoe (2013) highlighted two ways through which those with disabilities are marginalised, rights and language, two components of critical disability theory (Hosking, 2008). This was done through the use of face-to-face interviews designed to understand how people with disabilities in Ghana believe they are seen by general society. Those who have disabilities feel they are disrespected in multiple ways (Baffoe, 2013). He found stigmatisation, discrimination in the language used by Ghanaian society in reference to disabled people, such as “*ayarefu*,” which translates to “*sick people*.” Additionally, people with hearing and speech impairments are often called “*mumu*”, meaning *dumb* (2013, p. 193).

Avoke (2002) used models to shed light on the views of people who are disrespectful to disabled people. He stated:

In many communities in Ghana, the use of pejorative labels and the manner in which people with disabilities are treated tends to be considered justified, because disability in the past was strongly attributed to religious or magical models where evil was *placed* on an individual from the gods (p. 771).

Avoke (2002) offered another example of the various belief systems that affect the ways that disabled people are treated in Ghana. In part of the “Volta Region of Ghana, it was perceived that disability was caused by „evil spirits, ghosts and powers of sorcery” due to wrongdoing on the part of the family (p. 773). He pointed to lack of policy structure on issues concerning disabled people as some of the reasons labels are used to describe them. Avoke (2002) called on community elders and churches, in addition to politicians, to develop and implement policies that seek to enhance the lives of disabled people, in educational and other pursuits.

Baffoe (2013) found that those with visual impairments faced the dangers of open gutters without pavements for them to walk safely through one of the country’s most esteemed universities, University of Ghana at Legon. His study concluded that people with various forms of disabilities are labeled in ways that are “mostly negative and derogatory”, and that “they portray persons with disabilities in very negative light, as second class citizens, as persons who should be pitied, at best, and ignored and shunned at worse” (2013, p. 194).

Baffoe (2013) promoted a Strengths-Based Practice in mental healthcare (Bertolino, 2010), whereby professionals encourage the capitalization of clients’ skills and abilities. Such a practice would ameliorate negative treatment conferred by offensive labels in some Ghanaian communities, wherein exclusion is a result (Avoke, 2002).

Mprah, Opoku, Owusu, Badu and Torgbenu (2015) interviewed various officials Ghana Education Service (GES) and school officials who served disabled children in the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions. They reported that in addition to enduring societal stigmatisation, children with disabilities were being treated differently by parents as compared to their other children; this manifested itself

through less investment in education and the hiding of disabled children in their homes, denying them education altogether (2015).

In a quantitative study in the Ghana, Mamah, Deku, Darling and Avoke, (2011) examined teachers' perceptions of inclusion of visually impaired students. The study was conducted at three universities; University of Cape Coast, and University of Ghana – Legon, and University of Education – Winneba. Thus, the study included the perceptions of teachers studying at the same University as where the current one was conducted, UEW – Winneba. Mamah (2011) found that female teachers held more positive views about teaching students who were visually impaired. They also noted that visually impaired students were not engaged in the lecture halls and that there were delays in this group's receipt of their examination results.

#### **2.5.1.4 Marginalisation of People with Mental Illness**

Of Ghana's approximately 20 million people, about 650,000 have serious mental disorders (WHO, 2007). Issues of mental illness come to bear on the current study because it was a factor in the participants' lives; as some parents dealt with mental illness, it impacted their children. In the midst of their developmental years, children of mentally ill have to deal with the maltreatment that often comes with mental conditions. For instance, "A person with any form or level of mental illness is referred to as *Obodamfuo*, a mad person" (Baffoe, 2013, p. 193).

Unfortunately, there is a deficit of resources in Ghana for treating people with mental illnesses (Ofori-Atta, Read, Lund & Mental Health and Poverty Project [MHaPP], 2010). Through interviews and focus group discussions with 122 participants, they found that close to 80% of funds allotted for mental health work is utilised in maintenance and that the monies are used to cover needs of patients such as



feeding (Ofori-Atta et al, 2010). The authors emphasise the need for access for treatment in communities as proximity to facilities affects a patient's ability to return to their community post-treatment in light of stigmatisation with mental health issues (Ofori-Atta, 2010).

Accessibility and affordability are two reasons cited by Ae-Ngibise, Cooper, Adibokah, Akpalu, Lund, Doku & MHaPP Research Programme Consortium (2010) as to why traditional healers are consulted. The study also explored reasons traditional healers and "conventional" service providers do not collaborate to meet the needs of those with the mentally ill and found highlighted that when the disorder is seen as a spiritual attack, treatment is often sought from traditional healers (Ae-Ngibise et al, 2010).

Stigma is something that those with mental illness have to deal with, and this negative treatment often has negative effects on a familial relationships (Barke, Nyarko & Klecha, 2011). As the authors had found only one study regarding stigmatisation which the mentally ill face in Sub-Saharan Africa (in South Africa), they sought to discover the perceived stigma of this group in southern Ghana, specifically. They found that because they experienced a high level of stigma, they attempted to hide their conditions (Barke et al, 2011).

In Ethiopia, a survey of 178 relatives of people with schizophrenia or other mental illnesses revealed that 75% felt they were also victims of stigmatisation (Shibre, Negash, Kullgren, Kebede, Alem, Fekadu, Fekadu, Medhin, and Jacobsson, 2001). This is called "associated stigma", which is meted out to people who either work with or are otherwise connected to PLWHA (Holzemer et al, 2007).



### **2.5.1.5 Marginalisation of Females**

In many developing nations, girls receive less education than boys. In Ghana, Senadza (2012) found that there is a gender gap between boys and girls in primary and secondary schools. She further stated that girls drop out of school more than boys, as indicated by the number of those who survive the three-year junior high school experience, and the number of those who have only partially finished primary schooling. Moreover, more girls than boys have not attended school by 16% (p. 730), and the numbers for girls are bleaker in Ghana's three northern regions (Senadza, 2012).

### **2.5.1.6 Marginalisation of People with Albinism**

Scholarly articles regarding issues of people with albinism in Ghana are quite scant; however there are news reports that give a picture of their plight. For instance, in May 2016, [starrfmonline.com](http://starrfmonline.com) published a half-page story entitled, "Albinos „angry“ over attacks, discrimination", wherein persons with the condition were accusing the government of not protecting them. Moreover, in a one-page write-up, "Unwanted: How albinos are killed for rituals in Ghana" featured a young man who was the first person with albinism in his village; he was called names and threatened ([www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/May](http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/May)). Another short story told of a 19-year old student in the Brong Ahafo Region being forced out of school by stigmatisation.

While there is a lack of scholarly articles, the publications included full names, places and pictures. It appears that this problem garners attention yearly, just prior to Albinism Awareness Day, June 13<sup>th</sup>. Scholarly articles on this issue would shed more light on the experiences of those affected.

### 2.5.2 Structuration

Opportunities for higher education are not easy to come by for most Ghanaians. Those who perform well on standardised tests still have obstacles to overcome, including financial issues and many logistical challenges of applying for university admission. Thus, this study also highlights the intersection of social structures which seems to promote success of some over others and self-efficacy that transcends those boundaries.

Highlighting issues of power dynamics is also Pierre Bourdieu's work which supports the theoretical framework of this study. He addressed structural issues which influence how one succeeds at various goals and coined the term *social reproduction*. Bourdieu used social reproduction to look at the relationships between education, family, and social class. He posited that education impacts social inequality and reproduces inequalities throughout the generations (Bourdieu, 1973). According to Tzanakis (2011), "Bourdieu argues that schools and teachers aid and abet the family-based reproduction process by rewarding possession of elite cultural capital in students and by setting up elitist standards rigged to favour upper and middle class children and exclude others." Dei (2005) alluded to this idea when he issued a challenge to develop more inclusive schooling in Ghana and continued: "When we fail to recognize the perpetuation of schooling practices that do not critically address the implications of difference, we do so at great peril" (p. 284).

Bowles and Gintis (2002) also focused on societal inequities and stated: "America may still be the land of opportunity by some measures, but parental income and wealth are strong predictors of the likely economic status of the next generation" (pp. 21-22). There is a system in the United States education system called *tracking* which sorts students into various levels of education. Racism and classism play a

major part in how society views their potential. It is unclear the extent to which tracking is done in Africa, but socio-economic status is a factor in most educational endeavours in developing countries.

Gecas (1989) critique of Bandura's distinction between efficacy expectations and outcome expectations sheds light on how the ideas of Dei, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis converge in the current study. The convergence of these ideas is important in this research, as the participants, representing marginalised groups shared their lived experiences and educational pursuits. The meanings they attributed to those experiences represented their beliefs of how they fit and operate in the world. Although Gecas (1989) wrote: "Bandura differentiates perceptions of self from perceptions of self in relation to the social environment – a distinction that is important to traditional sociological and political science concerns" (p. 294), the researcher saw this delineation as representative of the essence of phenomenological inquiry in a post colonial state.

However, Bandura was criticised for his use of the terms "efficacy expectations" and "outcome expectations", with outcome expectations connoting the idea that environmental influences play a part in whether "a given action will lead to a certain outcome" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193; Gecas, 1989, p. 294). Gecas preferred the term "system responsiveness" over "outcome expectations" (p. 294), adding that "Bandura's research has continued to focus on efficacy expectations and has neglected outcome expectations" (p. 294). The researcher believed that leaving out environmental influences would have been a mistake in the current study. Therefore, this represents a gap in self-efficacy literature related to Bandura that the important works of Dei, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis helped explore in this study on the self-efficacy of UEW – Winneba students from marginalised categories.

People of marginalised status seem to find themselves in environments which discourage them from embarking on higher education. As a result, some of them doubt themselves and their abilities. Bandura reveals:

People's perceptions of their efficacy influence the types of anticipatory scenarios that they construct and reiterate. Those who have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides for performance and they cognitively rehearse good solutions to potential problems. Those who judge themselves as inefficacious are more inclined to visualize failure scenarios and dwell on how things will go wrong (1989, p. 729).

Hence, it was of paramount importance to identify and highlight successful students and their positive resistance so that their stories could be used as models of encouragement. The next sub-section under marginalisation is socioeconomic issues and some of the ways they impact academic pursuits.

### **2.5.3 Socioeconomic Issues**

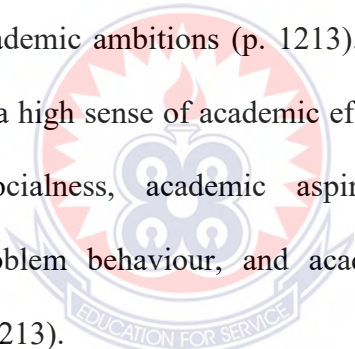
One of the ways academic achievement is affected is through the socioeconomic position of the family. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (1996) acknowledge this in the following statement:

The impact of the socioeconomic status of the families on children's academic achievement is entirely mediated through parental academic aspirations and children's prosocial behaviour. The higher the families' socioeconomic status the higher the academic and occupational aspirations they have for their children and the greater is their children's prosocialness. The influence of parents' sense of academic efficacy on scholastic achievement is mediated

through its impact on children's beliefs in the capability to manage their own learning and master coursework (p. 1215).

This notion of parents' sense of academic efficacy and how it comes to bear on their offspring was important. In the context of Ghana, marginalised children generally do not have the social or cultural capital handed down to them by their parents. The reason is that, while more opportunities are available in Ghana's post-colonial times, large numbers have not benefitted from them. In this study specifically, academic efficacy benefits were non-existent due to the absence of many parents from the students' lives.

Another relevant finding of Bandura et al (1996) was a connection between societal standing and academic ambitions (p. 1213). They stated: "Socioeconomic level is accompanied by a high sense of academic efficacy and educational aspiration in parents, and prosocialness, academic aspirations, repudiation of moral disengagement, low problem behaviour, and academic achievement in children (Bandura et al, 1996, p. 1213).



People arrive at different levels of economic status based largely on the educational levels they have attained. Therefore, education is widely regarded as the gateway to success. However, according to Case and Ardington (2006), education can be greatly hindered when a parent, specifically a mother, dies. Regarding their study on the effect of parental death on school attainment in South Africa, they stated: "Maternal orphans are significantly less likely to be enrolled in school and have completed significantly fewer years of schooling, condition on age than children whose mothers are alive" (p. 401). Given this finding about the impact of a mother's

absence, it is more remarkable when students overcome this barrier and go further than their peers in the same situation, as did those in this study.

As noted by Chataika et al (2012) in regard to disabled people, more stories are needed to highlight those who succeed against all odds, which was what this study sought to do. In the next sub-section, power and its ubiquitous forms are discussed, including indicators of power, which are not overtly recognisable to all, are addressed. The discussion highlights the roles which society plays in individual successes and challenges. It also expounds on issues of structuration, by taking into account socioeconomic and power issues.

#### **2.5.4 Power**

Power was a concept that was necessary to look at because, at the root of self-efficacy – one of the mechanisms of agency – is a notion power; the belief that specific chosen actions will net planned outcomes. Michel Foucault's work highlighted concerns of power dynamics in relation to knowledge. While much of his work laments ways that power is always at play and serves as an often-invisible way of controlling our actions, he went further and posited that power also “produces effects at the level of desire” (1980, p. 59). He stated:

If power were anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that...it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse (1980, p. 119).

Foucault (1980) equated power “as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is

repression” (p. 119). Regarding adult education, and in response to Foucault, Brookfield (2001) concluded, “If power does indeed produce effects at the level of desire, then one of the most desired of all effects it produces is a desire in adult learners and adult learners to resist manipulation and to fight oppression” (p. 16).

According to Foucault (1980), resistance is a fundamental, inextricable part of power relations, and he stated: “in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to disassociate these relations” (p. 211). Through a phenomenological approach, this is what the current research sought to do, investigate ways people held in focus their desired outcomes for their lives. Some did so even when that focus was challenged by circumstances and structures well beyond their levels of power and influence. Moreover, they resisted the discouragement of negative forces they encountered including remnants of colonial times.

Foucault’s (1980) work discussed power as a forever-present force that is inescapable (p. 39). He described it in the following way: “Power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives” (p. 39). Foucault viewed power in a way which “is in marked contrast to a view which sees power as possessed chiefly by a dominant elite, exercised from above, and emanating from a central location *that is clearly identifiable*” (Brookfield, 2001, p. 3).

The remnants of colonial power are also omnipresent. Dei et al (2006) decry the de-valuing of difference in attempt at national unity, stating post-colonial societies have an urgent job of finding ways “to speak about the concepts of community and nation, which are, at one level, marked by sameness, and at another, by difference” (p. 94).



#### 2.5.4.1 Neo-Colonialism

*Colonisation* is the “permanent settlement and incorporation into the political, economic, and social system of the parent country” (Grinker et al, 2010, p. 425). With all of the layers of difficulty that people from marginalised groups face, when we speak of Africa, there is an additional one that must be considered. Ghana gained its independence from Britain in 1957; however, echoes of the colonial era continue. Rodney (2010) wrote: “Africans ceased to set indigenous cultural goals and standards, and lost full command of training young members of society. Those were undoubtedly major steps backward” (p. 446). Dei et al (2006) added: “those remnants are ever-present and exist in the daily lives of Ghanaians.”

By way of example, Rodney cited women’s role in society as one of the many ways colonialism perpetuated the inequalities between men and women which continue to the present day. Through exploitation and oppression, he wrote: “The colonialists in Africa occasionally paid lip service to women’s education and emancipation” (Grinker et al, p. 447). Rodney continued, and discussed how the work that women contributed to society was seen as less important than that of men; as such, they remained when men left the homestead in search of employment (Grinker et al, p. 448). The contributions of women continue to be undervalued.

The occupation of the British in Ghana represented a system whereby all control and power were afforded only to the masters. Locals were dominated and previous governments were overtaken. The colonial authorities established absolute power by supporting elders who were given local power (Ranger, Grinker et al, 2010). In the wake of such a system, notions of group and individual efficacy and agency in society can often be challenging, as colonialism required subordination to traditions and customs and reliance on others.



The following section covers the gaps in the literature which the current study fills.

## **2.6 Gaps in the Literature**

In the wake of a century of colonial rule, many in Africa may find themselves in what could be called marginalised positions. Six decades after independence was declared in Ghana, remnants of powerlessness remain. Negative ideologies about those who are in marginalised groups often permeate the psyche of said groups (Fanon, 1963). Research which documents and promulgates experiences of successful resistance in Africa are necessary.

In their critical review of self-efficacy literature, Usher and Pajares (2008) used the phrase “culturally attentive research”, as “the majority of investigations focusing on self-efficacy have used participants who are White and middle class” (p. 787). They suggested that the void be filled with studies on the self-efficacy of African American youth (Graham, 1994; Usher & Pajares, 2008), a very worthy topic. However, the current study, also very necessarily and fills part of the gap in self-efficacy research by exploring the self-efficacy of students in various marginalised categories at the University of Education in Winneba, Ghana.

The goal with respect to this literature review was to find and examine writings that related to the topics highlighted in the work, with specific geographic pertinence. Searches indicated that studies based on the self-efficacy of those representing marginalised groups regarding education were scanty. Works involving efficacy in Africa often looked at the economy of whole countries. Hence, the use of self-efficacy of individuals who have been marginalised and those who represented those groups were not as plentiful in reference to the African continent as others. A

study which looked at these students in Africa, and in Ghana specifically, was necessary; therefore, this work contributes to filling this gap.

To go further, in a discussion on one of the sources of self-efficacy, social persuasions, Usher and Pajares (2008) lamented that researchers had not looked at the how messages from “broader culture at large” (p. 758) affect students. By engaging ideologies such as structuration, power and difference in this neo-colonial environment through a phenomenological approach regarding the experiences of Ghanaian University students from numerous marginalised groups, the current study sought to fill this large gap in the literature with respect to categories represented by the study participants.

Even when scholars investigate self-efficacy in relation to particular academic topics, the subjects are usually non-Africans. One study which shed light on issues of self-efficacy around the world included Asia, Latino and North America, and European contexts; however, Africa was entirely unrepresented in the study. The literature review, by Usher and Pajares (2008), who investigated self-efficacy with regard to education, listed studies that involved self-efficacy of grade school children and high school students. Included in the study were Latino, Japanese, Turkish, Canadian, and African American students. Many studies involved correlates such as mathematics and writing self-efficacy; and, while some did address undergraduate students’ self-efficacy, none appeared to be conducted with African students on the African continent (pp. 764-771).

Some studies investigated marginalised groups which were represented in this study, engaging one group per research endeavour. One such study, for instance, researched the phenomena of albinism (Braathen & Ingstad, 2014). Unfortunately, there seemed to be a dearth of scholarly articles on the issues facing people with

albinism in Ghana. There was one in Malawi, and what would have made that Malawian study more useful would have been a look into various ways people with albinism were affected in terms of self-concepts. This is due to the negative treatment meted out to them; moreover, the meanings which people with albinism derive from their experiences would be useful.

Regarding the study conducted in Malawi (Braathen & Ingstad, 2014), the researcher saw an example of how that study could have served a more meaningful purpose in the literature, in an interview of Pajares (Madewell & Shaughnessy, 2003). Pajares addressed how transformative experiences can alter a young person's life in profound ways and how "the actions of significant individuals – perhaps a teacher who came our way at just the right time – helped instil self-beliefs that influence the course and direction our lives take" (p. 377). Deeper probing was necessary to bring to the fore key cognitive issues faced by those with albinism.

Usher and Pajares (2008) wrote about ways forward with respect to the need to investigate transformative experiences in the formation of self-efficacy. They made the argument that: "Examining these transforming experiences by asking students to share pivotal self-efficacy-enhancing (or deflating) moments would lead to a better understanding of how self-efficacy is formed" and inform all adults who interact with children on how to best help them develop positive self beliefs" (p. 787). The current study sought to result in better understanding of self-efficacy development and it offers insights into how adults can contribute to self-efficacy development in youth. While the current study used phenomenological methods and therefore did not *examine* self-efficacy, it did explore issues of self-efficacious ways of handling adversity.

Mfum-Mensah (2009) dealt with student learning in marginalised communities. This literature was important in that it was located in Ghana and it shed some light on issues for complementary education programs – of which there are many across Africa – for children in the country’s Northern Region. It also gave a glimpse of the myriad of reasons children do not participate in education, an issue elaborated upon by Ananga (2011) and Case and Ardington (2006). However, the study in the Northern Region did not impart direct information on issues which the current study addresses, succeeding at tertiary education in spite of challenges. In addition, the current study was situated in Ghana’s Central Region in a university setting, as opposed to primary, junior, and secondary levels in the Northern Region, quite a large distance away.

Studies on people with impairments were more plentiful than those with albinism, and pointed to disparities in the education for the participants. According to a coalition of professionals in Africa, African Network on Evidence-to-Action on Disability (AfrINEAD), which aims to promote education for people with disabilities, acquisition of higher education leads people to better future (Chataika et al, 2012). They referenced the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa with the following assessment: “The education of children with disabilities and the development of education beyond primary school seem to be lagging behind. This implies that disabled people in Africa do not realise the true benefits of education” (UNECA 2009). The current study, of the group of ten participants, four of them have impairments. One had both physical and learning impairments; one had hearing and speech impairments; while the other two had visual and physical impairments respectively.

Chataika et al (2012) write of the “glaring gap between theory and practice” (p. 391). Chataika et al (2012) wrote that delegates of the symposium lamented the need to address this and the need. They also called for the distribution of stories about the achievements and experiences of disabled students in higher education (p. 395). Hence, the current study was clearly and called for and addressed a genuine and serious gap in the literature.

Other important highlights in this piece of literature shed light on the situation with impaired students in Lesotho, indicating that they were dependent on the kindness of individual teachers (Johnstone, 2007). Namibia leaves out general education teachers in terms of training them on fully developing students with special needs (Zimba, Mowes, & Naanda, 2007).

Zambia has been in part dependent on foreign non-governmental organisations’ initiatives and maintenance, a strategy that connotes undervaluation of people with physical challenges (Kalabula, 2000). Regarding Zimbabwe, Chataika et al (2012) posited that “gaps are evident between the ideological obligations to universal education and the actual practice on the ground” (p. 388), even while the country has been training teachers to meet the needs of physically impaired students for two decades. Most of those who are trained are said to leave the country for better opportunities (Chataika et al, 2012).

Colclough, Al-Samarrai, Rose, and Tembon (2003) made an important statement on access and equity issues in the education of physically impaired students with respect to countries in other regions of Africa. They lament the lack of attention given to issues affecting physically impaired regarding to EFA (Education for All) in African countries such as Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, Ethiopia, and several others.

They add that the focus in terms of EFA seems to be on issues such as school fee elimination, scheduling, gender equality and class size.

The following statement offered a recent and clear picture of the situation on the African continent as it relates to physically impaired youth and the lack of priority given to their educational needs. “Teachers are regarded as key role-players in implementing inclusive education, yet they experience difficulties” (Chataika et al, 2012, p. 391).

Lack of training, along with limited support and resources, large classes, and stress were cited as challenges which teachers face (South African Human Sciences Research Council (2005). Chataika et al (2012) added: “Many of these teachers work in communities that have to survive poverty and difficult socio-economic circumstances” (p. 391). Although the focus of this literature was on physically challenged, information that broader issues of marginalisation were also at play was also indicated. Hence in this light, the notions that those who reach and succeed at university level education in Africa are resisting monumental challenges and that their lived experiences enlighten and inform are made even more clear.

Dei's (2004) longitudinal study utilised qualitative methods as did the current one. While it represented an important part of the discourse on inclusion of differences in education, and recommended that students be nurtured beyond material needs (p. 355), this work was conducted with Ghanaian educators, junior and secondary school students, along with some university students. The current study adds to the dialogue about exclusionary issues and the necessity of inclusion in a nuanced way, by looking at those who society's powerful forces attempted to exclude, but yet the students persevered and successfully resisted marginalisation.

This chapter reviewed literature from various sources regarding agency, self-efficacy, notions of marginalisation, structuration and power. The studies discussed in this review of relevant literature informed the current study by shedding light on various issues which impacted students' ability to climb the educational ladder in Ghana. The current study serves to address a deficit of studies related to issues of self-efficacy on the African continent; specifically, ways Ghanaians outmanoeuvred the machinations of marginalisation to reach and succeed at University education.

Hence, Chapter Three follows and discusses the methodology used in conducting the current study on the experiences of UEW students from marginalised categories and their use of self-efficacious means to resist forces of exclusion.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The goal of this research was to uncover students' experiences and use of self-efficacy while resisting the forces of marginalisation. This chapter covers the general approach by which the study was conducted. Included are the researcher's perspectives and how those impacted the methodological decisions in this research, research design including the research questions, population, sampling techniques, and instruments. Then the methods and administration of the instruments, data collection procedures and analyses are discussed.

#### 3.2 Research Paradigm

This research was qualitative in nature and was conducted under the constructivist epistemology, based on the interpretive paradigm to understand the meanings of the experiences expressed by the participants. Merriam stated: "Interpretive research, which is where qualitative research is most often located, assumes that reality is socially constructed" (2009, p. 8). Underpinned by this paradigm, the meanings attached to the stories of each student participant have been "constructed and not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Gray, 2004, p. 20).

Regarding the exploring self-efficacy using qualitative methods, Bandura stated:

Qualitative investigations hold great promise for providing a rich understanding of the genesis of students' self-efficacy beliefs, as they have the potential to describe the heuristic techniques students use to attend to, weigh,



and appraise the degree of influence the sources have on their self-efficacy” (Bandura 1997 as in Usher & Pajares, 2008, p. 784).

Qualitative research design allows the researcher to delve into meaning and understanding, as “qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). With qualitative work, “the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” and, with understanding being the “goal of this form of research, the human instrument would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15).

Qualitative research relies on rich descriptions, including “the context, the participants involved and the activities of interest” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). This type of research gives readers a deeper perspective of the issues being studied than quantitative undertakings. Merriam (2009) also asserted: “words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon” (p. 16).

The strength and depth of the meanings constructed by and with participants in research situated in qualitative inquiry are significantly amplified. The use of open-ended questions in qualitative work was key to the current study, as they allowed room for participants to share more. This process contributes to the researcher’s ability to collect details through follow-up questions for greater probing into participants’ experiences (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). Thus, in order to gain greater understandings the experiences of UEW – Winneba students who represented marginalised categories, qualitative constructivist methods were used. This was an ideal way of eliciting how the students understood and interpreted their experiences.

### 3.3 Research Design

The design involved phenomenological and narrative research; in addition to semi-structured interviews, the researcher conducted observations and took detailed field notes to more thoroughly uncover the stories of successful UEW – Winneba students from marginalised categories. During this process of hermeneutic phenomenology and narrative research, themes from those stories were explored to better understand the lived experiences, the associated meanings participants assigned, and ways someone – through self-efficacy – succeeds beyond all expectations.

#### 3.3.1 Phenomenology

The focus of phenomenology is “on the intentional relationship between the person and the meanings of the things they’re focusing on and experiencing” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2). Finlay continues, “Phenomenology asks,

„What is this kind of experience like?“,

„What does the experience mean?“,

„How does the lived world present itself to me (or to my participant)?“

“The challenge for phenomenological researchers is twofold: how to help participants express their world as directly as possible; and how to explicate these dimensions such that the lived world – the life world – is revealed” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2).

