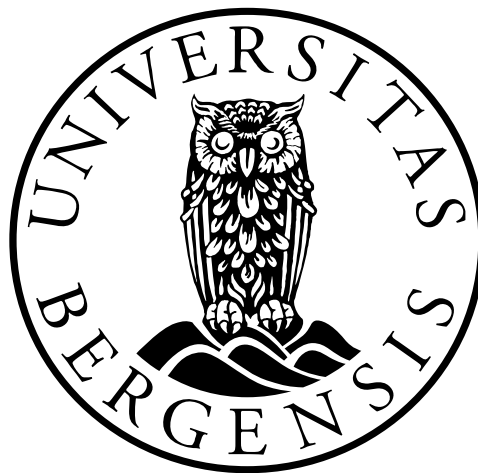**"GETTING THE APPROACH RIGHT: AN EMPOWERMENT ANALYSIS OF GHANA'S FREE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMME (FSHSP) BASED ON THE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS".**

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of The Requirements for The Degree Master of Philosophy in Global Development Theory and Practice, Specialisation in Health Promotion

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my late father, Mr Henry Patrick Gyimah. You have been my greatest inspiration, and may you continue to inspire me even in your death. Till we meet again, keep resting well, Akodim!!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus"

1 Thessalonians 5: 18

I give praise and honour to the Almighty God for bringing my academic journey to a successful end. May Elohim's name be praised.

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LIST OF ACRONYMNS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CO	Comprehensibility
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
EFA	Education for All
DTS	Double-Track System
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSE	Free Secondary Education
FSHSP	Free Senior High School Policy/Programme
HIAP	Health in All Policies
HPS	Health Promotion Schools
GES	Ghana Education Service
GoG	Government of Ghana
GRRs	Generalised Resistance Resources
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MA	Manageability
ME	Meaningfulness
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MT-YRE	Multi-Track Year-Round Education
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NER	Net Enrolment Rates
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NSD	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PFSHSP	Progressive Free Senior High School Policy/Programme
PIAC	Public Interest and Accountability Committee
RETTE	System for Risk and compliance
SAFE	Secure Access to Research Data And E-Infrastructure
SD	Sustainable Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHS	Senior High School
SOC	Sense of Coherence
SRC	Students Representative Council
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TSR	Teacher-Student Ratio
UiB	University of Bergen
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USD	United States Dollar
USE	Universal Secondary Education
VEF	Voluntary Education Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation
YPG	Young People's Guild

ABSTRACT

Accessibility inequalities in formal education is still a growing worldwide concern and of high relevance, as it is known to make a far-reaching contribution to development. Accordingly, global educational reformers are resolved to provide formal educational frameworks through all-inclusive (free) educational empowerment policies or programmes that aim to bridge the educational accessibility gaps within and among developing countries, especially in Africa. Ghana has synchronously introduced several free primary and secondary education programmes to eradicate its non-inclusive educational environment over the past two decades despite most African countries' inability to ensure mass educational participation. Notable among them include the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education in 1994, Progressive Free Senior High School Programme/Policy in 2015 and the Free Senior High School Programme/Policy in 2017. Undoubtedly, the introduction of these free education initiatives has instigated an exponential increase in student enrolment, both at the primary and senior high/secondary levels. However, the expected empowerment impacts of these programmes are seemingly unconvincing, given their objectives and approaches. It is believed that the efficacy of such programmes is contingent on the underpinning frameworks and approaches to their implementation. Although there have been many empirical free education studies within the Ghanaian context, particularly on the free senior high school programme, there seems to be little evidence on the relationship between the implementation structure (approach and framework) and its impact on the quality of education (empowerment).

By addressing the literature gap, this study aims to explore how the initial roll-out of Ghana's free senior high school policy/programme has empowered participating students. From a health promotion perspective, the study also aims to examine the well-being of students and teachers, as good health is deemed an integral part of empowerment. The study adopts the qualitative approach in investigating the research phenomenon. It employs three qualitative data collection methods: in-depth online individual interviews (two participants), written responses to open-ended questions (18 participants), and documentary data (a document from the ministry of education). In addition, the study complementarily employs two theories, the theories of empowerment and Salutogenesis, for theoretical analysis of the study's findings.

First, in unravelling how participants perceived and understood the programme, the study findings reveal participants exuding great understanding of the programme. Second, the findings also project the prevalence of several implementation challenges that affect empowerment: poor learning and living conditions, poor attitude of teachers (students'

perceptions), increased enrolment related stress, economic-related stress, and other challenges (teachers' perceptions). Other findings also include two different levels of coping strategies (individual and institutional levels) employed by participants to mitigate empowerment challenges; a nearly split perception of the quality of tuition offered and the level of knowledge, skills, and competencies gained under the free secondary programme. Finally, the findings also somewhat project self-dependency as being crucial for student empowerment.

Based on the findings, the study concludes by recommending a revision of the existing pedagogy and its pedagogical practices, improving the living and learning resources to help end the double-track system, and making the free senior high school programme health-promoting.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND

The global call for the standardisation of formal education (Ioannidou, 2007; Ball, 2012) as the acceptable development paradigm for human empowerment has led to a burgeoning of educational empowerment programmes, reforms, or policies that require scholarly attention. However, the efficacy of such programmes, reforms, or policies depends on the approach to its implementation (Knill & Tosun, 2012). Accordingly, this study aims to shine a critical light on Ghana's Free Senior High School Programme[1] (FSHSP). The intent is to examine its implementation approach and framework to ascertain how those contribute to realising its core mandate of empowering students through quality fee-free secondary education.

In pursuance of an all-inclusive formal education globally, formal education is now considered a fundamental right and not a privilege (Norad, 2019). Furthermore, according to the Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad), exercising the right to formal education also enforces all other human rights. Today, while globally promoting quality formal education for all children through the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development[2], nation-states and the transnational bureaucracies (international bodies and non-governmental organisations) have been resolved to institute more educational inclusion programmes through international agreements and partnerships (Tarabini et al., 2018; Moutsios, 2010).

Yet, despite the efforts to promote inclusive education, issues of unequal access to education still dominate the inclusive education discourse in many countries (Daniels & Cole, 2010). These access inequalities are by dint of household income disparities in the society (Gandhari, 2021; Madar & Danoch, 2021). A recent study by the United Nations[3] reveals that one out of ten people in developing countries lives on budgets less than US$ 1.90 a day; As of 2015, over "736 million people lived below the international poverty line". To Madar & Danoch (2021), this finding implies that living below the international poverty line denies one access to essential goods and rob of their fundamental right to education, as many children are likely to be excluded from school.

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[1] In some instances, it will be referred to as a policy, as it is sometimes regarded as such in literature.

[2] The Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, is universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030 (UNDP, 2018)

[3] Check "Ending poverty." See United Nations Website at https://www.un.org/en/sections/issuesdepth/poverty/.

While many countries in the Global North have made significant strides in expanding access to formal education, formal schooling for children in Africa remains one of the twenty-first century's grand challenges, with many African countries still lagging (Phasha, Mahlo, & Dei, 2017; Brudevold-Newman, 2017). Thus, the situation for children remains difficult despite several decades of eradicating the non-inclusive educational environment in Africa. Many scholars have attributed this challenge to the prevalence of a neoliberal approach to education within the educational context of most African countries (Madar & Danoch, 2021; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) particularly call for the rejection of the neoliberal ideas to education by granting citizens equal opportunities and access to education by the state in Africa. In other words, it means enforcing the state's autonomy in leading forward the collective all-inclusive educational interest (Hira, 2017).

Given this, one key sector of education that has continually been marred with accessibility inequalities is secondary[4] education (Verspoor & Bregman, 2008; Kiprop, Bomett, & Jelimo, 2015). Hence, by way of placing the role of the state at the core of development, there have been calls to governments to ensure mass secondary participation by synchronously introducing 'free' secondary education reforms (World Bank, 2005; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). Although most African countries have failed in ensuring this mass secondary participation, certain countries like Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia over the past two decades have progressed steadily in this light (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021; Abdul-Rahaman, Rahaman, Ming, Ahmed, & Salma, 2018; Essuman, 2018). For example, Uganda was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to launch a contemporary universal fee-free secondary education in 2007 (Essuman, 2018). However, the challenge of raising enough funds to enhance an effective and quality fee-free secondary education has limited the promotion of equitable secondary education in Africa. To Bregman & Stallmeister (2002), this challenge results from the continent's vulnerable economies.