Hence, the design of this research, with the participants as expert informants of their experiences, was based on qualitative phenomenological work whereby much time was spent with participants to observe and describe how they use elements of their agency on a regular basis to succeed in education. Furthermore, through this approach which was hermeneutic in nature, meanings were discovered in the data. In

order to reflect the participants' "intersubjective lifeworld" experiences (Finlay, 2008, p. 4), multiple semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviews (formal and informal) and observations were employed. For the interviews, the researcher designed and utilised a guide with open-ended questions. With an ethnographic stance including the use of pens and blank paper for taking notes, the researcher conducted observations of participants' activities, interactions and perceptions for further exploration.

This design afforded both breadth and depth in the understanding of ways in which each participant developed self-efficacy during the course of his/her life in order to arrive at university level education. The use of phenomenology also facilitated learning and documenting of the lived experiences of University of Education students from marginalised categories.

The use of phenomenology was especially suited to this work focusing on Ghanaian's experiences and their interpretations, given the emphasis of Dei et al (2006) on the importance of amplifying indigenous voices and perspectives in anti-colonial research:

the anti-colonial project uncovers colonizing practices as unending and deeply embedded in everyday relations, and how local/indigenous knowings become powerful sources of knowledge that allow for daily resistance and the pursuit of effective political practice to subvert all forms of dominance. (p. 57)

As indicated by Finlay and Dahlberg, much can be learned in research by beginning with and maintaining an open mind. Finlay (2008) stated: "The researcher is engaged in a process of trying to see the world differently – freshly – and to attend more actively to the participant's views" (Finlay, 2008). "The researcher is prepared to be surprised, awed and generally open to whatever may be revealed" (p. 5).

Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom (2001) described this open stance: “openness is the mark of a true willingness to listen, see, and understand. It involves respect and certain humility toward the phenomenon, as well as sensitivity and flexibility” (p. 97).

This philosophy mirrors that of the researcher with respect to students representing marginalised categories: Throughout the process, the researcher remained entirely open to learning as much about the participants’ experiences as possible. In order to achieve this, the researcher consciously allowed the information to be revealed unhindered. By maintaining this openness, the researcher was able to create environments for the stories to reveal students’ lived experiences. The researcher’s hermeneutic stance in this phenomenological study, further explored and incorporated participants’ interpretations of their described experiences. The stories serve significant roles in educating professionals as well as future students who feel they too have been or are being pushed to the edges of society.

It is important for researchers to remain unbiased while collecting data. As Finlay (2008) stated: “Meanings uncovered by the researcher emerge out of the researcher’s attitude and way the researcher poses questions. In particular, the researcher aims to „bracket“ or suspend previous assumptions or understandings in order to be open to the phenomenon as it appears” (p. 2). Looking closely at how things “are experienced” (Finlay, 2008, p. 2) and focusing on “what goes on within” the participants and getting them to “describe the lived experience in a language as free from the constructs of the intellect and society as possible” is seen as a way of bracketing (Groenewald, 2004, p. 12).

The participants narrated their experiences and highlighted challenges and the ways they dealt with hurdles. Regarding the use of narrative research, Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou (2013) stated that narrative researchers continue to use this

method “because we believe that by doing so we are able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change (p. 2). The current study used phenomenological methods and incorporated narrative storytelling because each participant had much to tell about how individuals succeed against all odds – including how it looked and felt from their own perspective, their own story. The use of narrative design facilitated deeper meanings by uncovering strata in participants’ experiences.

In order to complement the storytelling, observations were conducted, which allowed deeper probing into study participants’ feelings about their situations and their self-efficacy.

### **3.3.2 The Research Questions**

The questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the stories of students from marginalised groups who are successful at UEW – Winneba?
2. What hurdles to university education have these students faced?
3. How do the experiences of these students from marginalised groups affect their education?
4. Which qualities do these students from marginalised groups possess?

### **3.3.3 Population and Sampling Technique**

The number of full-time students located on the UEW – Winneba campuses totalled 18,987 (UEW Winneba Planning Office, 2017). The population in the current study included all UEW – Winneba students who have been marginalised and who were effectively achieving their quest for university education.

From this population, two visually impaired students were identified and invited to participate in the pilot phase of the study. Additionally, a student who had the condition of albinism was interviewed. Since he had just graduated, his data was also utilised as pilot data and informed the rest of the data collection activities.

Eventually, ten students were identified as study participants. A sample of ten participants was chosen because it provided enough depth and breadth in the data to yield enough themes to thoroughly explore self-efficacy and the phenomenon of outsmarting marginalisation. A much smaller sample would likely have been insufficient to look at a diverse set of themes. A larger sample would probably have created so much data that it would have made it difficult to go into a level of depth necessary to discover meanings in each set of lived experiences.

The criteria for having a marginalised status have been thoroughly examined. There were likely many cases where each person in the general population of Winneba – whether student, employee, or worker – felt marginalised to some degree. Everyone faces challenges in daily life; however, some encounter more than others. Also, it likely followed that each person in the general population had not always been treated the way they felt they should; this was normal. For purposes of this study, each participant's views and interpretations of his/her circumstances weighed heavily in the criterion for whether they had been marginalised. In addition to those, definitions from the study's background and theoretical sections were applied to ensure that diverse information was included in this study. Hence, while all of the stories shared were appreciated and valued, the goal was to document and narrate a variety of unique lived experiences of those who best fit the purpose of this study.

Initially, the plan was to employ a type of purposeful sampling method known as snowball sampling, whereby one participant would lead the researcher to another

(Merriam, 2009). It was thought that snowball sampling would be helpful in this study because there were so few students who fit the criteria and some may have successfully hidden their conditions/situations. Those UEW – Winneba students who struggled often knew of others who faced difficult circumstances, thus snowball sampling seemed like a good fit in the current study. Insofar as the student with albinism with whom a pilot interview was conducted, this worked. He had finished his programme, so he referred the researcher to another person who had the condition, and the latter was included in the study.

However, the plan to employ snowball sampling under purposeful methodology did not bear out when looking for students from other marginalised categories. Within some categories, snowball methods were not successful, so this method proved to be inappropriate for this study. By way of example, the first interview was conducted with a student who was HIV positive. As the researcher stood on the front steps of the Counselling Centre at UEW – Winneba on a bright Saturday morning, this student who was walking by, stopped and introduced himself. He immediately shared his HIV status. The researcher invited him inside and conducted an initial interview. Because of the stigma attached to his HIV status, the student had not shared this private information with anyone else on campus. He therefore knew of no other person who was living with HIV at UEW – Winneba and was unable to provide another possible study participant.

At the University's HIV Education Centre, another attempt was made to identify a student who would then lead to another. There, only one student at time was known to be HIV positive, and she was a sandwich student, which meant she was generally only on campus during holiday breaks. The Centre Director planned to put the researcher in touch with the student when she arrived on campus, but the student



did not present herself at the HIV Centre, and so the contact unfortunately was not made.

It occurred to the researcher that, by virtue of how marginalisation works – meaning that some feel that they were alone in facing some issue or situation. They may therefore not share private information with others, so snowball sampling would not serve this study. Additionally, the goal of the study was to represent and investigate as many UEW – Winneba students from marginalised categories as possible, so another method was sought.

Creswell (2007) posited that purposive sampling strategy is used when an “inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). Hence, in the current study, the researcher maintained purposive sampling methodology, as the researcher used her judgment in selecting students who could shed light on issues of self-efficacy with respect to the research questions (Bryman, 2004).

Merriam (2009) postulated that a typical sample – another type of purposive sampling – is chosen when it offers the reader a picture of the “average person of interest” for a study (p. 78). Typical purposeful sampling was therefore used and proved to be a more appropriate way of identifying participants. While they were different in general society and on campus, they were typical of the marginalised groups they represented.

Hence, study participants were purposively selected in this manner from four UEW – Winneba sources. Those sources were: The University’s Gender Mainstreaming Directorate, Chaplaincy, Disabled Student Association, and Counselling Centre. These sources were tapped purposively because their offices



were in direct contact with students who represented various groups that are often found to be in marginalised positions.

Firstly, the researcher conducted interviews with students with four female students from the Gender Directorate. Additionally, a lecturer who taught a course on Gender put the researcher in contact with three female students with whom the researcher conducted initial interviews. Of those seven, there was one student whose experiences seemed to represent a critical case, and she was chosen as a study participant.

Secondly, in the search for study participants, the researcher approached the University Chaplain, who happened to be a Counselling Centre colleague. The researcher was connected with Esi who was a second-year student who had grown up in a quasi-orphaned state.

Thirdly, the researcher visited and attended meetings of the UEW Disabled Student Association. She introduced herself to the group and had students who were interested in the study put their names on the list. Through interactions with the group members, the researcher identified a student who was visually impaired, one who was physically impaired, and one who had hearing and speech impairments. One student who had physical and learning impairments was a part of this association later dropped by the Counselling Centre and was added as a study participant because his experience highlighted a marginalised group that had theretofore not been represented in the study.

Lastly, through the researcher's work at the University Counselling Centre, two additional study participants were identified. They were unique cases in that one was identified as a result of the researcher's interactions with students across UEW's three campuses. The researcher had witnessed one of George's peers making an

apparent joke on stage questioning whether George was Ghanaian. Jeremiah was brought to the UEW Counselling Centre to deal with academic struggles related to his inability to focus on his studies. Through conversations with both of these students, the researcher's curiosity about their experiences was piqued and thus interviews and observations were scheduled.

### **3.4 Instrumentation**

For this study, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Merriam (2009) stated: "Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (p. 88). This was the situation in this particular study; participants were asked to discuss past events and circumstances which had affected them. Some events had occurred more recently than others but were still in the past and could not be re-lived.

Kusi (2012) went further and stated: "Qualitative researchers believe that participants have lived in their communities or socio-cultural context and, therefore, possess extensive knowledge about the phenomenon under exploration. Using a semi-structured interview schedule offers participants the opportunity to construct their own world" (p. 46). Thus, the semi-structured in-depth interview was the main data collection instrument in this study, as this format afforded the opportunity to gather rich data from each participant about their experiences.

A guide was used to generate interview conversations about pertinent issues regarding their experiences, self-efficacy and their effects on students' education. As Merriam (2009) indicated, the guide was used in a way that helped generate

discussions: “interview guide includes a mix of more or less structured interview questions; all questions used flexibly; usually specific data required from all respondents; largest part of interview guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored; no pre-determined wording or order” (p. 89).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The researcher also observed the participants as they went about their daily activities to learn more about the situations they faced. Observations were conducted concurrently during the data collection phase, complementing each other to probe deeply into each participant’s feelings about what they faced, their real-time thinking about the situations and reactions to them. During the observations, which were employed once for each participant in the study, field notes were utilised to document interactions with others, issues which arose, and ways they were addressed. The notes served as data on which the researcher followed up with further questions with each participant in order to gain an understanding of their perspectives on events and issues that arose.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness**

A goal in this work using phenomenological inquiry was to produce stories that were credible and adequately reflective of the lived experiences of those who shared them. Kusi (2012) wrote: “the elements of trustworthiness criteria include credibility or authenticity, transferability or fittingness and dependability or consistency and confirmability” (p. 102). He continued, citing Guba’s criteria for trustworthiness as “one of the most popular criteria for judging the quality of a study located within the interpretive-qualitative framework” (Guba, 1981 as in Kusi, p. 102).

In terms of credibility, Shenton (2004) offered a number of ways researchers can ensure that a study is believable. Some of those included:

- “Adoption of appropriate, well recognised research methods
- Thick description of phenomenon under scrutiny
- Debriefing sessions between researcher and superiors and
- Triangulation via use of different methods” (p. 73).

Kusi (2011) concurred, citing “In a qualitative study, credibility can be ensured through triangulation (p.152). Hence, the use of phenomenology, as well as both in-depth interviews and observations, afforded the opportunity to ensure trustworthiness. In addition to frequent debriefing discussions with supervisors, this design empowered the researcher’s ability to ensure validity through the investigation of consistency in participants’ responses.

In reference to “dependability or consistency”, Kusi (2012) wrote: “You can ensure the dependability of the conclusions of your study by asking clear questions, reducing bias and subjectivity during data collection; and triangulating the data” (p. 103). He also suggested that explaining the researcher’s positionality as a way to strengthen the “dependability of the research findings” (p. 103).

Although the researcher was a UEW student in Winneba as were the participants, the researcher did not place herself in the same category as these participants who have experienced marginalisation. That is, in terms of positionality in this work, in the world of marginalised UEW students, the researcher took an outsider stance as a person who was born and raised outside of the Ghanaian context.

After completing the transcriptions of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews and field notes, pertinent information was organised into emerging themes. Validation of data was sought from the participants, comparing the researcher’s

account of their experiences to what they believed, and making corrections as needed. This was done to ensure that the meanings that the participants derived from their experiences prevailed.

With a background in social work, the researcher worked as a part-time counsellor at the Counselling Centre of UEW – Winneba since 2006. Hence, the researcher had a broad sense of the issues of some of the students at the University. With the current study, the researcher had the task of moving from seeing things clinically and attempting to help, as an advocate and an activist. The priority became one of taking on a more academic role and looking at things in a way that aided in discovery. This involved seeing participants' experiences with fresh eyes – in order to address the research questions and objectives – and unearthing insights to learn more deeply about participants' lived experiences without interfering. Even so, the researcher knew that ethically, had there been any kind of danger to the participants, the researcher would have taken any and all necessary steps to ensure their safety.

Confirmability is another important element in ensuring trustworthiness in research findings. Kusi (2012) warned:

Unlike quantitative studies, it is difficult to generate objective results in a qualitative study. This is because, as a qualitative researcher, you are embedded in prejudices, and have your own knowledge, values, biases and convictions which could impact, to some extent, on the findings of your study. Therefore, you must endeavour to ensure that the meanings of the data you collect are not changed by your knowledge and experiences (p. 103).

Shenton added to that sentiment:

Here, steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather

than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. The role of triangulation in promoting such confirmability must again be emphasised, in this context to reduce the effect of investigator bias” (2004, p. 72).

In addition to the observations, the extensive interviews conducted with each informant contributed to the ability to confirm the findings in this study.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedures**

With the semi-structured interviews, an interview guide was used as a place to start the interview process, while allowing for follow-up questions. Areas of questioning were crafted to elicit:

- Stories of their upbringing
- Decision-making process to attend university
- Examples of addressing adversity

The study included multiple interviews which allowed for probing in order to clarify key issues.

In addition, observations and field notes were used to gather further information. “Observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artefacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for the study. The observational record is frequently referred to as field notes – detailed, nonjudgmental, concrete descriptions of what is observed” (Marshall, 2006, p. 98). The settings of the observations were students’ classrooms, homes, teaching practice, study groups and movement throughout campus. The researcher utilised each observation activity to see the ways the participants behaved in those environments and how they interacted with others. The researcher used did not use a guide during the observations, but took notes on blank pages and conducted the observation activities after the initial

interviews had been conducted. The observations provided opportunities to see the students in a different light, as well as to generate follow-up questions and verification of interpretations in subsequent interviews.

Most of the interviews were conducted in a small office in the Counselling Centre. It was important to have a space that was quiet and which afforded a degree of privacy so that students felt comfortable sharing their experiences. For some participants, the Counselling Centre was not a suitable location. The two visually impaired students who were involved in the study at the piloting stage lived in a hostel nearby and therefore were familiar with the area. However, meeting at the Centre was more of a challenge for a visually impaired participant who did not live in the general area. The researcher met this participant in places of her choice, which were most often her home and sometimes that of her friend.

Another participant who had physical impairments was unable to navigate the terrain surrounding and leading up to the Counselling Centre, which made conducting interviews there impossible. Hence, the researcher met her at her off-campus room.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

After fully developing the narratives of each study participant, themes were identified relative to how they dealt with adversity and how they saw themselves as agents in society and at the University. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. The researcher combed through the transcripts and identified themes in the data. Finlay (2012) stressed the necessity to “take time to dwell with the raw data such that *implicit*, layered meanings come to the fore” (p. 186). The researcher went through the raw data collected through interviews and observations and then pulled themes from the data and recorded them with the use of multi-

coloured pens to code different aspects of participant experience. This process influenced the researcher's ability to describe and to derive meaning from the phenomenon of students from marginalised categories succeeding through uses of elements of self-efficacy.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

As to ethical considerations, the researcher fully explained what the study was about and what was expected of each participant. Also, participants were assured that their information and their identity would be held in strict confidence. All of the participants' names were kept confidential, and only pseudonyms were used. In order to have this type of agreement with them, a strong rapport was built with each participant, so that they would trust that their information would be handled in ways they were promised. Rapport was built through visits to the University's Disabled Student Association wherein the researcher attended three meetings through which relationships with the group's leaders and members were established. At each of the meetings, the researcher was introduced by the officers and was given the floor to speak about the work.

As to those participants who were not among the physically, visually or hearing/speech impaired, there was not group interaction, but the researcher built rapport by communicating frequently through texts and in-person greetings. Also, when meeting students at the Counselling Centre individually, the researcher used verbal and body language to interact in a positive manner. The researcher made sure each participant was physically comfortable, understood the study and willingly consented to the interview process.



Possible risks included a participant feeling negative effects of focusing on unpleasant aspects of his/her lived experiences and/or place in society. The researcher offered to refer participants to a counsellor at the Counselling Centre if they wanted to discuss these concerns. Also, during the observation process, participants could have been or felt singled out in a way that negatively affected them. In the same vein, the participant experiencing this could have received counselling at the UEW Counselling Centre. While these risks were real, the benefits of conducting this study to delve into students' experiences outweighed the risks.

At the same time, one exception was made to the observation plans with respect to the participant who was HIV positive. No observation was conducted of this participant because the researcher felt that it would have added to the angst he experienced, as he constantly worried that people would learn of his status. Whether or not any issues such as possible risks occurred, the participants were assured that they could have stopped participating at any point had they become uncomfortable. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study without any consequence if they chose to do so.

Lastly, as in the prior discussion on positionality, ethical issues could have arisen as the researcher – for purposes of this study – had turned her focus from being an advocate for and with students to a researcher who allowed situations to unfold in front of her. Professionally and ethically, the researcher was very clear on which role would have been chosen had any situation arisen that could have caused harm to anyone or if the researcher somehow had learnt that there was any danger to or negative effects on anyone.

Chapter Four follows, wherein the results of the study are presented and explained.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS FROM MARGINALISED GROUPS

#### 4.1 Introduction

People from marginalised groups are seen as on the periphery of society, unable to enjoy all that society has to offer. While this is true in many cases, some rise above low expectations and overcome difficult circumstances to transcend their lives in meaningful ways. Some do this through higher education, refusing to accede to the position to which society seems to have assigned them.

Some groups of marginalised people are deemed so because of physical traits which make them somehow different. Some are marginalised based on features or perceptions which socially set them apart. With marginalisation in general, these differences often stand as a barrier between them and opportunities, as well as sometimes a justification for maltreatment and insensitivity.

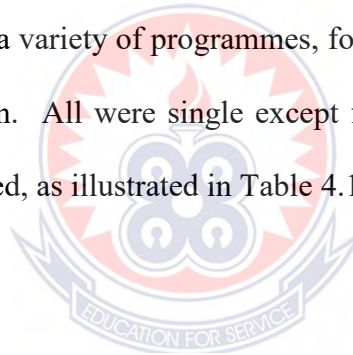
The purpose of this chapter is to reflect upon the lives of ten Ghanaians and their journeys through difficult lived experiences to their present status as University of Education – Winneba students. Each of the students faced extraordinary struggles by virtue of their individual life circumstances and lived experiences. This study took a phenomenological view of their lives and allowed each story to unfold as they each lived through difficult situations and, in the midst of distress and sorrow, found a way to meet their coveted goals. At the forefront of their minds was higher education; although their ambitions were hewn out of uncertainty, their focus remained very clear.

This chapter is presented in two parts. The first part presents the participants<sup>3</sup> of the study, and the second part discusses emerging themes from the data.

#### **4.2 General presentation of the participants**

The following section presents the ten participants in this research. The first part of this chapter presents the research data which was collected through interviews and observations.

The study participants ranged in age from 22 to 31 years. The table below lists each one and shows their gender, age, the area they were pursuing, their year of study, and their marital status. The group comprised of five women and five men who were pursuing a variety of programmes, four of whom were in their final year of tertiary education. All were single except for one who was married and another who was widowed, as illustrated in Table 4.1.



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<sup>3</sup> Each participant introduction is presented in first-person, verbatim format.

**Table 4.1: General Demographics of Participants**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Faculty or Department</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Marginalised Category</b>
Esi	Female	25	Social Studies	2	Single	Quasi Orphaned (Mother's instability/Father's abandonment)
Janet	Female	24	Science Education	4	Single	Gender
Kwesi	Male		Social Sciences	3	Widowed	HIV positive
Nana Adjoa	Female	25	Special Education & Art Education	2	Single	Hearing and Speech Impairments
Yao	Male	22	Education	2	Single	Albinism
George	Male	26	Languages	4	Single	Perceptions of his Sexuality/Citizenship
Grace	Female	26	Special Education	3	Single	Visual Impairment
Ama	Female	29	Special Education/ Sign Language Education	3	Married	Physical Impairment
Jeremiah	Male	29	Social Sciences	5	Single	Orphaned (Mother's mental illness/Father's absence)
Kofi	Male	31	Business Administration	4	Single	Learning and Physical Impairments

Each person was a student at the University of Education – Winneba and was considered to be representative of a marginalised group.

### 4.3 The First Research Question and Corresponding Data

#### I. What are the stories, the lived experiences, of students from marginalised groups who are successful at UEW – Winneba?

In responding to the first question, six of the ten participants are introduced to provide descriptions of some of their lived experiences, challenges and ambitions. These experiences were shared by the study participants themselves, meaning that the narratives are in first person and were written using their words. Following those introductions is a discussion of the emerging themes from all ten participants' lived experiences.

Esi

I am Esi, and I am reading Social Studies. I am someone who has been staying with different people all this while; I didn't stay with my parents for long. When I was 14 years, I stayed with one of my teachers and then from there I left to stay with my headmistress. By then I was going to church but not accepted Christ Jesus, but it was when I went to stay with her that I accepted Christ and I became fully Christian. Because of that, my father threatened not to cater for me because I'd made that choice. My father was a Muslim, but I was not comfortable with the religion, so I was not going to church [sic], I was not performing their ablution too. Once in a while, I would go to church; when someone was going I followed the person to church. My mother and father lived separately from each other for as long as I can remember; when I became conscious of myself, he didn't live with us. Once in a while, he will come and visit us and bring our, let's say chop money or upkeep money.

[Before living with my headmistress], when I was a child, I dreamed of becoming a nurse, but along the way when I consider all that I've been through

and the kind of people I've stayed with, I said to myself that it is God's grace that has sustained me this far, so I said since my teachers, because of their career they were able to see some of the – especially my headmistress, it's her – let me say her character – like she's been able to bring up children who are like me who are from, let's say a poor background. By God's grace, some of them who were able to endure have gained some in society [sic]. I said to myself, „I'll become a teacher so that I will be able to help the children who are going through difficulties, financially and all those stuff.“ That's why I diverted my career to the teaching field.

While at my headmistress' house, some were inciting me to leave the woman's place because they believed that she was not helping me and was rather maltreating me. They will not buy – as a lady you know you get to a certain stage, certain things you have to get: pads, panties, undies, bras, they were not. Those around the area were inciting that I should leave the woman's place because for them they were fending for themselves, having boyfriends and all those stuff. Because of your physical features, guys might get attracted to you and if you don't have the fear of God in you, you might give in easily. Before you realise, your future might be in terrible state, I said to myself.

Even though the treatment that she was giving me was not good, I said to myself that I would have to endure it. Because all those people who had been able to make it in life didn't get it easily. If me too I am able to persevere, I can make it someday. So I endured to that stage, and when I realised it was getting too much, those that I was staying with, we were staying with the same woman they were engaging in all sorts of fornication and all those stuffs. Yes, ladies, they were engaging...I said to myself that, for me, that I will not do that. I left there after

school; after the final exams. By then that my sister was calling that I should come to stay with her. My mother came with the intention of moving me from there to my sister.

At my sister's place, the husband, he's kind of a womaniser, and anytime he wants to have an affair with me and I said I won't do that, and because of that, he hated me. Like because whenever he makes an attempt, I refuse; he was not on good terms with me. Therefore, he kept giving all sorts of tasks to me – scrubbing the whole compound, the floor; I should wash the gate. You see, in the city they have the metal gate; I should be washing it with soap and water and then wipe it and all those – like, he was doing something that would hurt me or something. When he says it, I will do it without complaint because I don't want to bring any confusion between my sister and the husband...because the treatment that I was going through, it was not easy, starvation...Jesus.

My mother came to pick me, and I went to stay with Lebanese and Syrians as a house help [sic]. There you have to buy your own food. No, they will not allow you to eat their food, oh! No, if they see you touching their things, they will send you away. When the month ends, I get my money, I will save 50 Ghana and I will go to market and buy food in stock like gari, beans and all those stuff, those that will take me long, 40 Ghana and then save the 50 Ghana thinking that I'm saving – to further my secondary education. For four months I was there, and that place too, they were harassing me, one of them was harassing me so I said I had to leave and I went to sell pure water at Circle.

I have said it wasn't easy though, but I used my mother's lifestyle as an example that, when I was in Accra selling pure water, like (laughing), I'll be carrying my pure water and I'm following my mother, SHS, oh. And as you

know, guys would be approaching because I refused and when I'm selling, they'll be laughing at me. Making fun of me. "Hey Mommy, when the mother is coming she's selling pure water and the daughter too, she's selling pure water." They'll be making fun of me. Like it hurts, I'll go and stand somewhere and I'll cry, I'll cry. I'll ask God to intervene ... because they were thinking that because I didn't give in.

### Kwesi

I am Kwesi, a student in the Social Sciences faculty. In 2002, my wife passed away after battling CSM, cerebrospinal meningitis. During her stay in the hospital, the doctors had learned that she was HIV positive. When she died, they sought my consent for testing, and I also tested positive. Before that, our son was born in 1994 and died in 1998 because he was getting ill somehow; he was not all that healthy. He doesn't look so healthy, but we never knew what was the cause because he died on the way to the hospital. As a Muslim, I had to call in the Muslim community to help me bury, so we did not do any postmortem to establish what was the cause of his death.

I found it very difficult to disclose my status to my headmaster at the school where I teach, but because of my status, I had to talk to him. The headmaster took me to the SHEP (School Health Education Programme) Coordinator, and they took me out of the classroom and gave me a different job so I would not be too stressed. They accommodated me by creating an environment for me that allowed me time to go for my medicine and other HIV programmes outside of the Ghana Education Service setup.

If I did not come to work, my director did not stress me, and I appreciated this enabling environment; but at the same time wondered constantly what the



reactions of others were to my job change and my many absences. For instance I might be losing weight, but people might also perceive and might find out from background information since some people at my former station know my status, and at least a few circuit supervisors know. You don't know what that person will talk to, so nobody has stigmatised me directly, but maybe a perception. So the perception around was that, "Why is it that Kwesi is not in the classroom and is doing a different job? Is it a new portfolio?" so these questions were being asked.