Notwithstanding this, Ghana, over the years, despite its economic vulnerabilities, has shown immense commitment to the promotion of an all-inclusive formal education through several pro-poor empowerment interventions. For example, by referring to Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), the World Bank labelled its impact as a success story in granting education for all in the Global South (World Bank, 2011; World Bank, 2015). One remarkable success of the FCUBE has been the exponential increase in enrolment of pupils in

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[4] The term "secondary" and "senior high" will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis. However, I will stick to the usage of high school when used in the Ghanaian context.

primary schools, as most parents are able to enrol their children in schools for free (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018). However, the increased enrolment in the primary schools through the FCUBE has correspondingly led to an increased demand for high school education (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018), culminating in intense pressure on Ghana's government to introduce interventions to meet this increased demand. As a result, the government of Ghana introduced a tuition-free Progressive Free Senior High School Policy/Programme (PFSHSP) intervention in 2015. This intervention was to partially fund senior high education in Ghana (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018).

1.2   CONTEXT

Despite the introduction of the PFSHSP to expand high school education in Ghana, the drop-out rate of children from senior high schools (SHSs) due to financial constraints remained alarming (Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). Not only did children of high school going age drop out of school, but it also culminated in increased streetism[5]. Streetism, over several decades, has been a systemic development challenge in Ghana (Awatey, 2014; Obeng-Odoom, 2015). It has been worrying to see school-age children plying their trades on the streets instead of schooling (Awatey, 2014; Obeng-Odoom, 2015). This is because empirical literature indicates that economically vulnerable people who mostly drop out of school end up in poverty (Tufi et al., 2015; Takyi, Azerigyik, & Amponsah, 2019). It is estimated that an average of more than 140,000 students cannot access senior high education because of financial barriers every year (Kale-Dery, 2017), with some of them ending up on the streets. A report by Ghana Demographic Health Survey reveals that for every 96 students admitted to primary schools in urban areas, 80 are unable to transit to SHSs, while 86 out of the 90 children from primary schools in rural areas are also unable to further to SHSs (World Bank, 2017 cited by Chanimbe, 2019:182). This phenomenon is partly a result of the financial barriers to senior high education in Ghana (Chanimbe, 2019; Adu-Ababio & Osei, 2018; Addae, Affi, & Boakye, 2019). To address this social problem, the present government of Ghana, led by President Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo Addo, replaced the PFSHSP with an FSHSP in September 2017.

The FSHSP is an empowerment social intervention programme introduced to bring higher education to every child's doorstep to help drive Ghana's development (GoG, 2018). To this end, it aims at absorbing tuition, residential fees, feeding for boarding students, lunch for day students, writing books, textbooks for core subjects and school uniforms (Addae et al., 2019;

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[5] Streetism was first used in Ethiopia "to mean children who for various reasons work and/or live in the street" (Heinonen, 2011:1)

Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018). Furthermore, by enhancing educational equity in the Ghanaian society, every Ghanaian child is empowered with employable skills to improve competitiveness and be relevant to the community and the world at large (Adu-Ababio & Osei, 2018).

However, there is a growing debate on the whole approach of making senior high education free and accessible in Ghana. This debate is mainly tied to the implementation deficiencies that have plagued the FSHSP since its inception (Asumadu, 2019). First, the issue of funding and its sustainability has dominated the growing debate as most civil society groups and policy analysts have attributed the programme's problems to its unconvincing funding framework (Addae et al., 2019; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). The policy is mainly funded by internally generated funds (particularly oil revenues, taxes, fees and levies), the establishment of Voluntary Education Fund (VEF), as well as some support from the private sector and multilateral donors (Addae et al., 2019; Cudjoe, 2018).

Critics of the policy, including SEND-Ghana and IMANI (both policy Thinktanks in Ghana), explicate that the primary source of funding is not sustainable; thus, it is unwise to solely depend on oil revenue for such a colossal initiative (Addae et al., 2019; Cudjoe, 2018). Furthermore, they believe that oil prices are somewhat unstable and thus, may lead to fluctuations in the annual income accrued in that regard. In this vein, there is a higher inclination of such fluctuations affecting the programme's financing and compromising the quality of education offered (Cudjoe, 2018). For instance, looking at how the global oil economy has been hit by the devastating economic effect of the Covid-19 pandemic, the FSHSP is likely to suffer since its funding framework is heavily dependent on oil revenue. Today, it is reported that oil prices for West Texas Intermediate and Brent are about 33 to 36 USD/barrel, which is more likely to slide further to a range of 20 USD/barrel (Ajami, 2020).