I also have the opportunity to serve on the Ghana AIDS Commission, working on the Millenium Development Goals. When a friend sees materials in my room regarding this work, I can sense the questions being raised in his mind about my health. I've been asking myself, people might want to find out, "why was it that Kwesi was not in the classroom? What was so special about him, and is it that they have, per enquiries, they've gotten to know more why I was not being in the classroom?" So sometimes, I begin to ask myself, "Have people got to know about my status?" Even though nobody questioned me about it, but sometimes, I get self-stigmatised like, "Are people talking about me? Have people got to know? Now that I'm getting deteriorated health-wise, am I showing features?" Most recently, the last semester holidays because I realised that I was deteriorating. I was losing weight.

Ideally, as a PL, I wasn't supposed to fast, but as a Muslim, over the years, I have not been fasting. But last Ramadan fasting, I thought, "No, I wanted to perform my religious obligation, which I have not performed for quite a long time." So I did engage myself in the fasting period for about 20 continuous days. Then, at that point in time, my condition became very serious that I have to even rush to the hospital, went on admission. It really, really affected my health status,

and I was like, I was becoming very weak. And that has also contributed to my current status. I realised that all my collarbones and my things were showing, and it's like you meet your colleagues and, the way they take a second look at you, make you to become suspicious. "Are you showing features? Are they getting suspicious of you?" And that has been the condition as of now.

In addition to possibly being stigmatised by my colleagues, I also worry about my family situation. Once I stayed overnight with my brother's wife and children, and so when I got there, I happened not to go with my bathing kit. So they thought of getting me some water to wash down. Under normal circumstances what my brother uses – he is my direct brother, so his bathing kit, his sponge and towel could be what I could use; but I realised that they picked up an old, abandoned sponge that was lying there to give to me to use, but I thought that, well, could be that the perceived mindset that I'm HIV (positive), so they'll have to give me something different from what the others are using? From my observation, it happened to be an abandoned sponge that was lying down which was no longer in use.

The other thing is about a social contact, which I like. I've been single for this while (chuckling). I've been very single all this while. It's basically because I had always set a preference for myself, wanted a Muslim lady but wanted somebody too who has some level of education, and that has been my challenge; that is, I've not been able to meet my target.

My extended family and community members in my home area do not know that I am widowed and childless; thus when they ask of my wife and child, I respond as though they are both still alive so as not to alert them to my health

status. That is, I pretend that they are fine, meanwhile, they died well over a decade ago.

### Nana Adjoa

I am a 26-year-old Special Education and Art Education student in my second year. I was born deaf. I don't know exactly where my father is, and I don't even know his name. My mother was the one working to pay all my school fees. At times the family helped out with school fees, but then my mother died. Now my uncle is helping me pay school fees.

At first, things were better, but right now, since the change of government, things have been hard. From SS to this time around, it's very difficult to cater because of books and other things. Right now, I don't know where my father is and my mother too has passed on when I was nine years old. There has been increasing price of fuel any time, so we couldn't afford to pay the lorry fare. In the past, it was best, but right now, it's very difficult, so I have been forcing to come to school.

Any time I go to the house, it is very difficult to communicate with family since they don't know how to sign in the house, so, I feel isolated there because I can't talk to them. I'm very humble when I'm there. At times, I only play with them, but people don't want to come to me. My family members don't know how to sign; at the same time, they don't know how to write because of lack of education in the family. They don't know anything about signing and writing, so they only find shouting, doing all sorts of things. Only one of my sisters knows how to talk with me, so maybe when God permits and that sister is in the house, she may help me to communicate in the house. She's in Primary Five and is the only one who knows how to write for me to see, and also write for that person for

me to read. So if that sister is not in the house, then it means we can't even communicate.

Yao

I am a second-year Basic Education student. I am the last born of my parents' three children. On the issues of my parents, both are divorced, so it's my father who is taking care of my education now. They separated long ago and my mother married another man again; I was young, around five years.

Often I experience negative initial reactions of people I meet. The mindset, what people perceive about albinism – they perceive it's a characteristic which is not deserving to be given to humanity; some perceive me to be a spirit born baby on earth. Based on that spiritual matter, since it normally doesn't happen in our society to be born as albinos. So they will see you as child from either the gods or the spirit world in the community. So they will just ask, "did your father have – maybe your father was worshipping" – let's assume – "a ghost and then God gave him that kind of albino to him."

One negative reaction was from my teacher when I entered elementary school; I didn't know because whenever I attended school it felt like he [sic] wanted to throw me out of the school. I didn't know the relationship. I didn't know anything about stigmatisation, so anything that I did, he just called me funny names.

One day, we went to just swing on a mango tree on the school compound. And one of our colleagues fell down and had a broken arm. He was swinging at this side and I was swinging at this side, so unlucky for him the tree that he was holding just dropped and he just fell down. So they called the three of us in. The madam said I should not step my foot on the school there again. She insulted me

verbally and, from that, I wasn't able to attend school at that site, I alone; the rest attended. I never forgot that because that pains me a lot. It gets to my heart that insult that she used on me.

The madam used the black – the melanin outside my body to insult me, verbatim... the black spots on my face. She said my face is a melanical face, that the melanin looked like the small ant which bites, the insect found on corn. She just insulted me a lot with the use of that melanin. My father went to the school authority for them to just give him the details of the accident; he didn't tell me the answer for it, so I sat there for two years. Then he forced me to move from the house to school. That time, that madam had been transferred, so I went to the same school. My colleagues who – we were studying the same – were at Class Three and I was sent to Class One.

For two years, I wasn't attending school. They didn't ask for any explanation. What happened is that when that case happened, the three of us ran away and left the guy there. So the other students just pointed at me that it is I who caused that action, so the madam based on that answer and just said I should never step my legs on the school again.

Upon my return to school, I was given leadership roles as class captain and prefect from the basic education level to JHS where I won the position of senior prefect and then relinquished the role of class captain. This responsibility put me in the position to move about the school and interact with various groups. Since I was born I have had friends, so as you keep on contacting or interacted with many, the people know that they can live a real human life so he now should stop the stigmatisation they used to do.

## George

I am a fourth-year, language student, born in Ghana to an Togolese father and a Ghanaian mother. My father took me from Ghana and my mother when I was about three months old, and I was raised by my paternal grandmother in Togo, and she was aged. Then when you pass through a time of adolescence where you need really to talk to people, where your parent really need to understand you to some extent, I never really had people I could talk to about, really, what I was passing through. It worked to some extent that I was just showing the best out to people, but within I was being eaten up; I wasn't myself. Sometimes it's time in school where children receive their parents. I've never had the parents come in for me because my dad was always gone, and my grandma was now old and so she really couldn't make it all the time.

You know, later on, I grew up to realise that I was a bit, like, feminine. So I wasn't really getting along with people who were a little bit, more or less kind of like guys-guys because they were always looking me aside, "oh, you're too soft." I was being perceived as effeminate because of my mannerisms and my tenor singing voice. Basically, men don't have such a voice. Somebody who hears you on the CD or from elsewhere says, "Wow, that girl sings well." And then later on, they're like, "Oh, it's a guy." I would say, "Yeah, I'm a male; I'm a male," and they're like, "that's great."

In addition to dealing with questions of my masculinity and sexuality from society, my family also questioned me. When I was 14 and was visiting my dad in France, he woke me early one morning wanting to talk. He said, "You know you are feminine and you wore a pierce, an earring; why? I want to know, you can talk

to me. Are you a gay? "Come on. I can wear anything I want." He was like, "Yes, you can wear anything you want when you are a normal guy around."

When my grandfather died and my grandmother was sent to live in a home where they keep the aged people, I was sent to live with my father's brother, also in Togo. I'd lived with my grandma, and I had everything I wanted at my disposal; she had pampered me, but it was not the same with my uncle.

My stepmother, who I consider my mother, when I call and then I say "I need this" and she'll tell me, "The last time I tried helping and then your dad figured it out, I was in trouble. I am sorry; if you need something tell your dad, don't tell me, before he tells me that I'm not your mom and I'm not this and I'm not that. I don't want to have any trouble again. So I'm really sorry, I love you but I can't help. Call your dad." And then that's the end of the story.

When stuff like that does happen, I just want to be quiet in my room. I just want to be quiet in my room and I think – automatically when on the phone when she starts saying those sentences, I put my mind to what's next, what I'm going to do? I never sit down and cry about stuff, you know. Though it gets into me but I never stop there and say, "No" I say, "What's next? Who else can I contact?" I'm hurt though but realising that you got no help, nobody, nowhere, you got nobody to help and then the only help you think you could have gotten from parents, you're not getting it; of course you feel left alone.

When it comes to me getting stuff, when I need money for something, I could say, "Okay, I have this watch." I had it from my birthday; that's the reason when I get money, I buy expensive stuff. But if you meet somebody who knows me, they'll tell you, "Hey, this guy is a pampered person; his mom calls him everyday," because I tell people "my parents are cool. My mom is so worried

because I got my leg broken” and stuff like that. But nobody is worrying about my broken leg because I’m the person worrying about it. If I want to play baby saying “I’m not moving because I want my mom to be here,” I will sit in my room and I let life go on like that. That’s the point.

#### Grace

I am a 26-year old, third-year, Special Education student. I am someone who grew up in a family of illiterates – shall I say that – in a family of illiterates because both parents are not educated. I was born with this impairment, but due to my parents’ illiteracy, I was not sent to any eye clinic to be diagnosed to know the problem I’m facing. They were only using local treatment on me and it may even be those drugs that worsened my case, because when I was a bit grown, I had low vision, which was even strong.

According to my mother, when I was five and below, I told her that I would go to school because everyday my colleagues had been going to school, and she told me that now that I cannot see, how do I go to school. At that stage, I didn't even know that I could not see, because I could do anything, so I didn't realise it; she told me. It came to a time when they are going to school, I would be crying, and she has to find out from people whether there is a school for the blind. When she found out, they gave her two schools for the blind, Wa and Akropong. She decided that she would take Wa because some of our relatives are in Wa and they can be visiting me on her behalf. That made her to send me to Wa around seven, eight, thereabout.

I was partially blind; I could see until around age twelve years. I used to experience severe headaches. Whenever I have the headache, my eyes get swollen. So later one day my vision went off, the swelling of the eyes stopped.



Those days my eyeballs were a bit big, but now you can see that they are all smaller.

In learning, I was not facing much problem at my primary and JSS, but secondary school it was very tough because the books were not in braille and how to learn was difficult because many of them were not willing to help in reading for me. I used to get some, but it was not easy because there were information that I also lack, because they are not in braille for me to read. While others could go to library and get books to read to search for information, dictionaries, I cannot do that. I asked some of the friends who are willing to read for me to come and read, and I will copy the notes down. I will take down the points and I will be reading. In doing that, sometimes I have to motivate them too by giving out gifts. That would ginger them to come and read for me next time.

There are times when people treat me differently. Sometimes, when they are working, let's say maybe they are going to do cleaning of a particular place. Because of my disability, they eliminate me. I often tell them that they should always include me because there are some things that I am also capable of doing. Like the cleaning, I can also do it.

Sometimes, they feel that if they can stay with boys, chat with them, I'm not supposed to stay with them. Ghanaians, they have perception that if, immediately we are sitting with a boy, that person is your boyfriend, so sometimes, when you're chatting with guys, boys, they will make comments like, "look at them; they also know how to enjoy laughs." Those kinds of discrimination, they feel you are not supposed to do those things.

When I had low vision, I used to see a woman on GTV, Gifty Anti, and admired how she dressed and how she reports the news. That gingered me, and I

said, “Oh, by God’s grace, in future I’ll also be a journalist, and she would be my role model.” [And then] in SHS, sometimes when we the person with vision impairment, we dress, they would say, why do we also dress? Because they dress so the man will see them and propose to them and why do we also dress? I used to tell them that I, in particular, I dress because I just want to look neat and I don’t want people feel that because I can’t see, so I should live any life. That’s why I dress, but not for men because they do that for men to propose to them. So and we too, why do we dress, because men cannot propose to us because we can’t see. Now that was the perception. It makes me feel like because of the impairment, I’m different from other individuals. It makes me feel like with the impairment, it means I’m just useless or I have no value when they make such comments.

In this section, six of the ten study participants introduced themselves. The following section discusses emerging themes for the first question of this study with respect to the stories of all of the participants.

#### **4.3.1 Shunning, Judgment and Stigmatisation**

Several of the study participants’ lived experiences involved their enduring shunning and judgment. For instance, 25-year-old Esi’s experience of living a life of isolation from her family included shunning and judgment. Her circumstances put her in a quasi-orphan status. It began when Esi was entirely cut off by her father because she had rejected the Muslim faith, and that had significant effects on her life. When Esi’s father discontinued financial support to Esi and her mother, this affected the mother’s ability to take care of Esi and her four siblings. It was when the home became so unstable that Esi ended up living with various community members and then her older sisters, even whilst some extended family

members refused to support Esi due to long running disputes in the family, some of which involved religious differences. Without support from family, she was fortunate to be able to live with a teacher and then her headmistress while her mother hawked goods for a living.

George, aged 26, who also lived under quasi-orphan circumstances. He had never lived with his biological Ghanaian mother and has only lived with his Togolese father and European stepmother for short stints in Togo and abroad. He also had experience of shunning and judgment. The reason for the shunning since his teenage years appeared to be based on others' perceptions of his sexuality.

Yao, a 22-year old student with albinism whose parents divorced around the time he began elementary school, faced shunning often in every new situation he encountered. He was approximately four years old when a female teacher often insulted him and called him names, which continued to hurt him very deeply. One day, this teacher expelled him from school when one of the children in a group accidentally fell and got hurt.

We liked playing injurious games, games which will cause injury. (S)he said if we are not able to stop, (s)he'll just sack all of us to go home. The game is not conducted by only me, we are getting to more than four. One day we pluck – there's a mango tree around the school compound and we just went there to just swing on the mango tree.

Yao was not near the friend whose branch broke and caused his fall but he was, nonetheless, the only child who was ultimately dismissed. Even though his father held a night-time security position at the school, he was unable to protect him from the treatment of discrimination, abuse and rejection. Moreover, Yao's mother was unavailable to shield him, as she had re-married and moved to a bordering country.

At age ten, another memory of shunning stuck out for Yao, but this instance involved a woman he knew and whose business he had regularly patronised. When he approached her, she yelled and insulted him in front of his peers, which left a lasting memory. Yao narrated:

I was attending Presbyterian church during my young age. They distributed some cards for us to go out and solicit some coins for them. We went there with my colleagues and one woman was selling food outside, so I greeted the woman and said, "We are going for convention, so they say we should come along with this card to solicit some coins, if you could help me to do this." The woman said, "Oh, go away! Go away; who are you? You, you are a wizard. Go away, I don't need you here."

When Ama, a 29-year old Special Education student majoring in Sign Language was to get married, she experienced rejection similar to what Yao felt. Ama had been using a leg braces and crutches – and sometimes a hand-operated tricycle wheelchair – since age seven when she lost the use of her legs overnight. When she met the man who became her husband, her prospective in-laws were not in agreement. Because Ama was physically different, they actively sought to dissuade the union.

That one, I was having a lot of challenges with my husband's people, and me, because, when he was to marry me, they say because I have [a] disability, he shouldn't marry me, all that, I'm a cripple. He should go and look for someone who is not a cripple, what and what, paaa. He didn't listen. And someone went to their place and told the mother she shouldn't allow him to marry me. So my husband too went home and told the mother I have a disability but still he loves me, so he'll marry me.

Grace is 26 years old, and her lived experience, as a person with visual impairment, also included significant instances of shunning and discrimination.

Some did not voice it, but they were just, they were saying it and some also have the perception that now they are staying with us, what if they also become visually impaired? That if the parent had known that she was going to stay with a person with vision impairment, they wouldn't have allowed her to come to that school. Some had that perception. We were not having any friendship with them because they will not even allow you to approach them.

Kofi, a 31-year old Business Administration student who has physical and learning impairments, had difficulties making friends at the beginning of his tertiary education. In order to avoid the maltreatment similar to that which Grace experienced, whereby people believe they are somehow contagious, he felt the need to inform people about how he became physically impaired. Therefore, Kofi often told fellow students and potential friends of the accident he had as a four-year-old throughout his university years. The other issue of difference was undetectable to his peers, so he focused on explaining his physical dissimilarity.

He illuminated:

Because people know that because of your disability it happened to you because of your bad deeds that happened to you or because of something that...that's why this disease has come to you. So if they don't know your story and they come to you, they know that they are going to be infected or something will happen to you the same way. I normally tell my story to my friends before they will accept me as a friend.

Kwesi, a third-year student is living with HIV, and although he was an advocate for the cause of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), he kept his status private from those in the general community; the reason was that he was deeply worried of being isolated from society. When the subject was broached in the general public, he side-lined himself from the discussion and tried not to be seen as reacting much to what was being said about the virus and those affected by it. His lived experience with respect to shunning was a result of his fear of being rejected, something that he discusses in terms of self-stigmatisation.

I still have that fear of stigma. The fear of stigma is still there until sometime before – you know, there's this self-stigma itself and then there's stigma from the outside world. We need to also break away from that self-stigma, but it is not easy for you to break away from the stigma, and you have to go through a lot of process. Can you stand the initial surprise, the shock people will have that, “wow.”

As a result of his situation, Kwesi experienced psychological effects of living with HIV, constantly questioning his appearance and seeking reassurance.

It makes me feel like people were going to judge me, and I was going to get even worse, get bedridden so it's like, „No, I have to go often and then check on the doctor. „Am I looking good?“

In addition to the fear of ostracisation, Kwesi experienced pressure to marry. Besides finding and identifying a suitable partner who would not only accept him in his present condition and not shun him, he also presumably needed that same approval and acceptance from her parents and extended family. Society's expectation that he be married with offspring therefore weighed very heavily on him. In this respect, Kwesi notes:

I am trying and trying and trying, and then age is also not waiting up with you, because I don't have a child. So until my current age, I'm still not having a child; I've been single. Sometimes too, it gets, like, you become weak, you are alone, you get sick. So who is close by you? Who is the spouse next to you to give you that support? That is also something that I get too worried about.

Just as Kwesi's life was laden with fear of stigmatisation, so too was that of Jeremiah, a 29-year-old, fifth-year Social Sciences student. When he was approximately five years old, his mother became mentally ill and could not take care of him. He lived with his mother's friend, Auntie Essunam, while other friends also helped. Until the age of ten years, he thought that this family friend was his birth mother, but then he was taken to see his biological mother. He recalled:

Auntie Essunam told me I'm not the real son; this is my mother, but because of madness and what-and-what, that's why they took me and they take care of me so I should relax on certain things; I should not be reacting like money is in the house, I should [not] go and bring problems. Like, it's a form of advice (s)he's giving me, so later I went to town with Auntie Essunam and then she said this is my mother, I should not tell anybody, what-and-what. Right now, my mother is still there, naked, (s)he's around Kumasi Zoo, zoo wall.

The realisation of his mother's identity was very saddening for Jeremiah, and he felt he had to make a life for himself on his own. In addition to this devastating news, he learned about his father.

Then they said my father pregnant [sic] my mother and then he travelled to Nigeria. Then time, I was the blood in my mother's womb, then my father travelled to Nigeria. Since then, I haven't set eyes on my father.

Thus, from the age of eleven, he worked hard to pay for his secondary school education through this work.

I tried do like this one – in Kumasi you call it car mate, but in English, you call it conductor, tro-tro conductor.

Before he was even in his teenage years, Jeremiah was working like a grown man. All the while, his reality represented differences he could not allow others to know, so he kept his situation and that of his mother's secret.

No, I didn't share my situation to them because one, I don't know the caliber of person or the friends I have made, and then Auntie Essunam the time (s)he broadcast the news to me (s)he said, "This is my mother, I should not tell anybody." So the thing was in my mind or in my head that if I show you this is my mother, or if I tell you my situation, then later I go outside and I see people pointing fingers, it will pain me a lot, so...

Kofi, is a fourth-year Social Sciences student, had a learning disability and an impairment affecting his leg as a result of being accidentally hit on the head. He dropped into the UEW – Winneba Counselling Centre at the end of his final year. He had some unsolicited but insightful advice for the University.

It's important because each department should know the number of people who are disabled. After that, it will help the disabled people to come out with their abilities and what they are willing to do.

Kofi offered a recent example of when he and his colleagues presented their projects from their off-campus experiences wherein he felt that he and another person with physical impairments were challenged more than their classmates.



Okay, there was one physically challenged guy in our department. When it got to his turn and he presented it, the way they're putting questions on him, they're asking you, "Are you sure that this thing ... did you perform it when you are there and everything?" The way they're throwing questions on him, I did not like it at all and when it got to my turn too, they're doing the same thing.

Upon entering the office, he went into an automatic explanation of physical condition, also unsolicited.

The way I'm walking like this and the way it happened by the natural accident. Coconut fell on my head and it affected my leg. Yeah, I do tell them what happen when I was four years, having the natural coconut fell on my head, and even, some of my bones koraa, it came out (displaying the top of his head and pointing), a small hole, a scar there.

He described another way the incident affected him.

At first I was not able to use my right hand, but due to exercises then I was able to use it.

The blow to his head also affected his learning abilities. This is something that he did not share with people.

...so due to that, I cannot study for a very long time. If I start studying for a very long time, I feel pains in my head, abnormal pains, so I don't stress myself at all.

By way of summary of the presentation of data for the first question of this research work, the introductions of the participants and the emerging themes were shunning, judgment and stigmatisation. The themes in the participants' lives existed because of their social and physical differences. The participants in this study were from marginalised categories, and most had dealt with these issues since the formative period of their lives. Their verbatim responses illustrated some of the struggles they experienced.

A presentation of the data from the second question of this research study follows and provides a further glimpse of the hurdles the participants have experienced.



#### **4.4 The Second Research Question and Emerging Themes**

##### **II. What hurdles to university education have these students faced? Sub-question: How did these individuals address hurdles to university entry and succeed while others do not?**

The themes which emerged from data for the second research question involve the absence of parent(s) and the formulation and utilisation of various tools. Also participants had taken lessons from others' negative experiences; this took the form of negative encouragement/role models. They also had desires to prove naysayers wrong.

##### **4.4.1 Absence of Parent(s) and Perseverance**

###### ***That's My Life and I Have to Take Care of It***

The participants in this study were different from most of the student population and persevered through very difficult circumstances to arrive at the University level. One of the issues most of them dealt with was the absence of one or both parents from their lives. This circumstance represented a major barrier to university education. Some parents were physically available to the participants but unable or unwilling to house them and care for them, while some parents were unknown entities. Some of the participants' parents were deceased while others were emotionally disconnected from them. Even when one parent was "present" in some way, the participants at various, vulnerable developmental stages, were largely limited in their abilities to enjoy the benefits of stable, secure relationships. Positive relationships are considered fundamental to positive growth in youth. In the absence of such interactions, genuine vulnerability exists; even so, each of the

participants had to find their own ways to overcome obstacles in order to take care of themselves and reach their educational goals.

Table 4.2 shows the education levels of the participants' parents, as they were known to the students.

**Table 4.2: Educational Levels of Participants' Parents**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mother's Education</b>	<b>Father's Education</b>	<b>Marginalised Category</b>
Esi	Female	JHS (Junior High School)	SHS (Senior High School)	Quasi Orphaned (Mother's instability/Father's abandonment)
Janet	Female	Basic	Basic +	Gender
Kwesi	Male	No Formal Education	Elementary School	HIV positive
Nana Adjoa	Female	Unknown	Unknown	Hearing and Speech Impairments
Yao	Male	No Formal Education	JHS	Albinism
George	Male	Birthmother: Unknown Stepmother: Possible University	Unknown	Perceptions of his Sexuality/Citizen-ship
Grace	Female	No Formal Education	No Formal Education	Visual Impairment
Ama	Female	No Formal Education	No Formal Education	Physical Impairment
Jeremiah	Male	Unknown	Unknown	Orphaned (Mother's mental illness/Father's absence)
Kofi	Male	SHS	JHS	Learning and Physical Impairments

Esi, 25 years old, was quasi-orphaned as a child. While she did not live with her mother throughout her childhood, she had stayed in touch with her. As she

continued her schooling, Esi had to travel to Accra on weekends to help her mother sell pure water. During the time her mother was living in Accra, Esi was not allowed to sleep at the home of her extended relatives where her mother was staying. Esi was unable to live with her mother because of financial constraints, but also was unable to stay with her on visits and school holidays. Because of her precarious position, Esi spent some times on the pavements of Accra, including a six-month period when she would sneak through a window of the room where her mother was and steal a few hours' sleep. Esi recollected:

...but when I went, they didn't welcome me because my mother, she lost her job so she has to engage in pure water selling. When I went because she's not on her own there with her own house, when they said they will not accommodate me there because they accommodated my mother so they'll not accommodate me also. At the back of the house there was some oven they used to bake bread with some sort of unwanted goods, and I placed my things there so when I come that was where I was having my luggage. In the evening when I come when they are asleep and my mother is asleep I will go sleep with her. Early in the morning I wake up and leave.

Throughout this difficult time, Esi kept her educational goals at the forefront of her mind, despite being repeatedly rejected by various family members.

It was when I left my sister's place (where the husband was harassing me) after JHS, I went to sell pure water. My elder sister, who is the hairdresser, I went to stay with her. When I went, she doesn't care. Even now my other sister is even – okay, she doesn't care about it; you will fend for yourself, each one for himself. I was there, one day I came and she has taken my things outside. I came back from hawking, she has sent my things out, and one of her friends was telling me that she has gone somewhere, and they are saying that my mother is a witch or something like that so she doesn't want to have anything with any other family member.

While Esi was likely vulnerable at many points in her life, this experience points to a particularly high level of vulnerability, as she had nowhere to go. She explains:

My things were out and people were stealing my ... I don't have anywhere to go. I said to myself that I will not engage myself in boyfriend-girlfriend because I know that if I'm able to humble myself under God's power, He'll

carry me through but along the way when like I didn't ... I went to my grandmother's place in Accra and there, too, they said they would not accommodate me. I was frustrated. When it's getting to the evening I wish I'm even dead because you'll not get anywhere to sleep. When it happens like my mother will be crying, and I can't stand her tears.

Even as Esi at times wished for her own death, she persevered and continued to assess her options. She no longer had contact with her father due to her religious choice and was unable to stay with her mother. In addition, she was shunned by family members. Esi continues by offering a further glimpse of the difficulties which plagued her lived experiences.

I had friends, lady friends, they too are having boyfriends and girlfriends so you can see their life was good for them. So in the evening they said they don't want their uncles and aunties to see that they are harbouring friends in the house so I will go and sleep early in the morning at 3:00 a.m. they will wake me up and come and sit outside till daybreak. Along there I said at that moment if any man had approached me, I would have given in so that I will go and stay with the person because I felt it was too much.

Just as Esi was left to fend for herself while pursuing her education, so was George, a 26-year old language education student. As a young child, George lived with his grandmother in Togo. As he was pampered by her and spent a lot of time with her, he was also developing in ways that attributed to others perceiving him as effeminate. Eventually his grandmother was unable to continue raising him. George's father and stepmother were living in France and, instead of bringing George to France with him, his father sent him to live with his uncle who was also in Togo.

Then my uncle's also somebody who wasn't that friendly, so he decided to send me to a boarding house (laughing). Oh, damn; it was...difficult. I'm living with people I don't know really, and then they sent me to the boarding house.