Against this background, some critics believe that considering the policy's funding conundrum, it is entirely wrong and premature to make high school education accessible for all (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). Critics such as Gyampo (2019) accentuate this claim that the FSHSP is bound to lose its empowerment efficacy if steps are not taken to revise its funding framework. This claim also aligns with the arguments of Cudjoe (2018: para. 14) that:

> *"It is a known fact that the implementation of the scheme will have a toll on the country's finances...The financial pressure accompanying the implementation of the policy coupled with Ghana's low revenue mobilisation and the unpredictable nature of the oil revenue warrants some discussions on ways to minimise cost".*

In light of the preceding arguments, there is a growing call for a change of empowerment approach of the FSHSP, in that the programme should instead adopt a targeted and selective

approach to funding senior high education (Cudjoe, 2018; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) believe considering the vulnerabilities of the Ghanaian economy, a targeted approach is unavoidable if Ghana is desirous of pursuing a realistic cause. To them, the inclusion of students whose parents/guardians are capable of paying fees is a huge allocative inefficiency in the secondary education financing of the FSHSP (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021)

1.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Owing to the foregone arguments, there are the rhetorical questions of: Can the programme achieve its intended empowerment objective given its current approach, framework, and conditions? Is there a possible connection between the approach, nature and processes of empowerment and the empowerment outcomes?

It is quite evident that the current approach of the FSHSP has been received with lots of reservations, which does not augur well for the future. It is believed that once there exist some implementation shortcomings due to its approach, they inadvertently compromise the quality of education and its impact on students (Chanimbe & Dankwah, 202; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). Yet, despite this known concern within the discourse on FSHSP, the matter has received very scant scholarly attention. Most studies on the FSHSP have only sought to understand the challenges without examining its impact on educational outcomes (empowerment) (Addo, 2019; Matey, 2020; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). Until this is ascertained empirically, it remains a hypothetical fact that the FSHSP's challenges can compromise the quality of education and empowerment due to its approach. This study, therefore, has the potential to offer leads on the assumed relationship between the programme's challenges and its impact on high school education. And hence, help in addressing this gap in the literature on the FSHSP.

Also, from a health promotion perspective, good health (well-being) is essential, as it is seen as both a means to empowerment and an empowerment end in itself (Green & Tones, 2010). Health in this sense refers to the "state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1946, 2006 cited by Green & Tones, 2010:9). Owing to this, it is imperative to examine good health as an integral part of the empowerment process within the landscape of the FSHSP. Here, particular emphasis will be placed on the influence of the social determinants of health within the school setting. The rationale is to examine the relationship between the well-being of both students and teachers and the existing social environment of schools as defined by the FSHSP. This perceived relationship is still unknown, missing in the literature, and has to be determined. For now, it can only be hypothesised that the inherent challenges and conditions of the FSHSP can be

stressful for both students and educators and can affect student empowerment. Accordingly, it is of great optimism that this study can contribute to both discourses on health promotion and educational policy-making by filling the gap in the literature.

1.4   DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Empowerment

Empowerment is the key concept that underpins this study. I mainly employ Zimmerman's conception of individual empowerment to imply empowerment in this thesis. To him, empowerment refers to the "perceptions of personal control, participation with others to achieve goals, and a critical awareness of the factors that hinder or enhance one's efforts to exert control in one's life" (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998:4). Here, individuals can gain control over their lives and gain a critical understanding of their environment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995:570). Thus, by situating this definition in the context of my study, empowering students means equipping them with the requisite skills, knowledge and competencies to gain control over their lives and to prepare them for their future endeavours including tertiary education.

Free education

As used in this thesis, free education refers to a fee-free approach to schooling (Walton, 2019). Thus, Walton (2019:176) expresses this to mean "schooling where no formal user fee is payable for a student to attend school".

Secondary Education

Secondary education is a phase in the education continuum that succeeds primary education in most countries. According to UNESCO (2005:5), it is the phase responsible "for the development of the young during their adolescence, the most rapid phase of their physical, mental and emotional growth...alongside the acquisition of knowledge and skills".