With his grandmother in a home for the aged elsewhere in Togo, George felt isolated, and he had no support. On a visit to France, his father had already communicated to him that he was not "normal" based on his mannerisms, his tenor

voice, his physical appearance, and the attention he attracted. Although he had a distant and strained relationship with his father, George had grown weary of his lonely condition so, left to his own devices, he concocted a plan meant to expedite his return to his father. Unlike Esi, George decided to break some rules in his efforts to ameliorate his position in life. Ultimately, his attempt did not result in his being reunited with his father in Europe; his misguided plan gave his father ammunition to deal a major blow to their tenuous relationship.

After a couple of years, I'd learned by then how to be on my own. Because by then, there was nobody to really count on. So by then I have to man up and then realise that, anyway, that's my life and I have to take care of it. I talked to my dad in France, I said, "Dad, I don't want to be here anymore. I'm tired of being here; I want to come back home." He was like, "Oh, fine, when you're done with your examination to go to the university, fine. You go to school wherever you want to go, but make sure you pass your WASSCE." A friend told me his mom could help me in getting a good grade and then pass and then go back home. I was like, "Yeah, that is great. How much am I going to pay?" (laughter). In the end, my uncle found out and told my father. Then my dad called me and he said, "Hey, you know what, I deny you; you're no more my child."

His uncle also abandoned him. Like Esi, he was left without shelter and without the protection every person requires at vulnerable life stages.

Then my uncle asked me to leave his house whilst I wasn't having any parent there, so I was left on the street. And it was very difficult. That's the saddest part on my life.

After his desperate attempt at returning to family, George did make it back to France where his father was, but like Esi, there was no home for him. In fact, his father made great efforts to ensure that he was destitute. He lamented further:

So when I went to France, my dad called people he knew that I could stay there and asked them – they shouldn't receive me in their house. I'm a bad person. I shouldn't – come on, he said a lot of stuff, to the extent that he even told my friends that I'm mad, that I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, anyway!

George then tried turning to his stepmother.

And even my mom, I refer to my stepmom [sic]. She tells me, “I wish I could help you, but your dad is a bit complicated. He doesn’t want me to intervene in your family issue, so solve it with him and so I don’t want to put my mouth in it.”

In spite of the barriers to success in the lived experiences he endured with respect to the absences of his father, mother, stepmother and other relatives, George attempted to see his situation through a positive lens when he stated:

But you ask yourself, “Hey, come on, there are people who got no parents.” I would not like it to say I have no number to call; people got no numbers they’re going to call, so life goes on.

Continuing with the theme of absence of parent(s) and perseverance is the lived experience of 29-year old Social Science student, Jeremiah who was indeed one with practically no numbers to call; the distress of his lack of parental and familial support was ongoing. He reflected on the emotional anguish of having a mother who was alive but was not available to him in any way, owing to her mental illness.

I have some problem, that problem, dear, always it will come. Let me say that, like when you get to Mother’s Day... That day it’s not easy. Mother’s Day is very painful more than Father’s Day, koraa. Especially my father I don’t know him to say, “This is my father” but the mother, I know her. This is my mother, real, so when you get to Mother’s Day, yeah, I think a lot.

Though his mother was sitting on the pavement unclothed in town, unable to recognise him, Jeremiah strived to earn enough money as a tro-tro conductor to “make life.” By the time he purchased his application form and then reached University of Education – Winneba in 2011, he had spent most of the funds he had accumulated on his first-year school fees. Hence, the worries of how to survive without support from anyone lingered in his mind.

Then, I use some to pay my electricity bill, chop money, if I want to pick a taxi to south, what-and-what, that’s where I started spending all the money I have.

He continued to work when possible.

Garden City Savings and Loan, they have a branch at Swedru here; that's where I was saving my money. Yeah, that's where I started saving the money and then I pay the fees myself. And then I started selling jeans here...with small money left in my account. I go withdraw it and then go to Kumasi and buy jeans, slippers and Lacoste I'm wearing, selling them on campus here, so this campus, so many people know me because of the work I was doing.

Yao is the last born of three children, and parents divorced when he was around five years old. His mother left the family and Ghana at the same time that he was being shunned by his primary school teacher. Similar to Jeremiah's feelings about having a mother while not having her in his life, Yao shared:

Sometimes I tend to [feel] isolate[d] with – but since I set my eyes on her when I was a young child and I can't go searching for her. It seems like I feel traumatised when I feel lonely without a mother. Because people may say, "Oh, let me call my mother for this and tell me "let me go to my mother's house; let me do this," but always your mother is not calling. Doesn't see or anything. (S)he think that even you are not alive or not.

He learned through a third party that his mother left Ghana.

Yes. I heard that. I went and visit my uncle at Asin Fusu, central region here, he told me that my mother is – we were just conversing, and he just said my mother is at Burkina, Burkina Faso.

Unlike Jeremiah and Yao, Janet, a fourth-year Mathematics student grew up in a two-parent home; even so, she also missed the presence of a mother in her life. The stability one would presume in such a household did not bear out in Janet's case, however; her parents were unavailable to her and her siblings due to very long working hours to combat poverty. In their absence, Janet, as the eldest child and as a female, spent her after-school hours selling alcohol to patrons of her father's bar. Later, when Janet was in her mid-teens, her mother had a kiosk from which Janet sold provisions while her mother hawked goods. Unfortunately, like Jeremiah's mother, Janet's mother had developed a mental illness around that time. She recalled:



She packed everything, and I remember asking her, “Mom, so if you’ve packed all the cooking utensils, what do you expect us to cook from?” Then, she was like it’s not her business, so she was going, and during those times, she was psychologically – I don’t know – because she would roam about without even clothes and, because I was the first born, I had to be going round looking for her, sometimes, in the night.

The search for treatment took Janet’s mother out of the home, and sometimes out of the country, for a period spanning five years, from the time Janet was 15 to 20 years of age.

Yeah, it was when she became sick seriously, and we had to send her to hospitals and camps and prayer centres.

Janet believed her mother’s issues were due to a stressful marital situation, as pointed out here:

It was because my mom said she found out my dad was moving with someone else, so at that time, yeah, I would be about – I was in class 6 or so or JHS? Okay, so it was like when I was 15 years or so, I was in JHS 1, so it happened that my mom had to – there was a time she even poisoned food just to give us and she herself, so that we will just die.

Fortunately, Janet’s aunt disposed of the tainted food before it caused any harm. From a child’s perspective, her mother’s actions were not indicative of psychosis.

It wasn’t mental illness, but I think it was because of what she went through, so she became disturbed; she was depressed. She wouldn’t think, she wouldn’t even think about us. She was just thinking about the situation so it was like she had a problem. She would say that she had fire burning her body. Her body feels hot; she feels like just jumping into the sea, and she was complaining, so we had to send her to the hospital, and we were even told that there was nothing wrong with her.

Throughout the years that Janet’s mother was not around, another family member eventually came to stay with the family. Instead of bringing stability to the situation, the relative’s presence made things more difficult for Janet and represented another barrier in her life.



During that time, I was the only one taking care of my siblings. [Then] she brought someone to stay with us, my cousin, to say. She was a lady. She was a little old at that time, and she also maltreated me very well. She would beat me with the standing broom, the stick, yes. That was what she would beat me with, so sometimes, I had to leave home, stay with a friend's family. In the night when my father comes back, is when I go home, so I stayed there, I eat there; I do everything there. In the night when my father comes back, and I hear, then I come back home.

While Janet felt a measure of physical security when her father was able to be in the home with her, he has been very emotionally distant with Janet and her siblings throughout her life. However, with those outside of the family, her dad was different, like the time she brought a friend to visit.

I saw the two of them; they had nice chat. They had nice chat; I was just sitting behind. I was just looking at them how he was chatting with my friend just like a daughter and a father should. He was having a nice chat; I was just there looking at him.

Further explicating her father's emotional detachment and the ensuing hurt towards her and her family members, Janet continued:

There was a time too, my brother got angry. My father is like he doesn't appreciate what we do, or he doesn't even commend us on doing some things. My brother is also in the university. He's in Legon, so there was a guy he attended the same school with, but then, the guy is now an architect. He's now an architect. My father called the guy and was telling him, "Wow, you did very well. You did very well excelling this high." But then, your son also excelled that high and even better than – he was commending the – while my brother was there looking, and he got angry. He was even working whilst he was in school, fending for himself that he should commend, but then, he didn't. He was rather commending someone else.

Janet sheds light on her limited understanding of her father's lack of emotional engagement.

I don't know why he's like that towards us, but then, I felt it was the – because I heard him telling someone that if you have – he had a friend and the friend's children could talk to him like, "Daddy ah, daddy, the other time..." they would chat and then he was telling his friend that a father is supposed to be like – a father is supposed to be feared by his children." You see his idea? I think that's what is making him do that, but I don't think there's any other hatred for us that he has to be treating us that way, but I just think maybe that's how he is.

Emotionally distant was also how George's father was, representing yet another obstacle in a complicated, young life. Even though they were on different continents, he too desired to share his feelings with his dad.

As in, "I feel bad today." "No, those whites will behave that way because that's where they carry those wants, but you're not going to play white kids on me." I was – anyway, I just shut up.

George, while at a boarding school in Togo had emotional needs and sought to meet them through his father who was located in France at that time; however, those needs were left clearly unmet.

But I never really had a chance and anytime – I tried doing that with my dad once, and he told me, "Hey, you listen to me. All those wants, emotional stuff-stuff, are for white kids and whites, so stop it." I should just leave it because when I start complaining that nobody checks on me, nobody even try to understand what I'm passing through. He'd say, "Come on, what the hell are you talking about? Those white children behave in this way, so you be normal."

As with George's inability to express his feelings to his father, Janet also struggled to convince her dad that her feelings and desires were valid. In addition to her mother being gone, having been replaced by an abusive relative, her father's indifference to her educational aspirations represented the ultimate hurdle to Janet's tertiary education, as he did not take her higher education seriously; this was at least in part because of her gender. Having a conversation with him about her educational ambitions – in addition to any other important issue she wanted to discuss – was also an exercise in futility.

During the one year I stayed in the house, from his actions, I would go and ask him, "Daddy the forms are out. " He would say why do I need to go to school? He said I should go and look for a job. He even once sent me to a relative who was a seamstress, that I should stay with her and learn how to sew, but then the grade I had was very good to be sitting in the house with. I said that I needed to improve on what I had acquired in my secondary school. He said it didn't matter because I would have to marry, and my husband will take care of me so it doesn't matter.

Although his daughter's higher education was inconsequential to Janet's father, apparently, that of her younger brother was not.

I was very good but then when I completed my secondary school my father had said he didn't have enough money to sponsor my younger brother and I, so I had to stay in the house for one year selling and saving some money. Immediately my brother completed school, my father had given me money to buy forms for him so that he could go on to the tertiary education while I was in the house.

After completing senior high school, Janet ultimately relied on herself to advance her education. She spent a year working hard selling vegetables while attempting to convince her father to financially support her university education.

My mom sells tomato, food items, pepper and those things, so I send them around the neighbourhood to sell. I had to do that for some time and I saved money. That was where I got some money and, while I was going to buy the form for my brother, I bought some forms too [for myself].

While collecting the forms that would advance her younger brother's education, Janet had taken it upon herself to buy forms for herself as well. It was not the first time she had to fend for herself to advance her education. She had also done so during her last year of secondary school as her father would not pay some required fees.

Because my father was ... the school was charging fees that – it wasn't for them to charge. During my second term in Form Four we paid fees for the third term but when we got to third term, we were billed fees again. Yeah, everybody. He said he wasn't going to pay that amount and if I don't pay the amount I'm not taking my certificate, so I had to pay after I was going back for my certificate. During the time I stayed in the house working, I had to use the money I saved to pay that fee.

The economic difficulty which each of these students faced came out in their stories, adding a layer of complexity to their ability to strive towards higher educational goals. They were often in survival mode, as Janet exemplified during the times when her stand-in family relative did not give her money for lunch at school, punishment for not having done her chores.

When it's break I would ride the bike home, open the shop and sell for sometime before I go back. When I close, I come back to sell so it is evening before I go home. Just one break, sometimes my time could even eat into the next lesson but then because I had to open the shop to get money to eat. I had to open it during that ... Normally it's not because I had to sell during the break, but because I had to get some money. Sometimes I'll just be waiting for one person to come and buy then I close the shop.

One exception to this theme was Kofi, who lived with a supportive mother and father. The hurdle to education that he faced is a learning impairment wherein he suffered severe headaches whenever he studied or read for long periods. He decided not to inform others of this condition, fearing that he would be treated unfairly.

Like they would give me preferential treatment and like discrimination this thing. You know, it's not anybody who is like you. Everybody can say, "Oh, my friend if you can't cope, go home."

It is unclear whether his father was one who believed that Kofi could not deal with the rigors of higher education because of his learning impairment. Kofi's father's education peaked at the middle school level.

But my father, his idea was make me to go and learn a trade, but my mother forced him to send me to school. After completing the JSS, then, he said, "Kofi, we should go and buy machine for you too, so that you go and learn how to sew."

Regardless of why his father had set an easier goal for Kofi, his father was overruled by Kofi's mother who insisted that their son would go further.

Then, my mother said, "No, Kofi can't do any work apart from school, so you should send him to school." So my mother took my certificate and go and seek the admission for me by then. Then I started gradually.

The participants in the study used a variety of tools to deal with the difficulties that prevailed in their lived experiences. The following section shows how they arranged their thoughts, feelings and actions in ways that served their needs.

#### **4.4.2 Tools for Success: Self-Parenting Techniques, Life Mapping, Diary Writing, Positive Self-Talk and Hard work**

Esi's mother was "present" in her life and yet Esi could not find solace in that relationship regarding a very basic necessity: shelter. George had never known his birth mother and considered his stepmother to be his parent but, when he was in need, she was not there for him. His father was both emotionally and physically distant from him. Jeremiah's father was always unknown to him, while his mother with her mental illness was a nonentity to him. Similarly, Janet's mother's psychological issues impacted her life in her mid- to late teens, leaving her with a father who was emotionally unavailable and a caretaker who was seemingly more harsh than caring. Each one dealt with their respective circumstances in the best way they could at the time, employing tools of self-reliance which served to pull them out of the morass of their lives, making choices that would propel them to their current place in life, pursuing tertiary education.

George stated:

I live alone here, but I put some limits to whatever I do. Because, I ask myself: "Assuming your dad was here, what do you think he would have asked you to do?" He'd say, "Go home now." So that is how it works. I don't have parents here, but I live under parental control by myself, as in, I know what I don't have to do, the people I have to mingle with, the people I don't have to mingle with.

Similarly, given her experiences of not having a helpful family, Esi, was alert and cautious.

My family members, they're not supportive. And because of their treatment, I was careful that I will not go and stamp on someone's foot because if you should go and get in trouble, no one will be there to support you, so I was careful in my dealing with other people.

When the positive inputs every young person desires were non-existent, George filled in those blanks too. When he started to feel downtrodden about the realities of his life, he would give himself a pep talk.

No matter what happened to me, I'd look in the mirror and I say "you've got potentials in you, George; so there's no way you should let people" – because I know sometimes people try to make me down.

In similar ways as George and Esi consciously made sure their behaviour put them on the right path to success, Jeremiah also encouraged himself. He took a further crucial step and, while working and saving every day, he planned for himself with the use of a life mapping strategy, complete with contingencies.

So I sit down, I sat down right now that I have to I pick a paper; then-time, I draw my life the way my life – the paper is still there at Kumasi. That time I finished SS, oh; that time I finish SS, yeah. The paper, oh, I put my life that, after SS the work I was doing, it's not my permanent work. It's not my permanent work. I'll gather money, this year I'll make sure 2011 that – I find that 2010, I bought a form at UCC 2010, but they didn't pick me. They didn't take me and then I forget that one.

With his life map as an instrument, Jeremiah demonstrated tenacity and resilience; he pressed forward with his educational goals.

Then 2011, I bought UEW [forms] and they picked me. Then-time I have made my mind, the paper was there. Sometime I'd pick the paper, "this year, I told myself „I'll buy a taxi" but I couldn't, but next year if the taxi price is reduced to this and what, then [with] my amount I have in my account can buy a – I'll go. If not I'll go to school, whether training [college] or university."

In the absence of emotionally connected and present parents, Janet wrote down the issues she experienced.

To discuss with them...sometimes how friends treated me in school. I just wanted to say something about that, but then I wasn't given the chance to. So I kept most things, like some emotional problems, sometimes I'd get depressed, I'd feel like I should talk about it, but then nobody was there to listen, so I would write them in a diary.

As narrated, in addition to there being no one to provide emotional support, there was often no one to give her money for lunch so that she could learn.



Therefore, in the absence of her parents, she would open the shop and hopefully get one the buyer so that she would be in a position to buy food for herself that day – and then bike back to school as quickly as possible.

Each of the participants was forced by virtue of their lived experiences to grow up faster than they otherwise would have if they did not have absent parents. Nonetheless, each devised ways to press forward in their educational goals, attempting to take care of their lives. Clearly while experiencing the absence of one or both parents, any young person faces financial difficulties; that was a prevalent obstacle throughout the participants' experiences.

With her parents' help, Ama had finally found ways to transport herself using crutches, braces and a three-wheeled chair. Her parents passed away as she was entering UEW – Winneba, so there have been times that she has felt the impact of their absence when an unforeseen need arises. However, she deals with disappointment through the use of positive self-talk and faith and is thereby able to keep her focus and educational goals on track.

Maybe I will need something, because my parents are not there to give me, or because I don't get something, then, I will feel bored. I just feel like, "Ah, if I [had] known, I won't come" but I say, "no, everything is by God," so I just forget.

In addition to parenting himself and employing positive self-talk, George also created a fantasy – derived from others' perception of him – that he was actually a person who is in a better financial situation than others and that he was well supported by family members outside of Ghana. He narrated an example of how he survived during financially difficult times.

"Sorry can you lend me two cedis to make a photocopy or something? When my Western Union comes in, I will pay back."

Kofi uses films and evangelism DVDs as tools to encourage himself to reach his educational goals.

Sometimes I do listen to the preachings and watching movies, some foreign movies, based on a disability, that kind of movies. Yeah, preaching and movies, like that pastor who don't have a leg and the hands.

The participants in the study used the negative lived experience as fuel in their difficult lives. There were negative role models in their lives, those whose destiny they wanted to avoid. Hence, proving naysayers wrong became another trend in response to the second research question.

#### **4.4.3 Negative Encouragement/Role Models and Proving Them Wrong**

Although each of them went about it in different ways, the study revealed that Yao, Esi, Janet, Jeremiah and George used hurdles, such as negative feedback and maltreatment to actually buoy their efforts to reach higher goals. In some cases, they addressed the hurdles in their lives vicariously.

Yao used his brothers' negative experiences in school as negative encouragement.

Okay, since I was a child, I was young, my father told me that he sent them to school, but because of truancy, so the school authority suspended them and one of my brothers attempted to have an assault with the headmaster, so they just sack him from the school.

Yao was the only person in his family living with the condition of albinism, but he learned from mistakes in education his brothers had made and was determined not to follow in their footsteps.

The difference is that since I was brought up I looked to the family background and just set my mind that we are a family of – let me say – no hope. If I sit in the village and just say I'm going to follow the same trends that my brothers led there, I'm going to be the same person. So living with my same condition, if I do that, people will just say even a black man is doing this and if the law caught you or if you are caught by the law, you are not going excel. I just said since my brothers [were] not able to attend



school or they was able and they was sacked from school, I'll not do such behaviours. And my father is not having financial muscle to cater for me if I do that. If they sack me, he will not allow me to go again. So I'll do things which they will not sack me.

Jeremiah also saw examples in others' lived experiences which he planned to avoid in his own. In response to a question regarding how he explains his success under the circumstances he has been living, he states:

Because of the problems I was facing, and I don't want to be those kind of vagabond boys. I want to work and then do something myself. I get more experience in life, in such a way that I know my right and then my left, my, bad side and I don't want to offend people, a lot of things, Madam.

As Esi related in the introductory portion of this chapter, she wanted to avoid living the life that her mother had. Although her mother worked hard hawking every day, she was unable to earn enough money to house and feed her children. Males who had tried to entice her into sexual relationships mocked her, implying that she was making the wrong choice.

Like, I said it wasn't easy. I quite remember those guys who have proposed to me and I refused over there, and my mother, I went to her. I told you that every two weeks during vacations I'll go and help her in water selling. They'll be making fun of me that, "Mother is selling pure water, the daughter is selling pure water."

Esi did not want this to be her future life as her suitors seemed to be predicting even while they teased her. As she cried out to God, she continued to study hard, aiming for a better life for herself than that which her mother had acquired; she would prove that they were in fact the ones who were mistaken.

Janet responded to her father's silence and indifference to her educational goals with a plan to prove him wrong. Before deciding to do that, however, she was in the throes of missing and needing her mom who had left the home seeking healing for mental illness. It was during this time that she was being maltreated by

the family member who came during the years her mother was away. Reflecting on what she believed at that point about herself, she was not yet conscious of the determination that she was developing.

For me, that time, I really didn't have that much belief or to become something. I just didn't even want to think so much of myself. Yeah, so during those times, I was just around. I don't know but then, that was how I felt. I didn't feel or hope for anything too much for from my reach.

Then, after performing very well through senior secondary school, and thinking about her future, her father, with his low expectations for her, sent on a trip her to buy university admission forms – for her younger brother.

At that time what I believed in was that, for me, anything that is presented to me as a challenge, I try to overcome it; and I like to do well with that. So when my father was telling me that I had to buy forms for my brother because he did a little better than I did, and he even wanted to sponsor him, I felt like just showing my father that I could even do better than my brother when I go to the university. So that time, it was what was ringing in my -- just to prove him wrong that I can't do anything better on my own, so that was what I had in mind. So when I came here, it was at that time that, that the thinking to prove to my father even started.

Despite being in effect orphaned, Jeremiah persevered. While he faced obstacles to education, owing to his marginalised status, he worked hard for several years and, along the way, he developed a belief in himself.

I was believing that I will make life, the way I was doing tro-tro, gather some money at the bank, what-and-what-and-what. I was having confidence in me that I will not sit down and be like the same what I am. I have to pray to God and then work hard so that at the end of the day, or the when I get to my age like old age, I will be doing something like getting something, let me say that. Because I was having confidence and belief in me that the way that I have struggled, and then still I'm struggling, I'll make life in future.

Jeremiah aligns himself with like-minded individuals.

Me, sometime I don't move with friends who are not ready to learn from others or who are not prepared for something. That's my most important thing that always I put in mind before coming here. That's why sometime I move with friends who are older than me. The guy I just came here with, he

is my best friend. He also completed last year and he is doing the National Service at Accra.

Language education student, George, also used the negative dynamics in his family situation as a driving force in his life. His uncle had looked him up and down in a judgmental way. He saw humour in how little his uncle in Togo and other family members believed about his abilities to thrive and by extension his abilities to contribute to society.

He's trying to make me feel inferior like I'm not good for nothing. He always used to tell me those stuff. I'm "good for nothing." I'm a "useless person." (laughing).

George continued:

They bet – he gave my dad just three months before he's called that I'm arrested. I'm at the police station, that I did something, something, something.

George took the negativity and used it as an impetus for a better life, which included his passion, singing.

I know there are people who are sitting places trying to laugh anytime I fall, and I'm not giving people the chance. Sometimes, when I sing, people think that this guy is too over-excited on stage, but what I sing is what I live, when I say "nobody will take that joy". I put them into songs. I put my feelings into songs, and when I sing, I could say just a word but that word is related to a thousand words. When I say (singing) Jesus gave to me, and nobody – (talking) and I won't do „nobody“... it means my family; it means my uncle.

People were betting against George, and he was making sure that he put himself in the best position to win. He stated, "They bet, they say this guy is going be a social deviant soon."

In the homestretch of tertiary education, majoring in Languages, George, like his fellow participants, was already winning. Even when two supportive parents are in the home, financial obstacles can still exist. For Kofi, who experienced a head injury at a young age and who wanted to buy application forms to advance his education, this was the case. His financial position threatened to dictate his future; firstly, he addressed the financial hurdles he has faced and then the physical ones.

I burn[ed] charcoal. I have the pictures over there. I burn[ed] charcoal before I get the money to buy my forms. I went to my dad, and I ask my dad that he should give me Gh¢100 to go and buy forms. He said he don't have it, and my mother too, he [sic] said he don't have it. Then I look around, and there's other alternative. There is wood, they've cut the wood and I said, "Ah, this one koraa, I can get money out of it. Then I start packing it, then I gather the boys to help me, so after packing it, then I went to seek a loan from a trader over there. Then I was hoping that if I burn that wood and get that charcoal, I can [be] able to pay my debt, so after getting that money, I use that money to come and buy the forms then after that, then, I burn[ed] the charcoal. Within one week, I pay [sic] my debt.

In addition to hard work, Kofi also utilised vicarious experiences to overcome the learning impairments he faced.

In furthering my education, when I got to Poly, things wasn't [sic] easy for me, but I managed it. I'm such a person like if I want to do anything I say, "Ah, this person has done it. I can do it. This person has done it; I can do it," so the time that I was in Poly, they do sack people.

To combat doubtful thoughts about his ability to succeed, Kofi pushed himself to study longer and harder. Then I told myself, "Hey, Kofi, you're from [a particular village]." "From village like this, then you are coming to Kumasi, Ashanti Region. You will let them to sack you, dear", then so I used to sleep in class 24/7. Then I do learn, I do learn. I do learn. With that koraa, my head(ache) too, it was coming. Then, as I'm speaking now, the drops will come like water, water from my head will come out like ... Some headache like having cold and the phlegms is coming,

congestion, yeah, it will come. Then, my eyes too will be a lot of water; yeah, [because of] my head injury.

In conclusion, the themes from the second research question dealt with participants' experiences in light of the absence of one or both parents, their perseverance in spite of this major hurdle, and their development and use of tools for success. In addition, along the way, because they were different, some people attempted to discourage the participants with negativity. Despite the harsh atmosphere of their lives, the participants utilised the adverse inputs of pessimism and disapproval as fuel for their success.

The third question follows and sought to uncover how the lived experiences of each of the study participants influenced their education.



#### **4.5 The Third Research Question and Themes**

##### **How do the lived experiences of these students from marginalised categories affect their education?**

The lived experiences of the participants affected their educational paths in various ways. Because they were different in various ways, the students faced challenges each step along the way. The third research question of this study sought to uncover the participants' everyday experiences and the meanings ascribed to them. The themes which emerged included: vulnerabilities, exclusion and divided attention. Also issues came to the fore regarding self-beliefs, action and the future and sense of belonging.

##### **4.5.1 Vulnerabilities, Exclusion and Divided Attention**

###### ***I Can't Concentrate on the Book***

This section details how the participants' education was affected by their lived experiences and opens with a continuation of the experiences of Janet, a fourth-year Mathematics student. Following Janet in this section are: Nana Adjoa, George and Jeremiah who illuminate the paths they have taken and the effects on their education.

Because of her gender, Janet was discouraged from going to the University. Discouragement and lack of support from her one available parent represented a source of vulnerability for Janet and her future. He advised her to work and then get married, although without higher education she would likely be remain dependent on someone else to take care of her.

Prior to tertiary education, others attempted to dissuade Janet from majoring in Mathematics. Even as she sought to prove that she had more potential than others thought, she had no fear of challenges, as she illustrated here.

It was that I liked things that would challenge me. I really like things...So for example, when I was going to the secondary school, I wanted to do elective Mathematics. That is further mathematics and I was told that, "No, you can't do it. Even guys are running from that course, no, you can't do it." I was like, "No, I'll try."

When we went to the school unfortunately for us, we were even put in the further Maths class. I did very well there and when I was coming here, I was thinking I would forget a lot of things so better let me go to the Mathematics field. There [sic] is where I was good in, so I wanted to go there. When I came, I opted for Maths.

Seemingly, Janet had allowed some of the discouragement at senior high school level to seep in, as she used the word "unfortunately" when speaking of how her school placed her in Mathematics. The perception was that women cannot survive in certain areas, namely mathematics; hence it has evolved into a subject in which men dominate. Janet's attitude and experience of being willing and able to face challenges encouraged her to make an effort despite the vulnerability she may have felt in the field of Mathematics.

Even with this can-do attitude, Janet was at risk, as her father had no intention of investing in his daughter's education. He chose to fund her younger brother's tertiary goals over hers because she was different; she was a female. After selling vegetables in order to buy her own admission forms and fund her first year, Janet very fortunately applied for and received a Gender Mainstreaming Scholarship at the University of Education. After successfully studying in Winneba for some time, Janet reflected on her initial thoughts about proving her father wrong in terms of her educational goals when she realised that he was taking her younger brother's educational aspirations more seriously than her own.



At that point? I don't know, maybe it was because I entered the University. You see, sometimes, when you have a higher level of education, you think differently from the way you used to think. So maybe I was just a child or I was just young, with my childish ideas trying to prove my father wrong, maybe I was thinking that line, that I could prove him wrong.

Once Janet began taking courses at the University of Education, an idea her father had rejected, there was a shift in her thinking and her focus.

But when I came here, going through some courses, I felt that there was so much to do than to prove to my father that he was wrong. So I can say it was education; it was the life of the tertiary education that had motivated me to think differently from the way I used to.

Janet had found the validation and support of her goals through a programme designed for aspiring youth such as herself.

Kofi was also vulnerable socially and academically. His physical impairment at times affected his ability to build relationships with his colleagues at UEW. Beyond that, his education was affected because he was here to study, yet if he worked very hard at it, it caused him health concerns. He explained:

I told myself “Kofi, eii, can you compete with this environment? Because getting three Es, you will be sack out of the university, and you too, if you study small, then your head is paining you. Can you cope with this environment?” So that one, it was threatening me, so I force myself and study, but I went to hospital too. Any time I force myself, I went to hospital..

Ama, a 29-year old Special Education physically impaired student, explained some of the ways her education is affected by her condition. The physical challenges of navigating building structures put her at disadvantages which were not faced by able-bodied peers. Each part of her journey was marked by lack of equal access and resulting significant dependency on others.

Then I have to go to the library and do some research and all that, it's not easy; Physical – usually the climb at the library is not easy. When you enter the books where they are located is not easy to pick unless you go with your friend. Sometimes the books, they're costly, they're expensive, to purchase. Sometimes they carry me or I'll sit on the floor to climb. Especially the boys [will help at times].



In terms of vulnerability in education, there was an added burden for physically impaired students. Ama continued with ways that her experiences affected her education and her life financially; some course mates who assisted her in going to the library or to classes wanted to be compensated. Also, some expected their transportation to be paid by Ama, while she was also paying to transport her wheel chair for segments of the challenging journey to and from lectures.

Because she's just helping you, backing you, carrying you up or pushing you something like that, because sometimes, I had to put my tricycle inside; I have to pay for my tricycle too, and pay for her, and pay for myself.

Grace, a 26-year old third-year Special Education student, lost her eyesight at a young age and discussed the challenges of getting the information she needed to learn. By virtue of her impairment, Grace was often excluded from one of the basic activities in tertiary education. She explained:

I used to get some, but it was not easy because there were information that I also lack, because they are not in braille for me to read. While others could go to library and get books to read to search for information, dictionaries, I cannot do that.

Grace also could not walk through campus independently, as there were barriers such as open gutters to navigate. She stated:

[As] "for the environment it's not easy, it's difficult because of the gutters and other dangerous obstacles. So I have to depend on the sighted colleagues to move about."

Just as she was excluded at certain points prior to tertiary education, Grace was also left out at UEW – Winneba with her current roommate who did all of the meal preparation and would not allow Grace to cook.

For that matter, I have to leave the cooking for her to do it, and after eating – this is what we call over – protection. After eating, she will not even allow me to wash the bowl; she will do it herself.

She went on to share how she felt as she would sit and listen to her radio. I feel...I don't feel comfortable, because when I was in the hall on campus, I cook[ed] and I do a lot of things. For me to sit down, for everything to be done for me, I'm not comfortable in that.

An observation of Grace was done in her two-room hostel in the late afternoon. Her roommate entered through the kitchen while the researcher and Grace interacted in her room. The roommate, Aisha, entered the room and after changing clothes, she apparently put rice on the stove to boil and then stepped out of the hostel to conduct her prayers – she and Grace are both Muslims – or to bathe.

Some construction workers outside the kitchen area of their home and the researcher heard one of them say, “Rice is burning!” However, having no knowledge that Aisha had started cooking and having no signs such as a scent coming into the bedroom where Grace sat, discussions about Grace’s life continued. Grace read information aloud from the braille notes she had acquired when a friend had read her parts of the book *Effective Education for Persons with Visual Impairments in Ghana*. She reported that sometimes she listened to recorded readings, but the recorder was no longer working.

Once it was known to the researcher and the participant that rice was in fact burning in the kitchen area in the next room, both quickly approached the two-top burner which was situated in the far corner near the floor. Speculating that the participant could burn herself on the fire, the researcher asserted, “Let me do it!” Without responding, Grace, with her knees bent and hand extended, continued inching toward the fire. The silence alerted the researcher of the issue Grace had already raised; she was uncomfortable with overprotection and being left out of activities for which she was well equipped. With this awareness and the

observation that the participant's hand was moving directly to the flames which were shooting from under the pot, the researcher stepped back and watched as Grace safely moved her hand down to the button which she used to turn off the stove. As she had said, she was cooking in her hostel before moving into this particular accommodation with Aisha, and she was very capable of taking the necessary steps in the cooking process.

Grace experienced a different kind of exclusion when it came to matters relating to academics at the tertiary level.

Classmates, yes. Most of them are not sociable to me, and in that, even when I need help from them, it's not easy for me to also approach them because they don't socialise themselves to me, so I find it difficult to also approach them.

George explicated how his physical differences put him in a position to be excluded in the University environment, and in the Ghanaian context.

Yeah, somebody who comes maybe from the northern part of here, there men are dark, got muscles, you could see hardship on them, not really pampered, but when they come over and see guys like me, they're like, "Oh, no, this guy is not really a guy because I see women in him."

Nana Adjoa had hearing and speech impairments, and just as with her home life where she felt isolated and excluded, her schooling experience at the senior high level was also negatively affected. Due to lack of resources, students who were hearing impaired could not enjoy the full curriculum. Through a sign language interpreter, she communicated about the problematic nature of learning some subjects in senior high school.

We found it difficult before to learn in the SS because of our Maths teacher and our English was finding it difficult to sign for us. They were finding difficulty because they were lacking the sign language skills.

At UEW – Winneba, there are interpreters, but the experience also left Nana

Nana Adjoa was unable to be fully a part of the classes she attended.

The lecturer always goes fast. He doesn't take much time, seeing to it that we're different from them, and we can't cope like how those who can hear can afford, so he's...Someone is signing for the class, but as time goes, the lecturer always speak fast, fast, fast. And we're not coping with it so much. She explained the effect on her comprehension level under these circumstances. Sometimes I understand; other times too I don't understand. For example, the lecturer would say something, and I will see the lecturer talking a lot, but the interpreter would only give us a small interpretation, and I don't get it. The lecturer would be talking, talking, but the interpreter would just leave out certain information and give me little information.

As to what she did in that situation, Nana Adjoa saw study groups with her hearing impaired colleagues as her only recourse.

I don't have anything to do, so I meet my other course mates who are also hearing impaired. Then we sit there and discuss to help ourselves; we discuss the lecture notes.

While in high school Nana Adjoa and her fellow students who were also hearing impaired could gather with hearing students and review notes, it was not something she was able to do with her course mates at UEW.

No, the hearing students, we don't meet them. When we go there and they realise we are deaf, they will separate, they will leave us so we don't meet them. They will always leave out the deaf people and the deaf will be sitting idle so we don't even join them at all because they don't want to call us. Any time they're having group study, they don't call us and when we go they also reject us so we the deaf people decide to have our own groups.

As for other tasks, the result was the same in terms of collaborating with their able-bodied peers.

Even for assignments when we don't understand and we ask them to help us they say "no" so we do our own thing...So when they're meeting, they don't call us and, when they see us coming, they just do something as if they've they finished and they leave their place. There are other hearing people who are always welcoming the deaf, but they too – we don't get to see them so, we the deaf people, we are always sitting on our own and doing our own discussion.

It meant that the hearing impaired students missed parts of the classroom discussion, as they were excluded from key interchanges. One clear case was when there was student-lecturer discourse, which researcher witnessed when

observing Nana Adjoa in a classroom setting. The sign language interpreter did not translate any part of the interactions that took place when a student raised a point in the course of the lecture. During the observation, it was noted that the sign language interpreter disengaged when the lecturer asked questions such as, “What are two differences between development and growth?” and “What does being mature mean?” A hearing student read what he had in his notes, after which time the lecturer responded to the reading, delineating the parts he agreed with, and interacting with the students with humour. There was laughter amongst the hearing students, while the hearing and speech impaired students did not interact with others or the lecturer.

When a hearing student posed a question based on something he read on maturity, the sign language interpreter rested, as though this too was not part of the learning process. The lecturer got other hearing students’ views and then gave a cohesive response to the inquiry. The observation corroborated Nana Adjoa’s experience.

Yes, yes, they do it. When our hearing friends are answering questions or interacting with lecturers, they raise their hands, the interpreter does not even interpret that to us. It's true they do that.

As to her thoughts on these occurrences, in which she and her counterparts are left out of the conversation, Nana Adjoa opined:

I think the interpreter should interpret every communication that goes on in the class to us, but this is the case, they don't do it.

The lecturer continued and there was a discussion on inter- and intra-variation in growth of different people and their body parts. While the hearing students saw humour in this and demonstrated that with laughter, the hearing impaired students quietly and solemnly sat. However, nearly a minute later, the

hearing and speech impaired students were making gestures near their chests and ears, which proved that they were getting the point, albeit without the element of humour.

Occasionally, there was collaboration with the Special Education colleagues who were able to hear and speak and were studying Sign Language, as Nana Adjoa communicated the following:

Yes, sometimes they help; other times they don't help. Sometimes when they come they will say, "Oh I'm sorry; I'm very busy, I can't help." It's only in few instances that they will help, but we also help them to learn the sign language. But in times of helping us with our assignments and others things, it's not often. Once a while they do it, sometimes they give excuses that they are busy.

While discussing the financial hardships of life, Nana Adjoa shed light on a different part of her experience, after which George followed up, explicating the ensuing effects of financial difficulty on his educational experience.

When my family members see me, they say I'm growing slim, I'm always slim but I don't care about that because sometimes there's no food.

George discussed how the lack of food has impacted his ability to learn and therefore his education.

There are times I have lectures, but I have not eaten. I got no money. I'm never focused in class so when it's like that, I could be in a class, a lecture that, I normally stay three hours, I could go just for 15 minutes, and I come out and look, "where am I going to get money to eat today? Who should I call?"

Yeah, and it has even affected my grade because all my lecturers know I could be a first-class student, but sometimes I don't really attend lectures, and I don't learn... so basically what I sit that 15 minute in a class, what I learn from that, is what I write my exam with.

Thus, his experience affected George's abilities to be a more focused student and to be included in the learning process along with his cohort. He lived in Pomadze, some six kilometres from the Language Department at the South campus of UEW – Winneba.

Yeah, but people they will say, “I don't have transportation so I could start walking a little bit, two hours before the time to get there.” And I will say, “It's not my jogging or it's not my exercising time, so I'm not walking. I don't have money so I'm not going.”

Just as George's attention was divided between academics and survival, so was Jeremiah's. As a result, while Jeremiah struggled to overcome financial obstacles and studied in the Social Sciences faculty, his dreams of tertiary education nearly ended prematurely. Without a parent to rely on, Jeremiah's worries about his mother's situation and its bearing on his life affected his academic work at UEW – Winneba.

Serious, sometimes I think that a young man like me, the way I'm facing problems like I'm paying all my school fees, paying my utility bills with no parents, what-and-what, I was so confused in mind, so sometimes, if I open book, I think a lot, so I can't concentrate. I can't concentrate on the book.

This lack of focus led Jeremiah to acquire an E in three courses during his first academic year.

Then they say I'm not performing well because I was not in school. Sometimes I go to Accra; sometimes I go to Kumasi to do some business before I get my electricity bill, water bill, utility what-and-what and then money for photocopy, and then a lot of things, so they say I'm not performing well. They want to sack me.

Out of desperation over the prospect of being expelled from the University, Jeremiah decided to share what Auntie Essunam had instructed him to keep to himself, that his mother was mentally ill, he had never had a father, and that he was struggling. He explained to his Head of Department the challenges he was confronting and how these circumstances contributed to the poor performance he displayed in his first year at UEW – Winneba. He reported:

I can't concentrate because of the problem my mother is facing and the way I don't know any of my father's side, I don't know anybody.



Luckily, by the time Jeremiah was being asked to leave the University, he had already advanced to his third year, without any additional failing grades. Regarding the issues he had been struggling with, his lecturer and HOD (Head of Department) was taken aback and concerned.

My Head of Department, Mr. Quainoo said, “Hey you guy, you’re very secretive; why? Why? Why have you been keeping this thing? How can you learn?” That’s why he hold my hands and then – [brought me to the Counselling Centre] – straight away. He said why have I been keeping all these things in my head? These kind[s] of secrets in my life, like in my heart. How can I learn? How can I concentrate, what-and-what. He will send me to counsellors, that is why he brought me [here].

Although he did not respond to his Head of Department at that time, he was attempting to protect himself from judgment and shame.

To me, I keep all these things because I don’t want people to know my this-thing, my problems. If people get to know it, they will point fingers when you’re going, “oh, this guy this-this”; me, I don’t like that. That’s why I’ve been keeping it.

Jeremiah had issues that were affecting his progress through his tertiary education, but he feared being different in a way that he would be singled out.

In addition to being a student with physical challenges, Ama was a mother of twin babies, whom she nursed through the night. Therefore, her attention is divided several-fold. She illuminated:

When I have to go for lectures, that I have to send them. But I think sometimes, I find it difficult because when I’m to go for lectures, they’ll be crying, crying, crying.

The researcher observed Ama in a class; she was able to leave her babies at home with a relative who helped her, but she was tired from a night of breastfeeding. One child was a male and one was a female, and it was the boy who kept her awake more. Ama was behind schedule, having overslept, so the researcher waited for Ama to cook for herself, her children and her cousin. She



exclaimed: “We didn’t wake up early; they were eating all night, especially the boy!”

She nursed her daughter while looking for sugar, bread and powdered milk. While having her breakfast, Ama then nursed her son. Her cousin helped her by holding one of the babies and by handing her the following: a wet wash cloth for her face, a mirror, comb, deodorant, her blue scarf, her callipers (leg braces), shoes, crutches, a big colourful bag. With the use of crutches, Ama struggled down a short dirt road towards the main road, even as her left calliper strap dangled. When she made it to class by taxi, she took the seat closest to the door as one of her course mates presented vocabulary in her Sign Language class. She looked on with fatigue for the first few minutes of class, not writing notes and not practicing interpreting.

Using her leg braces, as her wheelchair was in disrepair, Ama struggled from her classroom at UEW’s South campus, up the hill to look for transportation. A classmate who had accompanied her called out to a taxi driver. As she boarded a taxi, the classmate handed the researcher Ama’s handbag. Ama sat down and manually placed her lower legs in the car. By the time she returned to her hostel, struggled up the two stairs into her single-room home, she looked exhausted and she stated as much with a subdued: “I’m tired,” as her babies looked forward to nursing.

The notion of divided attention permeated the experiences of the participants of this study. Through multi-levels of vulnerability, whether financial or social. Being left out of academic activities, often because of divided attention was one of the ways vulnerabilities manifested themselves.

#### 4.5.2 Self-belief, Action and the Future

##### *It Will Not Disturb My Integrity*

While the maltreatment Janet experience had great potential to affect her education in a negative way, she continued going to school, even when her abusive, older cousin punished her by withholding financial support. While discussing how such challenges affected her education, she noted no conscious effects, yet she persevered. She was apparently too busy surviving and getting her education to worry about any effects on it.

I don't know how it would, maybe it affected me and I didn't know, but then, the way she treated me, sometimes, I don't know, but then, I just took it that way. Sometimes, she wouldn't give me money to school because I didn't wake up early to wash or clean the utensils, so she wouldn't give me money to school, but then, I would go to school and come back.

Without her mother in the home, Janet would leave school by bike and open her mother's kiosk, just long enough to get one patron and earn enough to have money to cover the cost of lunch. She had had to grow up faster than her peers in order to take care of herself, and remembered no specific beliefs during that time which would have led her to set lofty goals.

For me, that time, I really didn't have that much belief or to become something. I just didn't even want to think so much of myself. Yeah, so during those times, I was just around. I don't know but then, that was how I felt. I didn't feel or hope for anything too much for from my reach.

However, as Janet was finishing her teenage years in the care of her emotionally distant father and a discordant relative – while taking necessary actions to enable her to do well in advanced high school Mathematics, she began dreaming of her future.

Then, I started having real goals for myself, that I would like to become an educationist, someone who would train younger ones and who would even train adults to train people, so I had that goal.

Like Janet, Esi did not see any effects on her education, even though she moved around and lived with people other than her parents from an early age. She had big goals in mind in spite of her circumstances. Because she had already decided that she had to create a strong future for herself, she was able to see the effects of her experiences on her education as negligible.

It didn't affect me much because I said to myself that no matter what I have to make it because if my mother could not make it in life, I have to make a difference in the family so I didn't make it affect me.

Esi did not allow the instability in her life to affect her educational goals. As to her belief in her educational goals and her ability to succeed at them, Esi looked at her situation and deduced that it was not conducive to success. She said:

That one, when I consider the situation that I am in, I made that move because I realised that if I stay in my family house or with my grandmother, I can't make it because the condition there would not favour me.

As Esi scrubbed various family members' homes, she had made a decision that she would not complain or rebel; instead, she dreamed bigger dreams for herself than what others had in mind for her.

No, it got to a time they stopped. My sister stopped catering for me because I want to – and the husband was saying that she should take me so that I go and learn a trade like hairdressing and all those things, and I said, "That's not what I'm interested in, so she shouldn't change my destiny for me." And she will be pressing me, after I've completed, she will open a container for me as you've seen around. I said, "I won't do that."

It was not a shop that Esi had set her sights on; it was a stand.

Because I want to get a stand somewhere in terms of my educational background in society so that I can achieve my aim because I've been through a lot, and I know there are other people out there who are going through similar things as I have experienced way back.

Although they were offering her opportunities for skill training, Esi wanted to elevate her education level; so she left the difficult living situation with her

sister and brother-in-law only to be placed in another one. She explained her decision to insist on advancing her education.

Like to further my education to achieve my goal because after BECE our basic level, you can't take that certificate, even SHS, as of now, you can't take it anywhere.

Buoying Esi's dreams and her belief in herself were the results received after completing high school.

Yes, I had that belief because when I consider my performance in school, by God's grace, I was somehow good. I was good, with the exception of my mathematical background; as for Mathematics, I was not good, so I realised that I can make it if only I'm able to stand firm irrespective of the circumstances I have found myself in.

Esi was willing to go through anything to reach her educational goals. She only wanted to be able to withstand all the difficulties she had to live through in order to achieve them.

My hope was like to be able to endure the suffering that I was going through so that, with the help of God, I would become someone great in the future to help the less privileged in our society.

Ama explained why she thought she had achieved as much as she had – despite having physical challenges which required her to use leg braces, crutches and at times a hand-operated tricycle wheel chair – while at the same time caring for twin infants.

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Ama explained why she thought she had achieved as much as she had – despite having physical challenges which required her to use leg braces, crutches and at times a hand-operated tricycle wheel chair – while at the same time caring for twin infants. She stated, “I have the desire and I think I can pursue an education with kids.”

Jeremiah worked hard daily, set goals for himself, and was encouraged by his own success.

Yeah, he was driving the tro-tro, and I was the tro-tro conductor, that’s car mate. I was doing the work, and then, every single blessed day, I have to save GH¢15 a day, because it was in my mind that I have to continue education because my SSS certificate was very good.

In the absence of parents, Jeremiah’s associates urged him to advance his education.

I was performing well and then my friends, they look at my certificate they say, “Jeremiah” I say, “Charlie?” “... continue school because you did well at SSS, and you have to go to university or poly.” So it was in mind that every day, I have to save ¢15, and I did that three, four years, three, four years before getting to the university 2011. I bought the forms myself, and I paid my admission fee for 2011/12 academic year. I paid it myself.

George believed in a bright future for himself, based on his perceived skills, his lived experiences and by extension, his ability to soldier on in spite of them.

I know I’m going to make it big time. Not even per se about music. As I said, I travelled and I’ve learned so much about experiences and I think my human ability in communication. Sometimes I say I can make people – I can talk to people, convince about an idea that I’ve got. I think I have that communication skill. I also speak other languages and I believe with all I have passed through since my childhood up to now...if I want to start a business, I think I can make it because I have endured a lot of stuff.

George continued with contingency planning and possibly hedging his own bets, which represented some of the agentic actions he took to be successful.

Yeah. I said something, when stuff goes worse and I have nothing to do, at least I have a profession, I'm a teacher. I don't want to be a teacher, no but now, I can say that I'm not going remain where I am in the future; no matter what happens, I have a profession, that I'm a teacher.

Kofi has used films and religious DVDs as tools in his success. He has been inspired by the preaching and triumphant stories.

I said, "Eii, this person is forceful then I can do this; if this one is doing this, then I can do it."

After completing his programme at Kumasi Poly, Kofi earned money in order to apply to UEW – Winneba for admission; his application, however was originally rejected. He took agentic action and sought to learn why his application had not been accepted.

I didn't know how to fill it, so I did marketing at poly. Then I came and did social studies when I was filling the forms, so I did not get my admission letter. Then I came to the Registrar, and the Registrar told me that, "Let me see your application form." Then he saw it and he said that, "Ah, it's you who did it because business course does not match with educational course, so you have two options whether you'll do human resource or accounting." Then I said, "I will go by your human resource." Then they gave it to me.

Explicating his decision to seek audience with the UEW Registrar regarding his rejected application, Kofi revealed aspects of his belief about himself.

Nobody can be like the way am I and the time that I was coming here, and I told myself, "If I go and they insulted me, I will take it like that because the principal there or the persons over there, whether they will be my mother or my siblings or my brothers, and they will be my siblings or my father. If they insult me, I'll take it that way."

Kofi continued, citing the possibility of God influence on his personality and his ability to take any criticisms or rejection which may be involved in the process of advancing his educational ambitions.

Me, I'm a man of...I don't know...God have putting that kind of, "You go, if they insult you." Me, I have that kind...if they insult you, maybe it will be your mother, or it be your father or it be your siblings, so I've accepted the way am, I that's my principle.

Kofi shared the rejection of one of his fellow students and how his belief in himself contributed to his ability to thrive in spite of ill-treatment.

There was one Ewe guy who always look down upon me, but I did not give that a damn because as I've said, I know who am I, and I trusted myself, so that I can do it.

Yeah, this guy always when you go to class, at first I ask question, he said, "Oh, put your hands down let's move on." and I said, "Ah, my friend I don't like it." This guy any time that they give us an assignment, and I was in their group, they say that, "You are in our group; who put you over there? Who placed you in our group?"

Kofi further explicated that others' negative views of him were like the air; they were invisible.

At first, I believe that, "Oh, if you have insulted me, even though you cannot be the way am I, so I love myself everything that you, you have insulted me, it's like insulting is like an air, just "Kofi, you are foolish." It will not be my integrity; it will not disturb my integrity. I will go on with my life, and whatever will be; I'll go on. I will carry on with my life.

His positive view of himself also seemingly bolstered his ability to take risks in order to succeed in education.

Jeremiah did not share his plight with anyone until he was forced to do so when he was confronted with expulsion from the University of Education – Winneba. He feared that if people knew his situation, they would point fingers at him and talk badly about him. Being exposed in such a way would have likely added further to the anguish he was already experiencing, struggling to survive own his own because mother's mental state prevented her from knowing him, and his This sentiment translated into the impact that differences and the perceptions of those differences have on one's sense of belonging.



Just as Jeremiah had feared his differences would affect the way he was treated and perceived, Kwesi constantly fretted about the way his standing could have changed if people learned of his HIV-positive status. Similarly, George lived with the secret that his family had abandoned him and that he was truly often in need of some of the basics of life. Esi, as well as the other participants lived with shunning or the fear thereof. These fears and anxieties are elements which affect a person's sense of self worth and belonging.

#### **4.5.3 Sense of Belonging**

##### ***I don't belong to nowhere... sense of belonging becomes a bit problematic***

George, who was born in Ghana but was taken from the country shortly after his birth stated that people's perceptions of him – along with the rejection of his family – affected his sense of belonging.

Sure, I even boast of that because still in my documents I still bear in mind, oh, I have one parent that's Ghanaian. So I'm here as a citizen, but still they don't really see me as one of them because my ways are a bit different.

George returned to Ghana to advance his education, which he had been successful in doing; however, the emotional satisfaction of connecting with one's roots, which could have come with returning to his birthplace, eluded him.

I don't belong to nowhere. Yeah. I don't belong even here. When I need just a pesewa to do something, I got nobody; I struggle for it. I don't belong to nowhere. I become so emotional; that's the reason why sometimes I don't want to talk about it. I don't belong to nowhere. As I say, if I am crossing the street, and a car knocks me down, you might not find a number you can call to say, "Where is his parent?" Do you understand that? Based on that, I don't see where I belong to. I belong to myself. Based on that, I know how to do my moves.

He explicated the difficulty of experiencing a strong sense of belonging in any place he had lived.



The first – it’s a bit like, I don’t know, I feel bad thinking of that because no matter what I do to belong, I still feel that I don’t belong. And that’s not only here; it’s all over the world. When I go to America or when I go to France with white people, no matter how I speak like them, no matter how you do stuff like them, they still see you to be black. Here I’m just a bit astonished when kids call me “obroni”, “obroni”, “obroni” means “white”, it’s kind of, yeah. And then when in America they say, “it’s a black” or maybe in France they say it’s “blac”, I feel like, so where exactly am I from? So the sense of belonging becomes a bit problematic here because you don’t really know where exactly you belong to. Because where you’re supposed to belong to think that you don’t belong there, and then the Africans also sometimes feel “hey, come on, you’re not part of us because you’re different, so it becomes a bit of a headache.

George felt discriminated against when people call him “obroni” because, although he had had limited contact with his mother, he did have Ghanaian blood. People do not see him as part of Ghanaian society and the whole conundrum left him with negative emotions.

Yeah and I feel bad, I really feel bad because any time they they call me like that, I just shout out “I’m not white, because I’m black like you guys.” Where is the white? Okay, maybe I’m a little bit fair coloured than you guys are, but come on, they have people a lot more fair than I am here. As a point, why are you calling me that way. Even that one makes me really not feel like I belong.

They still when, once I had that conversation they’re like, I’m maybe trying to play modest or trying to play okay, I don’t really want to – because for them it’s a title that people love to have, being called “obroni” because they only have a mentality that whites have the best, they know what’s up, they know everything. So when you’re black and you’re called like that you should be happy, but for me I think they are trying to discriminate you. That’s a way of discriminating. The same with whites who call, like, blacks as a Negro. And the same way they say here “obroni.”

Regarding her sense of belonging, Esi stated:

At times I will feel rejected, or neglected but upon all, no, I had a mind that God is there for me.

Jeremiah used a sheet of paper on which he mapped out his life plans. This life map was a tool he used to advance his education. He also employed humour

in connecting with others, which he felt had a direct affect on his sense of belonging.

The way I get to know more people I'm very friendly guy and then, I was selling goods. If you are a businessman or a trader or whatever, you have to be friendly with people so that people will buy your things. It's not because the problem I was in that's why I started sharing, no; I was businessman. Let me say that I was selling goods. And then, sometimes, Kumasi I'm in a tro-tro, when you are in my car, I can make funny things so that people will laugh. "You guy you are very funny where do you stay and what-and-what?" So I get to know more people in that because now I want to refresh my mind from those kind of things I was thinking about my mother and then my father's side. That's where my belonging started. Let me say that.

Janet cited her strength as a factor in her success. Also the fact that community members respect her, demonstrating a belief in her, comes into play.

I think what I went through rather makes me strong to withstand all this. It rather made me strong because in my area there are a lot of them. Some were very poor, they would finish secondary school and they would be pregnant and give birth, very young age.

Janet described the how community members perceive her.

Then in my area people look up to me. Sometimes even though I've not even yet completed school, anytime they want something about education they come to me. They come to ask me that, "So what should I..." They ask me of my view. It seems I'm becoming of more benefit to them. There are a lot of people who have been through my situation but then didn't make, it but I'm making it.

Kofi had a strong sense of belonging in his family and his community, as they had a lot of pride in his accomplishments.

My sense of belonging, they do love me because some people too take me as proud. Like they cherish me, my sense of belonging, some took me, they cherish me. Yes, said that, "Oh, this is my nephew. This is my this. This is my this. He's here ..." Yeah, "He's here. He's here. He's here." Like my niece and my friends, they used to cherish me because I was able to further my education. Because those who are having two legs, and four [limbs] all their this thing is physical koraa, they can't make it, but me, I'm able to make it; they feel proud of me.

Kofi backed up his claim of a strong sense of belonging in his hometown area with the fact that he was voted into public office.

Yeah, community, as currently, now I'm speaking now, I'm a[n] area council chairman. [City] and I'm a Unit Committee Chairman too, unit committee chairman.

Kofi explained his position and the strong backing of the supporters in his area.

We have our council of members from assembly, then, you come to assemblyman, then, those who help the assemblyman to take care of the community. We have five committees, so I'm the head when they voted. They voted, oh. They vote on us, so they voted me [in]; then, I was the first among them, so they made me chairman.

A second vote took place.

After the chairman too, then, we have to go to add three constituencies. Then we have to go and do another election; then there too, I came first.

Ama also expressed pride in her accomplishments.

I feel happy, and I feel proud of myself because I know some people, and they don't have any disability, but maybe, they're not able to make it up to this level, so I always feel happy, but sometimes, when I sit down maybe, I feel bored sometimes but not always.

While Kofi enjoyed a strong sense of belonging in his hometown, his experience was different outside of that community. He had described how people believe that his physical impairment and resulting gait have been caused by some misdeeds in his familial lineage.

Next, he described an experience he had while he was in junior high school and was attempting to participate in sports and marching exercises alongside his peers.

JHS too, they're still doing the discrimination because during the 6th March and everything, I try my best to march with them because I don't know, me, I thought that, me too, I can march; I can do football everything with them, but during the practice, they'll make me to do a little practice and they will say that, "Kofi, come out," but I feel this thing...I feel sad. After coming out, I feel sad. I say, "Eii, so am I not a human being or what?" then, I start saying something to myself.

In his second year in high school, Kofi had to use crutches following a surgical procedure for a dislocated hip.

I feel shy because all the eyes are on me. They're looking at me. Then they're feeling, some people are feeling pity too. Just a look and some

people will talk too. Some will say, “Oh, nice guy then you are feeling like this and this,” then it got me sad, so sometimes, I do not come out, but my friend will force me and come out with me.

Janet related stories of going to a basic school with rich kids who would not play with her. Later, in senior high school where she was a stern prefect, some of her class mates stumbled upon her humble homestead, which was far from the school and where she was selling vegetables. Thereafter, she experienced mocking at school and though she remained in the position of prefect, she was muted by the experience and by the fear that the maltreatment would further escalate.

Yeah, on the notice board telling people I was living in a kiosk so I really felt down. Even I stopped acting as a house prefect because I needed to act some authority on them but because of what happened I just stopped.

The incident marked the remainder of her time at SHS level, and she felt that she was side-lined without the ability to react in any way. She illuminated:

Punishing them would have spread the matter. My duties was to see to it that they sweep their plot before they leave to school, but then because of what happened I was the house prefect but I wasn't checking on them. I wouldn't go and tell you, “Please, you've not swept your plot” for you to come and insult me. I would always be in my room.

At UEW – Winneba where she had been supported by the Gender Mainstreaming Scholarship Scheme, she no longer had the feeling of inferiority.

I'm okay here. I didn't feel inferior as compared to my basic school. I never felt that because if I'm far...So sometimes I like to be schooled where I'm far away from home.

Although she was far from her hometown, the story about her selling vegetables followed her Janet to Winneba.

I remember there was one time same lady on the scholarship scheme when we went for interview to be selected as a eligible candidate for the scholarship I don't know how she got to know...Where she heard I hawked tomato and those things. She used to tease me on campus. There was one time a lecturer was advising that we do business, and she was like, “Yes like Janet who sells tomato” in the lecture hall.

She had a better way of dealing with the meanness.

I had to make fun of it and say, “Yeah, even though I sell, it gives me money.” So I had to make fun of it just to brush it out.

While Janet’s difficulties and feelings of not belonging were things of the past and she was able to find her place, Kwesi’s remained quite tenuous. He did have a place where he could advocate on behalf of himself and others with the HIV virus. He belonged to a group and got some satisfaction out of it, but he and his colleagues had more of a “don’t ask/don’t tell” policy about it.

Sometimes when I go for such Ghana AIDS Commission programmes, I leave the handouts and then files and things in my room, and so sometimes, normally, these are just lying there and then, they see. Some other colleagues, he happen to belongs to one of the clubs, HIV clubs on campus, so he asked me, why do I always go to Accra? I say, “Well, I belong to...” He was like – I was trying to tell him that, “Oh, I used to go attend programmes for Ghana AIDS Commission. I am part of their strategic plan; we are developing some documents,” but they didn’t know what made me to have that opportunity to be part of Ghana AIDS Commission strategic plan or those sort of thing, yeah.

Kwesi did not tell fellow students about his status, and they did not inquire about why this work was important to him. On one hand he enjoyed a sense of belonging but, on the other, it was a tenuous sense of belonging because he was not able to share his whole self, in terms of his worries and passions, with his colleagues. Once when a fellow student visited Kwesi in his room, the friend deliberately grabbed Kwesi’s anti-viral medication.

Yeah, but to my amaze [sic], it’s like I always keep it in my bag, but I don't know, he was being too curious, and then, whether he has set his eyes on it before once he has come to me before, so because he didn’t see it around the table or where it was visible, then, he just stretched his hand into the bag then unfortunately, he laid his hand on it and then brought it out.

This incident only served to further unsettle Kwesi’s sense of understanding about himself in relation to what his friends perceived about him.

Yes, we’re all close friends. Later when he asked about my therapy, whether I was taking my treatment. So I was like, "Is it that the other friend had

succeeded in telling him that he should try to – diplomatic-like try to find out from me what sort of treatment I've been taking?" Because I told him I was on that therapy, it was as food supplement. So when he took it, from the look of his face, it was like, he was looking so suspicious about the tablet he picked. And, yes, he was looking at it curiously trying to find out what therapy it was, but he was unable to find out.

Kwesi was shocked that the friend was examining his medication so closely and searched for an appropriate response, one that would allow him to maintain his place in the community which he belonged. He described the event:

I also kept quiet because I was then thinking about what to tell him if he questions me about what he was holding, and I said, "Oh, it was a food supplement to boost the immune system and then just to make you feel very good." And then he look [sic] at it, examine [sic] it and then the inscriptions on it was so small that he could hardly read it. Fortunately, there was nothing inscription on it that should show that this is for HIV positive persons, and that was what saved me.

Kwesi told another story about an exchange with a different friend which took place after he had been sick.

So when he comes to me, he looks at me closely. For some time I was ill; I had some malaria, so he asked me whether I have taken my treatment. I was amazed. I was like, "What kind of treatment?" I ask myself. And he said, "Oh, my medicine." And so I was, "Medicine, what medicine?" You see that, I was questioning him to see whether he has heard of something and has some idea that I was on a therapy. Then he said, "No, my malaria treatment that I was taking." I said, "Yes, yes, I have taken it."

Kwesi expounded further on the anguish which ordinary conversations sometimes caused him and how interactions with friends evoked questions which were unasked, which he believed would affect his sense of belonging.

So, I came back to conscious[ness], and I was, like, then, he didn't know about anything. But initially when he was saying, "Have I taken my treatment?" then I was asking, "What treatment was he talking about?" So I was like, "Ah! Did he know something about it?" Then he said, "Well, no, it's about my malaria treatment." So, I said "yes, I have taken it," because he knew then treating malaria.

So, he was asking in relation to the malaria but not the HIV. But, I was like, "Is it about the HIV he was asking me whether I have taken my treatment?" I was questioning myself, but at the end of the day it wasn't about it. Yet [it] still it



puts me in the suspense, "Is it that he has heard of something that was an alternative therapy that he didn't want to go straight to the point?" or was he like – so this is some of the thing that has been haunting me.

Because he had witnessed HIV positive persons becoming weaker, the fear that community members would ostracise him was ever-present.

How they affect me is that, I begin to ask myself, "Is it that, my health is deteriorating? I'm getting deteriorating day by day? That I was going to become bedridden?" Because I have seen those days before the ART started coming.

Before the A-R-T, Antiretroviral therapeutics, started coming, people get deteriorated, who get bedridden, who become so skeletal. Honestly, that has been my prayer, that I shouldn't go to that extent. Even if God should take my life, I shouldn't become so...you become so worried, people begin to say – society begin to talk, "He's suffering from HIV." When people see you, it's like, "He's suffering from..."

One particular peer experienced such scrutiny.

Even you're walking, when you begin to walk. There was a friend, one student who was doing his sandwich in the Zongo those time, when he also pass away. It's like he was deteriorated to the extent that even as he walks and pass, people begin to make comment, because all his features were showing, he was becoming weak; and it was manifesting that he was living with HIV. That is something that is worrying. Anytime, you pass by people, you begin to see that, no, people are talking about you. People begin to say that "this guy is, ooh – ." That is something that [would] happen. I worry –

The act of visiting the researcher at the UEW – Winneba Counselling Centre also added to Kwesi's constant uncertainty about his status with his friends, one of whom called during an interview. He expounded on the queries that lingered with him:

Even as I was walking to the office, I was cautious. I was like, "Was the environment conducive?" "Was any of my mates somewhere?" [sic] Everybody knows this place is a counselling centre. So you walk in here, already you yourself, you getting worried that showing features of skeletal, and maybe people who are conscious are asking themselves questions, "Is it TB? Is it tuberculosis? Is it HIV?" So it's like seeing you walk into the Counselling Centre too, will that confirm their suspicion? When this friend just called, I was like, "Was he around? Did he see me walking in here, and that is why he was trying to call?" (laughs). So all these [issues] I am always cautious about.



The UEW Counselling Centre addresses all issues, not only HIV/AIDS. The University's HIV/AIDS unit was located next door to the Counselling Centre. The researcher shared that clarification with Kwesi to allay his fears about his presence in the UEW Counselling Centre and how that could have come to bear on his relationships around campus.

The third research question uncovered ways education was affected for students in marginalised categories at UEW – Winneba. The vulnerabilities which persisted through their life circumstances to their points of entry extended to their university experiences. These vulnerabilities encroached on their respective efforts to complete their tertiary education. Inabilities to focus well and to be included in the full experience of tertiary education highlighted self-beliefs, agentic action, and participants' senses of belonging.

The next section explores the qualities which contributed to the success of the study participants, University of Education – Winneba students who were in marginalised groups but transformed their lived experiences into educational success.

#### **4.6 The Fourth Research Question and Emerging Themes**

##### **IV. Which qualities do these students from marginalised categories possess?**

###### **Sub-question: What supports did they receive?**

The fourth question in this study sought to uncover the qualities of UEW students who represented marginalised categories. The themes for this question centred on the participants putting negativity in its place and pushing past it with agentic action, in spite of their differences from the mainstream. They discussed and demonstrated courage; resilient and forgiving natures; and problem solving skills, and faith. In addition, the participants identified role models to emulate.

Lastly, as a sub-question, the study sought to uncover the forms of support the participants received in their pursuit of education. Participants demonstrated resourcefulness in the process of reaching their educational goals. The modes of support varied from the kindness of teachers to the kindness of strangers.

#### **4.6.1 Courage**

##### ***Anywhere that they will go, I will be within***

Yao, who felt he was from a place of “no hope”, decided to attend University of Education – Winneba. With the condition of albinism, much attention was drawn to him, which made it a daring act for him to move from one class to another.

It seems like walking on campus is not easy at all because when you just appear on people, people will just set their eyes on you, since you are unique among them. Always when we are walking it seems important for you to have courage because, if you are not courageous, you cannot walk on campus here.

Yao made a distinction between his interactions with those outside his department at the University of Education – Winneba and those inside his department.

Okay, UEW campus is – students, it seems like who normally you work with, maybe your department student, they are friendly, but some other department whom you are [sic] not find yourself with, they see you like even not talking to you. But when you are in the same department, a colleague and you just meet him, you greet him or the colleague will just greet you and ask you, “how is it?” and you will respond. But the other colleague you met on the road whom you are not in the same department with, he will not even greet you. He just pass by and go away.

By way of example, from the time he entered the University, Yao encountered people who were surprised by his appearance and his presence.

Yeah, when I was in the level 100. First year, first semester I came here on Tuesday. That was, I think, 8th or 9th September. That's the date I came here and since I was not here before, people start to look, "Hey, these people coming here – " “Are you, oh – “then the school is growing up, because they would ask, "Are these people coming to this school?"

One of the qualities Yao seemed to display was the ability to ignore negative words and actions, refusing to allow them to affect his path.

Oh, people say it, but I just make a notion that they are ignorant on what they are saying because they are not educated to the people of albinism. I just ignore them and proceed. Since the question is not directed to me, I cannot answer what the person is saying, so I just proceed. I said, "Ah, these people, paa, why are they ignorant about these albinos?"

Yao took a cue from his father, his only parent, on how to deal with others highlighting and speaking ignorantly of Yao's albinism.

He's good. Since he's Christian, he doesn't comment on those questions people ask on [sic] him. "Why is that your only child, your last born is albino; why, why? Is there anything that happened to you at the birth or why is it that you were born with this child?" He just keep [sic] mouth on what people say about me. He didn't really do any answering of that question. He give[s] me words of motivation like I should not mind what people say on the hurts. I should just focus on what I want to do. I should not mind people.

Yao spoke on the fear that people exhibit when they see a person with albinism.

I think that since you are albino, they don't even want to see your face. Some people think that they are afraid of we albinos. You coming to them they feel some kind of – They become afraid when you step into their office because some have not seen some albino in relation to people before. Immediately they see you they say, "Oh, go-go-go-go, who sent you to my office, go and come back. I'll call you."

Although he received positive treatment in his department at the University of Education – Winneba, he once wandered into an administrative office and was not well received.

It do happen in, most at times, it do happen when I went...Last year I was searching for an office, and I incidentally went to one of the office. UEW here at the side here. They say, "Go-go-go-go! Why do [are] you knocking here?" I was saying, "Oh, I was located to come to a certain office here, but I didn't know the office number." They say, "Oh, haven't they written the office, the head?" I said, "No, I didn't check on it." "Go and ask the receptionist; they will direct you."

Yao explicated the contrasting tones and language between how he was treated while in search of information at his University and how he believed he would have been treated if he did not have albinism.

Because stigmatisation – because if I went there with a black man, they will not even sack me, they will just – Or if I was to be a black man, they would not even insult me, they would just look at face, "Oh, please what do you want?" "Oh, I want this..." "Oh, not this office, but you can go to the other office and check," but he start, "Oh, what do you want?" Say, "Oh – no, no, no, no, no, haven't you seen that they had just written there office ,, on the top of the door? Go and ask the receptionist and he will then direct you. Go, go!"

Like Yao, George's appearance, being different from others, caused some to react. His uncle's skeptical look as he gazed pointedly at George, from his feet to the crown of his head is an example. In this treatment, there was perceived judgment, as the onlooker was seemingly deciding whether to approve of the individual's existence, presence and, in George's case, his worth.

I say, "How are you?" He say, "I'm fine." He looked at me this way and he moved? He's trying to make me feel inferior like I'm not good for nothing. He always used to tell me those stuff. Yeah, I'm "good for nothing." I'm a "useless person" (laughing).

Like George and Yao, Kofi stayed focused, regardless of the negativity that he experienced. He highlighted boldness as a key to academic success.

I've thought this too: If you are in school too ah, you will put all the shyness away. You put all the shyness away. Yeah, I put my shyness away, and sometimes too, and fear too.

#### **4.6.2 Resilient and Forgiving Perspectives**

Kofi was vicariously inspired by others who have overcome obstacles in life. Witnessing how others have bounced back from difficult circumstances buoyed his efforts and his self image.

Sometimes, I do tell myself that, "No matter what, if this person has done it, by all means, I can do it." I-can-do spirit is in me. Yeah, I can also do it. I've achieved the goals because I don't envy others. I don't envy others.

Grace's handling the burning rice in her shared kitchen demonstrated the same type of "I-can-do spirit" as did Kofi. She had done it before when she lived

elsewhere, but now she was not allowed to cook because her new roommate did not want her to.

Yes, it's just that she doesn't like me to do a lot of things, like cooking. She feel[s] that when I cook, I will make the place dirty.

Here, Grace cited her new roommate's excuse for doing all the cooking, whereas she earlier described her friends' actions, which also included washing all of the utensils, as "overprotection."

Janet cited her strength as a factor in her success in the midst of very difficult circumstances. Also, the fact that community members respected her, demonstrating a belief in her, came into play.

I think what I went through rather makes me strong to withstand all this. It rather made me strong because in my area there are a lot of them. Some were very poor, they would finish secondary school and they would be pregnant and give birth, very young age.

There were times Janet had not made time to wash dishes at home and money for lunch at school was withheld. She stated, "I just took it that way"; the situation did not deter her from going to school.

Yao continued with his perception of comments he overheard as he walked through campus.

It's an insult because: "Is these people all coming here to learn?" is a question and also a kind of insult when you think on it because the intonation that the person will just use to say that thing is not a good one. So at the end, you think, "Ah, why are these – always people are just asking questions, insultings [sic], and causing mockery on people with albinism? Is it that we are born with this colour or what?" I say, "Oh, should I go and answer the person in a negative way, or I should stop?" I say, "After all, if I answer the person, what will I gain, so let me stop and go my way." Sometimes I didn't let them to go free; I just express my views on what they are saying to them.

Yao seemed to have wisdom beyond his years, being resilient enough to look past people's ignorance.

Since I was born I have friends, so as you keep on contacting or interacting with the person, the person keep on knowing that they can live a real human life so he now stop the stigmatisation that he used to do.

Like Yao, George had a forgiving disposition towards those who seemingly wanted to dispirit him.

Last summer they saw me, my uncle saw me, and he looked at me like up like this (demonstrating) and then trying to say – but I don't disrespect anytime I see them, I call my uncle "Dad," I say, "Hi, Daddy? How are you; I hope you're fine?"

Esi also demonstrated a forgiving nature with people like her unsympathetic grandmother, one of the family members who had not been very helpful to her.

Whenever we vacate, before I go anywhere, I will go and greet my grandmother, despite all that she has done to me. When I have something, I will give it her because Bible says that we should not retaliate; vengeance is the Lord's. So me, I've cleared everything off my mind; I know that it's all part of life.

Esi accepted as part of life the situation she endured with her grandmother, in whose home she most often received no food.

For her, when you're staying with my people, dear, you don't have to tell them you are hungry. They will insult you. They will tell, don't they know? Like in a way, you're trying to insult them. As you're with them they know their responsibility that they will give you food, so you don't have to tell them, so they'll be there; the time they feel like giving you food, they will give you [sic]. As I'm saying, it will be like literally you are insulting them.

#### **4.6.3 Problem Solving, Role Models and Faith in God**

Just as Yao learned to "not mind" people's hurtful comments, Jeremiah, Yao, Esi, Kofi, Ama, George, Janet, Grace found ways to continue to act as agents in their lives, even during times when they were in pain. Discomfort in their lives was remedied with agentic action to solve problems. Also identifying role models to emulate was a factor in participants' success. Lastly, having faith in God is a recurring theme in this work.

Describing himself and how he may be different from some who have not achieved as much as he has, Jeremiah saw himself as a problem solver.

I'm different because the way I am, if I get problem, I don't think about the problem. I have to find solution to the problem, but sometimes, people get problem and then they are always complaining about the problem they always think of it. Me myself, I don't think about the problem. I have to find solution to the problem.

When Yao overheard people talking about his albinism, it created negative feelings for him. Therefore, when people were curious and would actually ask him about the condition, he wanted to offer them an explanation that they could appreciate. Sometimes Yao found it difficult to help others understand how he was born with albinism. In order to circumvent this problem, he gave different answers to those who ask about his albinism based on the level of education and understanding he perceived they had. Examples of queries made were:

Questions they'll ask [like], "Are you the only son with albino in your family or you have any albinos in your family?" or "do your family has many albinos?" or they'll ask you, "How could you come by the albinos?" Since it's a genetic formation. Since the genes, it's [to] do with genes aspects [sic], both the mother and so called the husband, if their genes have the albino, or if the mother has the albino genes and he get married to another husband who also has a genes of albino, they'll produce albino child or the chance of producing albino is going to happen.

If he believed the enquirer would not comprehend his technical explanation, Yao gave a simpler explanation for his condition.

If I see you are just, you are educated, I will explain but, someone who is not educated, if you say "genetic", he cannot get to the meaning of it. I said that it's who God [sic] creates us, so God wants us to be in this frame; that's why he give[s] us this colour. So that is it, and they say "okay."

Esi talked further how her experiences served as stepping stones to her triumphs and strong faith.

If they had been so lenient or they have been so easy with me, I would have taken life so easy. I will not have strived to this far. And I think those treatment that they gave me, has also helped me in some way because I knew



that I should be able to do something, and I should also rely on God because my family members they're not supportive.

Kofi pointed to family support as being of major importance in one's success; in his own family, his mother encouraged him to advance his education, as his brothers have.

I do tell my friends that, it's about the family too that you're coming from. In fact, the family, anything that you will make, is about your family, no matter how it is, based on the two parents whether your father or your mother. They can push you. I was a secretary too to my district, and we had one guy who the district is sponsoring the guy to paying the school fees. Just recently, when I went home, the guy stopped school. He said because the family did not give him money to go and this thing ... the feeding fee, like any time that he want to go to school, the family they did not give the money to go and feed, so that one too is based on the family.

Kofi's own family has provided a source of self-efficacy. He was the last born of four siblings who have pursued higher education, one of whom is working on a doctorate.

But my brother, one who is following the girl, he's doing his doctorate now, at your hometown, U.S.

Ama faced many hurdles to her education, spending years in search of treatment for the sudden paralysis in her legs she experienced in primary school. She has two older and sisters who are tertiary students. Their achievements make them positive role models for Ama to follow.

Kofi practices self-acceptance and belief in God as paths to success. Through that self-acceptance, happiness is found.

Because sometimes and you have to understand God too. If you understand God, whether a different religion then you believe that it's God who make you the way you are, then you accepted yourself the way you are, then you can progress in your life because in this life, nobody will happy yourself. You should happy yourself. Anytime, wherever that I will be, I do happy myself.

Kofi further explained what seems to be claim to belonging despite his differences.

Because I challenge myself to the extent that whenever that able persons are going, I will be within, anywhere that they will go, I will be within. I will not isolate myself. Even though if I come and you will not accept me, me, I have accepted myself in the first place, so I will come to the programme. I will come to wherever that they will go, so in the first place, you have to [have] accepted yourself the way you are, no matter what the situation will be.

Ama's experience presented many challenges. Yet she challenged herself further with the wish to pursue higher education as her sisters are doing. Seated on the floor with her infant twins crying and her crutches nearby, Ama simply stated, "Because I have the desire."

Esi who had spent much of her life living with community members due to her mother's instability and her father's rejection, described her qualities in the following way: "It's determination, perseverance, prayers, faith in God." She believed she had achieved because she took her mother's lifestyle as an example of what she did not want in her life, even as the boys she rejected and taunted her.

In terms of qualities which contributed to her success, Nana Adjoa highlighted her respectful nature and high morals.

I think I am a good teacher. I also respect, I respect people a lot and I also know how to care for myself and other people. I'm not proud, I have a good behaviour, I respect a lot and I'm very honest. I am not doing anything bad; I have a good attitude. I always welcome people and I respect people a lot. I always welcome them.

The doctors marvel at Kofi, and this bolstered his faith with the notion that his very existence was miraculous, all of which played a major role in his level of self-acceptance.

I've accepted no matter because, nobody can be the same as am I because I do go to hospital, even the doctors ask me, "Ah, Emmanuel, what's your situation? Are you sure this happened to you?" because they know that I will go insane because they will take my time to converse with me for a very long time and say, "Ah, Emmanuel, are you sure that you got an accident and this thing happened? Eii, God is wonderful." So I've accepted the way am I no matter what the situation.

George filled in a part of his lived experience, explicating how he arrived at the University of Education – Winneba. He had taken a risk and returned to Ghana, his birthplace which he had left two decades prior, while still an infant.

Before God and man, like I swear, I never knew where I was coming. When I got at the airport, nobody was waiting for me to pick me up. Nobody picked me; nobody expected me.

With a strong faith in God, George took a series of decisive, agentic actions in his life, in search of belonging.

When I came, first day when I arrived at the airport, I looked around, I said, “Okay.” I found my way. I walked on the street, walked, walked. Then I picked a taxi. I said, “Can you send me to a cheap hotel around?” That was risky though, but I’ve been places in the world, so I have to toughen up. “I’ve been here for awhile. I’m a Ghanaian, it’s just [that I] lived elsewhere and stuff. Then, little by little I found my way, and then I got here. When I got here, I realised the fee stuff and I said, “Yeah, I can afford.” But according to my plans, I could just afford up to level 200 (laughing). Yeah, I was like, “How am I going to survive here?” But God have been so great.

George continued and then broke into song, singing a tune which he had sung as part of a live performance the researcher had observed.

To cut the story short, I’ve been here without any help, any support, but I’m having a complete life. People see me and think, “I wish I’m like this guy.” And I don’t go about crying about my problems. People see me and then like, “I wish I’m like „George“.” But they don’t really know – and that’s the reason why I sang during my concert, “I Got Joy”.

When I sung:

[singing],

*I GOT JOY IN MY HEART*

*DEEP, DEEP, DEEP DOWN IN MY HEART*

*CAUSE JESUS GAVE TO ME*

*AND NOBODY NO ONE NEAR ME CAN EVER TAKE IT – TAKE IT FROM ME*

*CAUSE I GOT JOY IN MY HEART, DEEP, DEEP, DEEP DOWN IN MY HEART*

Anytime I feel sad, I got a song that comforts me.

The participants in this study demonstrated self reliance through their lived experiences narrated in response to the first research question. Their demonstrated

tenacity attracted the attention of others and influenced them to come aboard with the participants in their educational goals. The next section identifies ways the students were supported in their quest for higher education.

#### 4.6.4 Supports

Esi worked hard at school and, although she was allowed to live with her grandmother in the Central Region, she got no food at all at the house. She studied often in the library, and the librarian started helping her.

Yeah, you see my mother is petty trader, the pure water, she's catering for me and my younger brother, so the money that she gets, it's not all that enough, so the little that she gives me, when I come, I will try to manage it, and there was this librarian at my former school, the librarian at my former school. I don't know when the first sight he saw me, and he called me, and whenever he's given lunch, he does not eat it, he will give it me. And I was depending on that lunch every day, throughout my three-year education, I was depending – I don't know; so God works in miraculous way. It's beyond our imagination.

I like going to the library, and when we went there first semester, there was not all that serious business, so I used to go to the library to read and when he saw me, he called me and then he gave me his lunch. And I don't know what he told the – I think he knew me and, me too, I knew him, but I had never talked to him before.

Word spread and Esi found the same support from various teachers at her school, all the way through her last day there.

It was the lunch that I was – and other teachers too, I don't know whether he told them something about me. My housemaster too, he was a friend to that librarian. When they give them food, they will not eat it; then they will give it to me. They did that even my last paper, my school was an examination centre, so I wrote it in my school. My last paper, he gave me food.

With her physical impairment and the use of crutches to move, Ama was unable to collect water.

Last two semesters, Winneba here, the taps lock, last two semesters, and I was still at Aggrey, so we were not having water always, and any time they bring water, you know those who are physically fit, they will run and go and fetch all then you cannot get. So there was one lady, "Mercy", anytime they bring the

water, then, she will come and take all my containers and go and fill all and bring to me, so in that instance, I was happy. And I realised she treated me well.

Several participants mentioned that they do not complain about the hardships of their lived experiences. For example, Jeremiah did not tell people about his mentally ill mother and absent father until he was nearly expelled from University of Education – Winneba.

While George, who felt he was seen as different, found little support through his family, this was something he does not share. He has found crafty ways and means of survival while attempting to pursue higher education. One example was he enlisted a friend to help him tap into a corrupt education system in Togo in an attempt to facilitate his return to his father.

While Jeremiah remained quiet about his plight while doggedly working, George maintained silence while finding support by any means necessary to move forward in his goals. By way of example, George, nonchalantly requested food for his empty stomach.

Yeah, yeah, I often got nobody to call but sometimes, you could meet somebody in church, you're in the same group with and you can say, "Excuse me, are you in a hall?" "Yeah." "Do you have food, like, ready food at the moment? I'm a bit hungry." You don't sound needy, but you don't really sound like you're in need of stuff, but "Can I come for lunch or something?"

People will say, "Oh, come on, you, the way I see you, would you love to eat what I have? Because I know you are a high class." I said, "No, come on, I eat everything." So it goes that way.

He continued:

I join and whilst there, I don't make comment; I don't stop. When they give me the food, I eat as fast as I can, when I finish, I appreciate, "Thank you so much, it was so nice, can I go?"

George was different on various levels; one had to do with the perception of his sexuality, and another had to do with his presumed foreign status. He often

borrowed money from one “friend” to pay another, all while maintaining the façade that he was well-to-do and supported by family abroad.

And if sometimes I don't have transportation I see how close I could be with the person. “Sorry can you lend me two cedis to make a photocopy or something? When my Western Union comes in, I will pay back.” And I say, „I'll pay you back“ because I never told them I wasn't having money, nowhere. They all think I was receiving money on the monthly basis, yeah, and even when I ask money from people, I don't ask much money. I ask money people can afford giving. “Can I have five cedis?” People can afford five cedis. “Can I have three cedis? Can I have two cedis or can I have one cedi to buy this?” People can afford those stuff [sic].

Jeremiah received support as a day student in junior high school, as he continued to live with Auntie Essunam and her family while working as a tro-tro conductor. After that, he continued this line of work in addition to selling clothes, and he ultimately worked his way through senior secondary school as a boarder.

Support was also provided in terms of moral support. Yao described how a lecturer at the University of Education – Winneba made his entry into university life a bit easier by introducing him in the context of a lecture.

The faithful day that he came there to lecture, he mentioned my name, he used my name as the same as – he used my name. So after the lecture, everybody in the department became closer to me that – became friendly to me because he used my name. So up till this date, all in our department know me, and some even try to come for us to do a group study.

Janet received encouragement from a former headmistress who apparently saw potential in her.

Then there was a – she used to head a cluster of school I attended. She is in the area so she always come and she speaks to me. I'm a very good girl, why am I in the house? She kept encouraging me and I told her I was gathering money to go, so she kept encouraging me. She explicated the impact of the encouragement she received from this headmistress.

She was my headmistress, to say my headmistress in my basic school. She was encouraging me that I should go to the university and further my education. I told her my daddy didn't want to, but then I want to save some



money and go. She told me about a scholarship scheme in the University so when I came then I applied for it, and I was granted a scholarship. The qualities the participants discussed and demonstrated through their narratives included courage, resilience, forgiveness. Actively solving problems, identifying role models and abiding faith in God also emerged as themes in terms of features the participants possessed. They were also resourceful in their pursuits of education, attracting various levels of support from different sources as they endured and overcame formidable hurdles.

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the emerging data for the four research questions of this study. The first question delved into the participants' lived experiences, which involved shunning, judgment and stigmatisation; these experiences were based on their differences from the rest of society. In addition to their lives having been marked by these negative factors, they faced significant hurdles.

The second question uncovered two additional themes in answer to the queries regarding hurdles to university education and how the participants addressed those barriers; those themes were the absence of parent(s) and perseverance. Additionally, tools which the participants developed and utilised were discovered. They were: self-parenting techniques, life mapping, diary writing and positive self-talk. Moreover, issues such as negative encouragement/role models and proving naysayers wrong also emerged from the data.

The third research question investigated how the lived experiences of these marginalised students affected their education. This question uncovered various vulnerabilities related to social and academic exclusion. Additionally, the



vulnerabilities extended the issues of divided attention, in terms of their inability to concentrate owing to their life circumstances, emerged as a theme in how the lived experiences of marginalised students impinged on their education. Additional themes were: self-beliefs, action, the future and sense of belonging.

Lastly, the fourth study question probed into the qualities which participants possessed. They were: courage, resilient and forgiving perspectives, problem solving, positive role models and faith in God. The sub-question looked into the supports, which the participants enjoyed in their quest for education. The results varied from the kindness of teachers to the kindness of strangers.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the research as they related to the four main questions. An analysis of the participants' lived experiences uncovered the lack of cultural and social capital, meaning their parents were not highly educated and they were not in positions of power (Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Giddens, 1984; Gordon, 1984). Therefore, very little if anything, was handed down to them from their forefathers and mothers in terms of intergenerational transmissions of economic status. Yet, the participants upheld the notion of certain failure for those from marginalised groups.

Based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), human behaviour is more indirectly, rather than directly impacted by educational levels and socioeconomic status (Pajares, 2002). These social benchmarks, serve to influence the belief in oneself (Pajares, 2002), and self-efficacy was crucial to the participants' use of agency.

The first question was regarding the lived experiences of students from marginalised categories. A major theme that emerged from the data with respect to their various experiences involved shunning, judgment, stigmatisation and the fear thereof. This study set out to take a phenomenological look at successful marginalised students. The data, however, showed them to be people who may have had affiliations with marginalised groups, but did not necessarily see themselves as marginalised people. Through a level of perseverance that could be termed *dogged determination*, they shrugged off others' doubts and negativity. They then utilised

elements of others' pessimism to fuel their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and grit (Duckworth, 2016) to advance their educational goals. In addition to believing in themselves, they sought to prove their naysayers wrong. Even while dealing with a confluence of negative circumstances over the courses of their lives, they believed in themselves and their abilities; moreover, they believed that they could and would, in fact, attain higher education.

There were three primary findings in this study. One general outcome was that people who were in marginalised categories were successful because they consciously and actively – by agentic action – resisted the label and implications of marginalisation. In a display of intense resilience, they soldiered on, intellectually accepting that struggle is a part of life. When people and circumstances pointed to the idea that they were not worthy, they disallowed the notion that their differences warranted their being pushed to the edges of society. While various elements of society rejected them because of their differences, the students believed they belonged in the institution of education. The students in this study were seen as different by society, but they were not to be left out.

Secondly, the participants in this study had many negative inputs and circumstances in their lived experiences. Picture Yao suddenly being sent home from school in very early primary school experience because a teacher did not like and did not understand his condition of albinism; she likely feared it. With all the rejection the participants suffered, they bounced back with each blow. The shunning and stigmatisation were based on others' fears and misunderstandings, not their own (Dei, 2006). In addition to their beliefs that they had the ability to succeed, which they used to fuel their resistance to opposition, the students also had the negative energy, words and actions of others. They used their beliefs and negating factors and opinions to

shore themselves up with levels of resilience and perseverance none of their naysayers believed they had.

Thirdly, alongside their beliefs in themselves and their own abilities as well as the use of negativity as fuel, the participants had an unshakable faith in God. They actively called on Him to see them through life's challenges. For example, the meanings they ascribed to the supports they received from teachers had connections to their faith. The phenomenon of marginalisation and how it often affects aspirants such as these did not play out in its usual way.

## **5.2 Perseverance in the Face of Unfriendly Environments: Shunning, Judgment and Stigmatisation**

The participants in this study described the experience of being stigmatised, shunned at various points in their lives. Also, feelings of fear regarding the possibility of this treatment were expressed. Whether their differences from others were visible or not, their experiences included these negative influences because of their affiliation with marginalised identities. Four of the students had various impairments; one had albinism; while the remainder had conditions and life circumstances that are often stigmatised and shunned. Examples were HIV, familial mental illness, and the perception of one's sexuality. Society has adjudged members like these as unable and sometimes unworthy of the benefits which the majority enjoys (Avoke, 2002). In the instance of HIV positive status, there was self-stigmatisation, or internal stigma, in terms of fear of disclosure (Holzemer et al, 2007).

Social judgment can affect the way one feels about one's ability to meet and set goals. When members of society treat and/or view a person from a marginalised group in a negative way, that person can choose to validate negative opinions and/or

actions or decide to triumph over them. Some give up in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1997). The participants, especially those who had impairments, were treated in ways that made them feel they had no value, as Hosking (2008) explicated with critical disability theory (CDT).

The participants in this study found ways to deal with and overcome the many barriers they faced. Although there was some acknowledgment of being treated in negative ways while also sometimes being blamed and shunned for their differences, the participants continued on their paths to higher education. They soldiered on, turning the maltreatment on its head by treating it like “air”, as a participant with a physical impediment and undisclosed learning impairment, Kofi stated. In other words, in spite of the difficulties they experienced, they continued to pursue each successive step in their path that would lead them to University education.

The participants used short-term or “proximal subgoals” to keep themselves on track for reaching long-term goals of University education (Bandura, 2001). When obstacles threatened their goals, the participants used their personal agency and devised creative ways to deal with them; this use of their agency and beliefs that they would come out victoriously contributed to their success (Bandura, 2001).

Rounding up this part of the discourse on exclusion is the physical environment for those with visual impairments. Grace (aged 26), had partial vision until she was in early primary school. Now entirely visually impaired, she reported limits on her mobility and independence, which occurred in many places in Ghana. Unfortunately for Grace and others who have visual challenges – like those with albinism – and those with physical impediments, the University of Education – Winneba is a place that is difficult to navigate. Grace stated, [As] “for the environment, it's not easy; it's difficult because of the open gutters and other dangerous obstacles.” This situation

contributed to her dependence on others. While new sidewalks were constructed for students' movement to and from lecture halls, they remained incomplete, with large gaps which opened to deep holes in the ground at various, incremental places in the construction (see Appendix III).

Therefore, the newly-made sidewalks, designed for student safety did not serve this function for impaired students. For this reason, visually impaired students who did not have a peer to guide them remained excluded from this safety benefit available to others; they found themselves in the position of walking on the street where cars were also moving. This was the kind of danger (and exclusion) Grace highlighted.

The study participants dealt with many challenges and decided to *intentionally* make things happen by their actions (Bandura, 2001). They proceeded as though they had no other choice; and for many of them, this was true, as most did not have parental and familial support. This absence of parental and familial support is discussed in the next section.

### **5.3 Absence of Parental and Familial Support**

Experiences in early life regarding their efficacy and expectations are closely linked to family, specifically parents (Bandura, 1997; Eccles, 1998; Frome and Eccles; 1998). A parent's feedback on a young student's examination results, for instance, weighs heavily on how the child will endeavour to learn. Simultaneously, having parents' input affects how a student sees him- or herself in terms of their abilities and prospects for their future lives.

Lack of a mother, specifically, in a household has proven to greatly hinder students' academic performance (Case and Ardington, 2006). The impact of mothers' perceptions of their children's ability and effort (Frome and Eccles, 1998) plays a role

in the children's self-concept. In most cases, the study participants experienced the loss of one or both parents permanently or temporarily. Even in the absence of parental support, the participants in the study persevered in their educational pursuits. Their experiences represented a combination of self-belief and dogged determination.

In other words, in addition to belief in themselves based on their abilities, there was a strong sense of persistent resolve in their narratives. The dogged determination emanated from the fact that there were no safety nets for most of them, as their familial situations were often precarious, financially strained or wholly lacking. Those who were fortunate enough to have parents in their lives faced financial and other impairments, which threatened to block their paths to educational success.

In the absence of parents to serve in assistant capacities, the students formulated various tools which served to push them forward in their goals. They found ways to “shape their life circumstances and the courses their lives” took (Bandura, 2006). The participants used instruments such as life mapping to plan their options, including contingencies in the event things did not progress as quickly as they preferred. Positive self-talk and self-parenting techniques also brought participants through times when they needed parental guidance but, for various reasons, it was unavailable to them. The participants used these tools with “intentionality” and “forethought”, expecting that they would aid them in reaching their desired outcomes (Bandura, 2001).

#### **5.4 Impact of Role Models and Vicarious Experiences**

The students also incorporated vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977) by looking at family members and friends who were advancing their academic pursuits. These individuals served as role models for the participants. They believed that if



they could follow the examples of successful people, then they would prevail against any barriers, whether they were societal or cultural. By way of illustration, as a child, Ama (aged 29) had suddenly lost the use of her legs for unknown reasons and was the mother of newborn twins at the time of the study. Her sisters were University students, and this contributed to her belief that she could advance her studies in a similar fashion, despite the challenges she faced.

By the same token, some participants identified those who were on life courses that they did not want to emulate. Their observations in this regard also became a motivating factor in their lives. On weekends and school holidays, Esi (aged 25), who lived a quasi-orphaned existence after asserting her right to choose her religion, struggled alongside her mother selling pure water to motorists and pedestrians on the hot streets of Ghana's capital, Accra. Her intention was to make this work a means to an end, University education, not her way of life, as it had become her mother's.

There were times when family members knowingly and purposefully left participants stranded without a roof over their heads. Yet, without dwelling on negativity and without absorbing it into their belief systems of what they could or would achieve, they persevered. They bounced back, demonstrating resilience from each snub and each form of rejection (Garnezy, 1993).

The participants successfully treated slights and negative inputs as air; however, that is not to say that the students were altogether unaffected by them. When students were neglected and maltreated by family, this did affect their senses of belonging, because if there is a place each member of society belongs, it is presumably with family. As the data showed, this sense of belonging in a familial environment was not possible for various reasons. Some participants were rejected

and abandoned by family, while some lost family members to death and to mental illnesses.

### **5.5 Societal Perceptions and Academic Vulnerabilities**

Analysis of the data showed that the participants were susceptible to social and academic vulnerabilities, owing to exclusion, the fear thereof, and divided attentions. The students were vulnerable based on the perceptions which others held about their various differences. This was the case whether they had one of the four impairments represented in this study (visual, hearing and speech, learning or physical), or some other way of being different.

The participants, with their various differences from most of their peers, were held accountable for those differences, as though they or their family had done something wrong and were reaping what they had sown (Avoke, 2002; Agbenyega, 2003). Also albinism and the aforementioned impediments were thought to be due to some misdeeds in the family lineage. Additionally, whether they were persons living with HIV or with mental illness in their families, they were cognisant of the uneasiness some felt around people in these groups. The discomfort was based on erroneous beliefs that the participants' conditions or situations would affect those with whom they associated. It was also based on the societal notions that the study participants were blameworthy (Avoke, 2002; Agbenyega, 2003).

People generally fear what is unknown, and their lack of knowledge about the differences represented by the participants contributed to views that led to exclusion (Avoke, 2002; Dei, 2006). Their differences from their peers were thought to be somehow contagious, as Grace (aged 26) shared regarding her prior schooling experience: "Some also have the perception that now that they are staying with us, what if they also become visually impaired?"

The fear of the possibility of their peers learning information about the participants kept participants from fully expressing themselves and the circumstances with which they struggled. Mental illness in the family and having an HIV-positive status are examples of situations which sometimes come with fear of marginalisation.

As stated by Agbenyega (2003) in this environment, “it is difficult for any interaction to occur between the „normal“ and the disabled” (p. 5). This was in line with Ama’s experience – and Avoke’s (2002) findings on negative labels – during the time leading up to her wedding with an able-bodied man. His family had tried several ways and means to discourage him from marrying this woman, whom they had labeled “the cripple.”

Students with impaired hearing and speech missed out on significant parts of the learning process, as not all parts of lectures and interactions between their peers and lecturers were interpreted. This exclusion and the real possibilities of them being left out of activities such as study groups put the study participants in positions of having to at times focus on their differences, even when they simply wanted to fully engage in discussions about the subject matter they were studying. Grace continued: “We were not having any friendship with them because they [would] not even allow you to approach them.”

Often finding that their able-bodied peers were unwilling to engage with them in study group discussion and classroom settings, those with impairments carried on with their efforts to learn. Adding to academic vulnerabilities for those who were visually impaired, reading materials in braille were unavailable. This was significant, so students with visual impairments identified a small number of people who were empathetic and asked for help with activities such as reading aloud selected parts of

required readings. Grace reported: “While others could go to library and get books to read to search for information, dictionaries, I cannot do that.”

Other slights were experienced by the participants, based on societal perceptions. While her peers questioned why Grace, who was *visually* impaired, would want to dress (nicely), deKlerk and Ampousah’s (2003) study in South Africa found that, for the *physically* disabled “some aspects of clothes evoke certain feelings about themselves” (p. 1137). The assumption of Grace’s peer was that she was dressed nicely to attract males. The peer further assumed that it was not necessary to dress well because Grace’s blindness precluded her from dating. Grace indicated that she just wanted to look neat, and this was consistent with deKlerk and Ampousah’s (2003) findings which offered some insight into this situation. “It seems that beautiful/nice/good clothes can make the physically disabled woman feel good about her self” (p. 1137).

Students’ perceptions of their abilities to exert control in their lives by avoiding negative peer pressure (Bandura et al, 1996) was exemplified by the participants in this study. George’s self-imposed curfew in a self-parenting fashion and Esi’s repeated rebuffing offers from adolescent boys in order to stay out of trouble were ways they exercised a level of control in their lives. Even while they struggled on their own, some family and peers taunted them, betting they would not be the contributors to society that they foresaw and planned to be.

Esi was suddenly evicted in Ghana’s capital city, Accra. She related how she returned from selling water on the streets to find her belongings thrown outside by her sister and that people were stealing her items. She was at once without a place to sleep and the victim of theft. By evening, she reached the home where her mother was staying only to be denied again and left frustrated. It is this type of abrupt

abandonment and upheaval that can sometimes indefinitely usher youth onto the streets of Accra (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013).

Esi, along with the other participants had a strong vision for herself. Based on past academic successes and performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977), they each persevered. Moreover, performance accomplishments such as surviving instances of acute vulnerability added to their levels of self-efficacy. This additional layer of efficacy exists in terms of nonability influences on self-appraisal, which come to bear heavily in functioning when disarray, obstructions, or tensions complicate matters (Bandura, 1997). “Nonability influences” refer to inputs that have little to do with an individual’s ability to complete their tasks towards a specific goal, but can hinder their efforts. The meanings attributed to their experiences served as an argument that the participants parlayed vulnerabilities, disappointments and other negative forces into energy for further success.

### **5.6 Self-Belief and Negativity as Fuel**

The students and their “environments were reciprocal determinants” of one another (Bandura, 1977). Their self-efficacy and the negativity they encountered demonstrated a give-and-take effect. While they fought through systems of cultural and social reproduction which sought to exclude them, they were accumulating various achievements which confirmed their abilities (Bandura, 1977). Some were invisible barriers and may not have always been distinctly clear to the students; but when individuals like family members and peers bet against them, discounted their abilities and their worth, they had tangible, visible adversaries. The environmental dynamics, which included their naysayers, unwittingly gave the participants something tangible to fight against, and this served as further motivation.

The participants struggled against barriers seen and unseen. With each success, they grew more self-efficacious (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy is rooted in social cognitive theory, and success builds on itself. When they surmounted one hurdle, the experience buoyed them and their level of self-efficacy in terms of performance accomplishments (Bandura, 1977). With these positive experiences under their belts, they set subsequent goals. The experience of succeeding in earlier phases of life allowed them to “sustain identities, meanings and interactions over time” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Each achievement taught them about their abilities to meet challenges they had set for themselves (Bandura, 1977). This could explain how the study participants repeatedly climbed higher in their educational goals. By way of example, Janet declared that she liked challenges, and she chose Mathematics as an area of study, even when she was discouraged from attempting it – because she was female.

Even during discouraging times, the students continued to make conscious choices about their futures. When suggestions were made that they settle for less, they demurred. Esi resisted giving up on her goals when her sister and brother-in-law repeatedly offered to send her to training school for hairdressing or sewing. Alternatively, they offered to open a shop for her to sell foodstuffs and other provisions. She reported: “I said, „I won’t do that. That’s not what I’m interested in, so she shouldn’t change my destiny for me.””

Even as others doubted them, the participants believed in their competence to take a certain degree of control over their own lives and the circumstances in their environments (Bandura, 2001). Twenty-four-year-old Janet’s father supported her younger brother’s educational goals over her own. When she attempted to persuade her father to finance her higher education so that she could build on what she had

accomplished, he refused and said, “it doesn’t matter because I would have to marry, and my husband will take care of me; so it doesn’t matter.”

Janet cited her strength as a factor in her success. Also, the fact that community members respected her demonstrated that they also believed in her. This social persuasion emboldened her and increased the self-efficacy she already enjoyed (Bandura, 1977), further protecting her from some of the vulnerabilities her peers faced. She stated:

I think what I went through rather makes me strong to withstand all this. It rather made me strong because in my area there are a lot of them. Some were very poor, they would finish secondary school and they would be pregnant and give birth at a very young age.

Although sometimes their senses of belonging were denied them with respect to family, they decided that they could and would pursue the highest possible level of education. In so doing, the participants developed their senses of belonging in relation to where they would fit in society. They would be among the educated.

George chose a practical profession. “When stuff goes worse and I have nothing to do, at least I have a profession, I’m a teacher.” Nobody, including his uncle and his father who waged bets that he would soon be a social deviant, could dispute that he was successful. Like those in his cohort, he believed in himself, solved problems through agentic action, and proved them wrong.

In the absence of supportive blood ties, most found ways of belonging by finding and developing a small number of close colleagues, classmates in the University setting with whom they regularly interacted. While they acknowledged the complexities of their lives, they were undeterred. Instead of allowing negative words and experiences detract from their efforts and self-belief systems, the students incorporated those negative inputs into their arsenals of tools. They used the



pessimism and disapproval of others as a collective impetus in their perseverance. Had they not had strong efficacy beliefs, they would have fallen prey to negative inputs and would have thought and behaved in self-debilitating ways (Bandura, 2006).

Kofi (aged 31), who stated that he did not wait for others to make him happy and treated negativity like “air”, described how he used vicarious experience through models (Bandura, 1977). “I’m such a person like if I want to do anything I say, “Ah, this person has done it. I can do it. This person has done it; I can do it.”

Instead of absorbing the negativity, they used it to their advantage. The students chose to prove their cynics wrong. Their goals were long-term, but they kept them in sight with each step they took. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) posited that it is necessary to look at agentic action over time, emphasising that “structural environments of action” can be maintained or changed through human agency. The participants demonstrated this process, through the day-to-day actions taken in pursuit of goals, even when immediate results are unclear (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

The positive inputs in their lives were: their faith in God and their belief in themselves. The negative inputs fueled their grit, their perseverance for longstanding goals (Duckworth, 2016). If they had not had strong senses of self-efficacy, they would have behaved as those with low self-efficacy do and would have given up, altered or downgraded their goals before reaching the university level of education (Bandura, 1993). Instead, they continuously climbed higher.

In effect, the participants combined the essence of Bandura’s (1997) concept of self-efficacy and Duckworth’s (2016) grit. They believed in their abilities to achieve higher education and, as they were met with negativity, they utilised it. This use of negative energy added to their grit, their perseverance as they moved towards

their goals for higher education. Of negativity from others, Kofi stated: “It will not disturb my integrity.”

### **5.7 Resilient Qualities: Courage (Refusing to be Left Out), Solution Seeking, Forgiveness and Faith**

The fourth research inquiry sought to identify qualities of students who were from marginalised groups, but yet, were successful. An analysis of the data revealed the participants’ resilient and forgiving perspectives. A resilient sense of efficacy is necessary to successfully handle and overcome hurdles to lofty goals such as those set by the study participants (Bandura, 1997). This line of thought is confirmed in this research because, as narrated, the participants, who were University students, faced many challenges.

Experience is a key factor in self-efficacy and agency (Bandura, 1977; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), as demonstrated by Yao (aged 22). His condition of albinism attracted attention in every new situation he encountered. Everyone in his department at UEW – Winneba was accustomed to seeing him, so he was comfortable with them, but walking across campus presented a different experience. He stated: “Always when we are walking, it seems for you to have courage because, if you are not courageous, you cannot walk on campus here.”

Just as self-efficacy and agency incorporate schematisation (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), courage is also an iterative, schematic process, whereby each successful walk across campus builds confidence and makes way for the next experience (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998). Similarly, Kofi’s words gave meaning to courage and perseverance the participants demonstrated: “Anywhere that they will go, I will be within.” This refusal to be left out illuminated how successful students

who represented marginalised groups combined self-efficacy and grit through courage.

Youth can devise ingenious ways of figuring out how to manage themselves, which the participants had to do (Bandura, 1997). Esi was aged 25 at the time of the study, but earlier as a school girl, she had sneaked in and out of her mother's room in the night to steal a few hours of sleep; Jeremiah (aged 29) sought out and worked odd construction jobs when his boss's tro-tro was broken. George (aged 26) took on part of the image which people had of him, that he was warmly supported by family abroad.

Since his childhood, Jeremiah viewed himself as a problem solver and stated how he felt he was different from others by not focusing on problems but on seeking solutions. He reported: "I have to find [a] solution to the problem, but sometimes, people get problems and then they are always complaining about the problem; they always think of it. Me myself, I don't think about the problem. I have to find a solution to the problem." A difference between Jeremiah's and George's interactions and meanings assigned them was that Jeremiah sought to build quality relationships in each setting. George, on the other hand, got what he could out of his associates and felt that they, in turn, did the same with him.

Bandura (2002) wrote of people using agentic action to make ways to "compensate immensely for their sensory and physical limitations". Two of the participants, Grace (aged 26) and Ama were such people and were good friends. Without the benefit of mobility, Ama (aged 29) received help with her twin babies, at times, from Grace who was visually impaired. They also studied together, and Ama read for Grace when braille materials were unavailable. They had begun the semester with able-bodied study group peers who eventually stopped participating, leaving

only Grace and Ama. The two women used creative means to collaboratively continue on towards their goals.

This issue of creating various ways to cope, at times, includes caring for siblings when children are left to figure out things on their own (Bandura, 1997). Janet was the oldest child in her family and had to operate a bar by selling alcoholic drinks to patrons while her parents worked long hours elsewhere. Thereafter, she had to take care of her siblings when her mother left the home for mental health care.

Moreover, there was forgiveness by the participants. Esi described her current relationship with one of the relatives with whom she had lived: “Whenever we vacate, before I go anywhere, I will go and greet my grandmother, despite all that she has done to me. When I have something, I will give it to her because [the] Bible says that we should not retaliate; vengeance is the Lord’s.” She had let it go: “So me, I’ve cleared everything off my mind; I know that it’s all part of life.”

Ironically, with their forgiveness of their adversaries for the ways they were treated and neglected, there were by-products which reflected some gratitude for the struggles. Esi stated: “If they had been so lenient or they have been so easy with me, I would have taken life too easy. I will not have strived to this far.” This highlights another of the ways the students operated: They did not complain. They were able to take negativity and shortcomings in others and positively spin them to somehow identify a lesson in them, thereby to making meaning of the hassles they endured and overcame.

Through their qualities of courage, problem-solving, faith, forgiveness, the study participants refused to be left out and took agentic action to ensure they were not excluded from being among the educated. Even though systems and people attempted to leave them behind, they used that energy, transforming it into stronger

senses of self-efficacy. Kofi, who did not tell anyone at the University, including his mates of his learning impairment until after his last examination in his final year at UEW – Winneba.

## 5.8 Supports

Children who are experiencing instability in their home lives often need encouraging support from those outside the home. Having supportive teachers makes a difference in the lives of students facing challenges (Bandura, 1997). This was the case with the students in this study. In various ways, teachers and clergy personnel contributed to the success of the participants during times they were vulnerable. These supports represented a form of agency termed *proxy* (Bandura, 2002), whereby others assist with an individual's goals.

By way of example of Bandura's agency by proxy, one lecturer at University of Education – Winneba reportedly introduced Yao, a new student who had albinism to a lecture hall of freshers in the course of an initial lecture. The lecturer asked Yao if he could explain a concept which others were not grasping. Yao was new and unprepared to actually teach in the lecture hall, but the lecturer asked his permission to introduce him to his peers. It had a positive and significant effect, which the student described: "So after the lecture, everybody in the department became closer to me [and] was friendly to me because he used my name. So up till this date, all of our department know me, and some even try to come for us to do a group study."

The enlightened lecturer did something for Yao by introducing him to the entire class while in the context discussing academic content. By so doing, he showed the new students how he treated someone who was physically different; he treated this student like everyone else, with interest and respect. The lecturer, who set this

positive example for his new students, broke the ice for Yao by asking the student questions such as where he was from. This brief interaction provided the basis for subsequent informal, one-on-one conversations between Yao and his mates.

Another example of support which could be seen as proxy agency also has meaning rooted in Esi's faith. The support was in the form of a school librarian who gave his lunch to this student. The assistance she received, through her faith, is connected to help from God. She reported: "I was depending on that lunch every day, throughout my three-year education, I was depending – I don't know – so God works in miraculous ways. It's beyond our imagination." By also giving their lunch to her through the day of her final examination, other teachers joined in the support of this participant, who could often be seen studying in the high school library.

Along with negativity from individuals, the participants had as part of their arsenal, a Higher Power. It would have been difficult to argue with people of such strong faith that any person or institution could deny them something that was supported by or as a result of their faith in God. Hence, their abiding faith in God represented a formidable part of their resilience.

For instance, after being left in a boarding school in Togo by a harsh, disapproving uncle, George (aged 26), a Ghanaian by birth, was then stranded in Europe by his father and was abandoned by various family members at least in part because they saw him as different, not masculine enough, and possibly by their estimations homosexual. George, like others in this study, continued to believe in himself and repeatedly landed on his feet. He stated, "God has been so faithful." Regarding the song he sang in Chapter Four, I've Got Joy, the "joy" came from God. And Nobody, Nobody can take it away. The "Nobody" was his uncle, and by extension family and other judgmental members of society who believed that those

affiliated with marginalised identities deserved negative treatment and would not go far.

### **5.9 Chapter Summary**

In conclusion, the students in this research endeavour represented societal groups which are often marginalised yet, as the data showed, they used elements of self-efficacy to advance their goals of higher education. Many expected them to fail, but this type of negative input added to their levels of self-efficacy. With resilient and forgiving perspectives, they doggedly pursued their long-term goals. There were times their senses of belonging were questioned by others (and for some, by themselves), but they found their places in the higher education.





## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to unveil the phenomena of students who, in effect, outsmarted marginalisation. The mechanisms of marginalisation for them were multi-layered. Firstly, in this neo-colonial Ghanaian context, there are remnants of domination and lack of the ability to independently act in any regard. This study was conducted in Ghana and provided a closer look at student successes at the University level in an African context. Hence, this study provided better understanding of the factors at play in terms of self-efficacy and successes of students who are different and at risk of marginalisation in a West African locale.

Secondly, the study participants were different from the rest of the societal majority. They represented several groups which are often marginalised. The participants were different in many ways; some were perceived as different, while others had physical variances such as albinism, impairments or other conditions.

The study took a phenomenological look at ways the participants utilised agentic actions through self-efficacy in order to overcome hurdles that threatened their goals of reaching higher education. Whether they had albinism, HIV, or were quasi-orphaned, visually, hearing, physically, or learning impaired, thought to be homosexual, was an unsupported/unseen girl child or had family members who were mentally ill, their lived experiences included shunning, stigmatisation and judgment or the fear thereof.

The research showed that the participants were first-generation university students. They did not have cultural and social capital; despite this, they found ways and means of taking agentic action steps to move forward in their educational goals. Since they were trailblazers in their families in terms of achieving higher education, they were unable to benefit from foresight and familial experiences; in other words, they had to chart their own courses in figuring out how to advance their education.

Whereas there are many financial constraints to higher education in developing nation such as Ghana, the ten students in this study experienced more than typical economic boundaries. The participants' parents were educated to various levels. The majority of them had little education beyond grade school (see Table 2), and some levels were unknown. Under ordinary circumstances, according to cultural reproduction, the passing down of values and norms from one generation to the next, the study participants would have acquired similar levels of education as their parents (Bowles & Gintis, 2002).

Moreover, social reproduction would have, under those circumstances, achieved necessary conditions for social reproduction to prevail, as social reproduction involves the maintenance of social inequalities over long periods. In this scenario, their future children's educational accomplishments would have been similarly muted. These systems were at work in the lives of the participants, which were represented by various barriers to their success, but the students became agents for themselves, believed in themselves and employed grit to overcome the hurdles.

Prosperity is generally passed down from one generation to another through educational expectations and opportunities (Bowles & Gintis, 2002). The participants represented groups that were normally held back – unless and until mechanisms such as cultural or social reproduction worked in their favour and provided easy access to,

passage through, and understanding of institutional workings. Because they were not in privileged positions, and some lacked mothers, fathers and supportive family, these systems stood as formidable barriers to the students over the courses of their lives. Many would have felt entirely powerless in situations in which the participants found themselves. Many would have dropped their lofty goals and taken easier paths. Instead, the participants continued to believe in themselves and they persevered.

This chapter presents a summary of the findings in this study, conclusions, recommendations, limitations of the study, implications for theory expansion, and ideas for future empirical research.

## **6.2 Summary of Findings**

The data showed that the participants were able to resist marginalisation through self-efficacious means and intense levels of perseverance in the face of challenges to their goals, as well as their general survival. They believed in their abilities and, with each successful step towards higher education, they learned more about themselves and their respective abilities to go further (Bandura, 1977). The students persevered, repeatedly taking agentic action and found ways to continue in the midst of unfriendly, unaccommodating environs.

Whereby the participants could have found many reasons to be cynical or resentful, they instead adopted resilient and forgiving perspectives about the long, arduous roads they had had to travel to reach their ultimate goals, University education. A key finding in this research was that the students took the negativity they experienced, transformed it into something useful for themselves, and fueled it to further challenge themselves to reach their successive goals. They sought to prove

their naysayers wrong. This added fuel to their efforts and showed up in their experiences as grit, perseverance for longstanding goals (Duckworth, 2016).

Not only were the participants unable to enjoy the benefits of cultural and social capital through familial ties, the data showed that in many instances, they dealt with the absence of parents in their daily lives. The inspiration and support from parents which often contribute to one's self-efficacy development (Usher and Pajares, 2008) were also unavailable to them.

The participants in this study treated demanding situations as difficulties to be "mastered", as opposed to "threats to be avoided" (Bandura, 1993). Even through health threats and fear of stigmatisation, when mothers/parents were unavailable to be nurturing influences in their daily lives, the participants made efforts to fill the gaps. One way they did so was through the employment of various tools, from life mapping (for planning) to positive self-talk in times of despair. Unlike the majority of their peers, they had to deal with pressures of general life even when they could not see where they were going or could not hear pertinent interactions in the lecture halls. One participant would get bad headaches from intense studying, and one had to crawl or be carried up the stairs to the library to complete assignments. They did not shy away from challenges; they persevered.

The shunning which the participants endured at various points in their lived experiences affected their senses of belonging such that, at times, they felt disconnected. Fiercely resisting the forces of hegemony and adversity, these students continued. They did not absorb the essence of marginalisation in this study, the experience of being pushed aside and left behind. Regarding disabled people, Baffoe (2013) wrote of socially constructed barriers which block them "from gaining equal access to information, education, employment, public transport, housing and

social/recreational opportunities” (p. 188). Instead of being obstructed, all of the participants successfully contained the negativity; they transformed the anguish and pain of those experiences into energy which served to further encourage their efforts.

There were teachers and friends who added their positive opinions about the students’ success; this verbal persuasion also contributed to their efficacious beliefs. By way of a form of proxy control (Bandura, 1997), some were provided supports, like when Esi’s librarian and teachers gave her lunch every day.

In the initial stages of formulating the research study, the researcher had described the students as *marginalised*. However, as the interactions progressed, it became clear that, while the students’ lived experiences included many rebuffs, negativity and neglect, they did not see themselves as marginalised. They were not to be pushed to the edges of society, and they would not accept exclusion.

When asked to describe their qualities, they did not mention *marginalised*, *relegated* or any pejorative term offered by society (Avoke, 2002). They had consciously lived under the cloud of the meaning of the term *marginalised*, but did not condone or accept the maltreatment which accompanies it. In reflecting on how they were able to, in effect outmaneuver marginalisation, the participants ascribed the following adjectives to themselves: *courageous*, *problem solver*, *forgiver*, and *faithful*. The students had strong beliefs in God, which strengthened them against the mechanisms of marginalisation. Their resilient and forgiving perspectives had a connection to their faith in God.

Kofi’s words summed up the resistant and resilient nature of the self-efficacy and grit which the participants displayed: “It will not disturb my integrity; I will go on.”

### 6.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

These findings are broadly in line with Bandura's (1982) assertion that sometimes people abandon goals because of their uncertainty that they can measure up, or because they believe they will not succeed because of undesirable environmental factors. However, because the participants in this study linked thought to action (Bandura, 2001), they became successful University students. While this study's findings were generally compatible with Bandura and other scholars who focus on self-efficacy, the themes in this study indicated that those from marginalised groups also used pessimisms, disapprovals and potential threats in positive ways. Hence, they used several elements of self-efficacy, but extended both their beliefs in their abilities and their gritty efforts by transforming the negativities into useful energy to propel them forward.

As mental health professionals, as well as educators, it is important that we create and nurture environments where every person's voice can be heard. Moreover, the appreciation of diverse voices is something that betters everyone through various exchanges and interactions (Dei et al, 2006). We have a duty not to judge or in any way impede any human being. Even when personal values and beliefs are at odds with others' beliefs or ways of life, we can each extend humanity to them, as opposed to rejection.

Dei et al (2006) stated: "Rather than deny or suppress differences, radical school politics must uncover differences among learners and educators and harness this wealth of knowledge to further educational goals" (p. 94). Based on this laudable stance, and the results of this study, the researcher recommends that the Ghana Education Services (GES) develop and implement a number of policies towards inclusive education for students who are different. These steps should be

implemented at a national level so that groups and individuals who have been pushed to the edges of society can take advantage of the full benefits of education that others enjoy.

Firstly, the GES should require all universities in Ghana to follow in UEW – Winneba’s footsteps in creating HIV/AIDS Education Centre to serve to inform all students about HIV and AIDS. A course should also be required for all students. Information on ways that HIV is transmitted would dispel fear people often have of those who live with the virus. By educating students on the facts about the virus – especially those who will teach others – a nationwide programme would create safer, more accepting environments for those who often silently deal with the complex ramifications of the condition in isolation.

Secondly, universities should be mandated to create a Diversity Mainstreaming Directorate in order to develop diversity inclusion training for all students, teaching and administrative staff. The purpose would be to educate and sensitise the entire University community on issues of diversity and inclusion. Students would also benefit from, for instance, examples of activities that the general population often take for granted would deepen the understanding of how the use of a wheelchair hampers a person in plugging in something at the back of a computer; or how it might be embarrassing to have to sit still on a footpath while taking a phone call. These examples were explicated in Amosun et al (2005), as was the dilemma of asking (or not) for help. The Directorate could undertake the goal of positively impacting how people of difference(s) are engaged in classrooms and offices at higher educational institutions across Ghana.

Thirdly, the efforts of Diversity Mainstreaming Directorates should be mandated to include efforts aimed at positively shaping the perspectives of difference



in the nation's teachers, regardless of their subject area. At an elite University such as the one at which this study was conducted (University of Education – Winneba, the first university of education), there should be a requirement that students, the nation's classroom teachers, take at least one course learning about populations that are often marginalised. That subject matter should include the positive and negative impacts everyone in society has on groups and individuals who are different. In addition, students in colleges of education should be similarly educated.

Fourthly, the Ghanaian government should earmark funds for the creation or purchase of braille reading materials and other teaching and learning aids for visually impaired students at all levels of education. Over time, technology, materials and supplies would need maintenance, upgrading and replacement; hence, it is vital that they are appropriately funded as well.

Fifthly, as Danso, Ayarkwa, and Dansoh (2011) pointed out, access to public buildings for PWDs (persons with disabilities) in the nation's capital, Accra, does not meet standards laid out in the 1992 Constitution of the rights of disabled persons. With respect to higher education, it is important that new construction plans take into account the needs of visually and otherwise impaired students, such as sidewalks, which are complete with the materials needed to make them safe for all. As for the highlighted examples in the photographs (see Appendix III), this would mean that, until construction is finished with grates – as opposed to open holes – they should not be accessible to the general public. Also, fervent efforts should be made to purchase and install supplies that aid in the safety for all students, and administrative and teaching staff in a very timely manner.

A sixth recommendation is in terms of physical access. Except for the ground floor, buildings on University campuses that do not have functioning lifts (elevators)

should not be open to anyone. Older building should be retrofitted with elevators and/or ramps for the physically challenged. Adopting policies that treat those with impairments equally in these ways will positively impact issues of marginalisation by sending strong messages to all in the country's University communities that fairness and equality are valued in education.

A seventh recommendation is that government funds should be supplied for technology to enhance the teaching and learning of those university students who are hearing and speech impaired. In this vein, the number of sign language interpreters should be increased such that each class interaction in the course of a lecture is interpreted. Also, there should be enough interpreters so that study group sessions can be more easily integrated with both hearing and hearing impaired students. This would create an environment wherein no one is excluded and wherein a diversity of ideas can be generated to enhance the learning of all students.

Likewise, as for learning impairments, no one should have to hide this condition for fear of being turned away. Hence, a seventh recommendation involves a GES mandate of a revised application form for every university in Ghana which includes questions designed to ascertain whether aspiring students have difficulties with learning. This would serve to ensure that applicants are identified and supported from matriculation until graduation. Staff, along with teaching and learning aids should be available to such students so that they have equal opportunities at successful university completion.

#### **6.4 Limitations of the Study**

It should be stressed that this study looked at the experiences of this group of students through larger issues of possible marginalisation. Hence, one person

represented specific differences in various categories in this study; that is, only one person with albinism, one person who was living with HIV, and one person who was visually impaired were engaged in the study. Other groups were similarly represented, with one person. The study was constructed in this way for breadth in investigating how people who represented various marginalised groups overcame challenges. Studying one particular segment of society that is often marginalised could have yielded more depth about that representative's experiences.

Another limitation was that the study was conducted in one university located in the Central Region of Ghana. Other salient findings with regard to students overcoming marginalisation could have been garnered from populations at universities in Ghana's other regions.

### **6.5 Challenges During the Study**

In terms of challenges during the study, the researcher struggled with the notion of marginalisation. It is a nebulous concept and proved to be even more so once the researcher began interviewing and observing the study participants. They resisted the often hidden forces of power (Ferguson, 1990) with such conviction in themselves that the researcher found it necessary to take a closer look at who she was actually engaging in the study.

Working with a participant with hearing and speech impairments presented logistical challenges. It was apparent from the outset that an interpreter was necessary. With little difficulty, the researcher identified one, as there were students majoring in sign language interpretation at UEW. Communications were conducted through the interpreter when the researcher and participant met. Also, many texts were exchanged between the participant and researcher, but some texts regarding

logistics were at times complicated by language barriers and lack of understanding on the parts of both the participant and the researcher. Both persevered, though, and developed a strong rapport in the process. Often while awaiting arrival of the sign language interpreter in silence, this participant taught and drilled the researcher on sign language, thereby further opening her lifeworld to the researcher.

The researcher's desire to look at the phenomenon of outsmarting marginalisation in a variety of ways indicated that purposeful sampling would be more appropriate (Creswell, 2007). Initially, the plan for this study was to utilise snowball sampling, a type of purposeful sampling technique whereby one participant would lead the researcher to another (Merriam, 2009, p. 79). It was thought that snowball sampling would be helpful in this study because the thought was that UEW students who had faced struggles would know others who had faced challenges. However, this did not pan out, so typical, purposeful sampling was employed (Merriam, 2009). The population included all students dispersed across UEW – Winneba's three campuses, but there were certain offices/associations which dealt with students facing various struggles. Participants were identified with this method through various University directorates, departments, associations and contacts.

The process of entering into their lifeworlds and gaining understandings of the meanings they attributed to their experiences occurred over time. They did not behave like people who could be pushed to the edges of society, so the researcher wrestled with the term *marginalisation*. Over time, the researcher struggled with ideas of their experiences of shunning and exclusion and how they interpreted their lived experiences. In this phenomenological work, the researcher had to come to terms with what *marginalisation* meant to the participants. So powerful were their abilities to believe in themselves and their grit that they determined that they would

not be left out. Having an affiliation with the groups relegated by society did not mean that one is to be pushed to the edges of society.

## 6.6 Implications for Theory

Some of the gaps in the previously existing literature were identified by Usher and Pajares (2008). They suggested future research into features of socially persuasive messages that boost self-efficacy. In effect, this current study at UEW – Winneba, represents an augmentation of the current self-efficacy theory. In addition to mastery experience, vicarious experience and verbal and social persuasions, and emotional and physiological states (Bandura, 1977), there should be another source of self-efficacy. It could be called *converted or transformed negative social persuasion*, and was demonstrated by the participants in this study who took the pessimism of others and changed it for their benefit. If the conclusions of this study are confirmed by further research into the use of negative energy, there will be an argument for including an additional source of self-efficacy.

This additional source of self-efficacy could be further developed and used for children and other individuals who have been through difficult circumstances. For instance, counsellors could utilise this extension of self-efficacy theory to bolster the efficacy of youth from groups represented in this study; similarly, this concept of transforming negativity could be helpful for work with children who have experienced verbal, physical, and emotional abuses, including rape, abandonment and homelessness.

Moreover, augmenting self-efficacy theory in this way responds to Dei et al's (2006) call that we “theorize and situate difference in our discussions when drawing connections between education and national development” (p. 93).

## 6.7 Future Research

One avenue for further study would be in the form of follow-up, longitudinal studies with this group of students to determine where their firm beliefs in their abilities and grit take them through various life stages.

Future research should look into how people who are different or who are differently abled view the terms sometimes ascribed to them such as *marginalisation* and what unclear, dynamic terms mean to them.

A study should be commissioned to evaluate these recommended Diversity Mainstreaming Directorates across Ghana.

Several groups were represented in this study. With regard to those who outsmart marginalisation, separate studies at various Ghanaian universities, including bigger cohorts of the various groups represented in this study, should be conducted; this will allow for deeper probing of issues for each of the various groups.

Self-efficacy scholars Usher and Pajares (2008) called for a study looking into the characteristics of social persuasive messages that enhance self-efficacy. Based on this current study at UEW – Winneba, it is necessary to look further at how, in effect, *negative social persuasion* contributes to the success of students from marginalised populations in Africa and elsewhere at varying levels of education. This type of inquiry would constitute a very fruitful follow-up.

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## APPENDIX I

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

#### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE SELF-EFFICACY OF UEW STUDENTS FROM MARGINALISED GROUPS

These in-depth interviews will be held at the University of Education – Winneba Counselling Centre, located at North Campus. As for students who use wheelchairs, I will meet them where they are most comfortable, since they would not be able to access the building. The interviews will be conducted in 2 sessions, 1-2 hours each.

**Introduction:** Thank you for coming. I am Cassandra Juanita Martin-Weiler. This study is about UEW students in Winneba who are in some ways different and who are in different ways persevering through their lives to earn their University degree. The study will be based on stories of people like you who have overcome challenges. I would like to spend about an hour with you discussing your life experiences from childhood to the present.

**Consent:** This is strictly voluntary. It is your choice whether you participate or not. If at any point you feel uncomfortable about any subject being discussed, please let me know and we can end our discussion. You can withdraw from the study altogether at any point. There will not be any penalty or consequence for your opting to withdraw from the study. Is that clear? Do you understand that even if you consent now, you can halt the interview at any time? (For visually impaired students...If you choose to withdraw, I will guide you to the door and then back to the place where we arranged to meet; is that okay?)

**Confidentiality** – I will not disclose your identity. I will be using pseudonyms for this work.

**Counselling** – If any issues arise which make you feel unsettled, we can also halt the interview process and switch to counselling mode to address those issues and feelings, okay? You can do that with me or any other counsellor here at the Counselling Centre. Do I have your consent to proceed?

1. Please, what is your name?
2. Where are you from?
  - a. Town/City and Region
3. What course are you studying here at UEW?
4. What year/level are you?
5. What is your age?
6. Gender: M F
7. Marital status: S M  
D W

8. What level of education did your mother attain? Your father? (If high, grandparents' education)

**I. What are the stories, the lived experiences, of students from marginalised categories who are successful at UEW – Winneba?**

9. I want to get to know you and your story. How would you describe yourself? What is your greatest attribute? Can you think of an experience or an event that stands out as contributing to who you are today? Please tell me a story about two significant experiences that contributed to your being the person you are today.

10. What is your vision, hope, dream for yourself? When/how did this start? Is there an experience in your life that led to this?
  - a. How did each of these experiences affect you?
  - b. What else comes to mind when you reflect on how you have developed?

11. Please describe how you were parented.
  - a. Were you parented the same as your siblings?

- b. If not, how were you treated differently?
- c. What are the reasons you believe you were treated differently?
- d. How did you feel about it? What significance do you think it played in your being the person you are now?

12. Please tell me about any unique situations in your upbringing.

13. Could you give me an idea about the sense of belonging you have felt at various stages in your life?

14. How did you perform in school? How would you describe yourself as a young student?

## **II. What hurdles to university education have these students faced?**

15. When have you felt most vulnerable? Meaning, being in a position where you or some goal you had set that was under threat?

- a. What were the circumstances? How did you deal with it?

16. How do you overcome vulnerability?

17. When you think of all of the goals you have achieved, to what do you attribute your successes? In other words, what impresses you most about your life and the way you handle obstacles? What do you do well? What are your strengths?

## **III. How do these students' lived experiences affect their education?**

18. How do you see your overall schooling experience? How did you and how do you feel about schooling?

19. How involved were/are you with the community? What role(s) did/do you have in the community? What does that entail?

**IV. Which qualities do these marginalised students possess?**

20. Why do you think you made it?

21. How do you think you are different from people from similar circumstances who have not set the goals you have?

22. Please, finish the following statement: “I have achieved goals because\_\_\_\_\_.”



APPENDIX II:

**Picture of study participant, Kofi, burning charcoal**





### APPENDIX III

#### Photographs of footpath at University of Education – Winneba





## APPENDIX IV

### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION



**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION**

P. O. Box 25, Winneba, Ghana. Tel.: 020-2041070  
Email: [psychology@uew.edu.gh](mailto:psychology@uew.edu.gh)

24<sup>th</sup> June, 2016.

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

#### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

We write to introduce to you, **Cassandra Juanita Martin-Weiler**, the bearer of this letter who is a student in the Department of Psychology and Education of the University of Education, Winneba. She is reading Doctor of Philosophy in Guidance and Counselling with index number 9130170001.

She is conducting a research on the topic: **A Phenomenological Study of the Self-Efficacy of Marginalised University of Education, Winneba Students**. This is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the above mentioned degree.

She is required to administer questionnaire to help her gather data for the said research and she has chosen to do so in your outfit.

We shall be grateful if she is given permission to carry out this exercise.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Antwi-Danso'.

**Dr. Stephen Antwi-Danso**  
**Ag. Head of Department**