1.5   OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is structurally organised into eight (8) chapters. The first and present chapter opens the thesis with introductory discussions. The second chapter presents the study's theoretical approach, followed by a literature review in the third chapter. The fourth chapter presents the study's research objectives. Chapter five also discusses the research methodology of the study. It expounds on how the research was conducted and analysed. Chapter six presents the study's findings. The implications of these findings, together with the study's limitations, are then discussed in chapter seven. The final chapter concludes the thesis with a recap of the study's key findings and recommendations for further research and practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the theoretical approach for empirical analysis of the study. The study employs two different and yet interrelated theories to analyse the dynamics of the study's findings. Theory-use in qualitative research mainly provides an orienting lens for data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). Thus, by way of analysis and interpretation, the study employs Zimmerman's theory of empowerment and Antonovsky's theory of Salutogenesis to examine complexities of empowerment (along with its coping strategies and resources) within the landscape of Ghana's FSHSP. These theories are employed in a complementary fashion based on the premise that the complementary usage of multiple theories provides "a series of perspectives with which to explain empirical outcomes" (Cairney, 2013:3).

2.2 EMPOWERMENT THEORY

Although conceptually perceived to be vague, empowerment offers a construct that establishes the mutual links between individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours to social policy and social change (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment theory is a principal theory of community psychology that directs and shapes interventions to improve the well-being of individuals and populations (Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017). Most theorists' theoretical interpretation of empowerment is underpinned by the perception of power (Zimmerman, 1995; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Empowerment theory traces its roots from the educational theory of Paulo Freire (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator whose work centred on understanding the struggles and marginalisation of the oppressed in society and how they could achieve liberation (Demmitt & Oldenski, 1999). Freire's educational theory was concerned with the welfare and needs of the oppressed as learners (Freire, 1970). Although Freire's ideas mainly were conceptualised as educational constructs, his pedagogy was regarded as empowering the oppressed by examining their experiences of oppression and assisting the oppressed in transforming oppressors through reflection and action (Demmitt & Oldenski, 1999). Since the ideas of Freire, issues of empowerment have been of great concern to theoretical thinkers in trying to link individual well-being with the broader social and political environment (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

Now, empowerment, as conceptualised by the empowerment theory, is an "intentional, ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring,

and group participation through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources" (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995:569). In implication, it is suggestive that empowerment is two-tracked; it involves both processes and outcomes (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Thus, to Perkins & Zimmerman (1995), it is always imperative to understand these two tracks of empowerment, in that the actions, activities, or structures define the empowering processes while the outcome of such processes later feeds into the level of empowerment. For this reason, Zimmerman & Warschausky (1998) regard empowered outcomes as consequences of empowering processes that provide a basis for studying the impacts of citizens' quest to attain absolute control over their lives, mainly by the effects of interventions designed to empower participants.

According to Zimmerman (1995), the interplay of the empowering processes and outcomes happens within a multilevel empowerment construct with three levels of analysis (individual, organisational, and community). Each level of analysis, according to Zimmerman (1995), is interdependent with others. Therefore, during the empowering processes, mechanisms are provided for individuals, organisations, and communities to gain mastery and control over issues that concern them, develop a critical awareness of their environment, and participate in decisions that affect their lives (Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998:5). Therefore, empowerment researchers are concerned with operationalising empowerment processes to study their consequences on the various levels of analysis (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). For instance, studies on empowerment outcomes for individuals might be interested in looking at "situation-specific perceived control and resource mobilisation skills" (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995:570) of individuals after an empowerment process.

Against this backdrop, it is worth noting that the study aims to narrow down its empowerment analysis to the individual level of empowerment. This is because "individual empowerment is seen to be important to all other levels of empowerment" (Koelen & Lindström, 2005: S11). Although it is the main aim of Ghana's FSHSP to achieve collective/community empowerment in the long term, it is more expedient to understand how individual students are empowered and how they can account for collective empowerment in the long run. Zimmerman & Eisma (2017) outline that individual empowerment is defined by the interaction of its intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioural components. The intrapersonal component involves all factors associated with individuals' perceptions about themselves, such as perceived competence, perceived control and self-efficacy (Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017). The interactional component also refers to the person-environment interface, which includes analysing the critical meaning one ascribes to their goals and understanding and identifying the social and

material resources needed to attain such goals (Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017). Finally, the behavioural component has to do with an individual's actions to achieve their targeted goals and influence outcomes (Zimmerman, 1995, 2000 cited by Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017). This component also involves "behaviours to manage stress or adapt to change" (Zimmerman, 1995:590).

2.3   THE THEORY OF SALUTOGENESIS

As already mentioned, the theory of Salutogenesis is employed to complement the understanding of empowerment processes and outcomes of the FSHSP. It mainly emphasises individuals' ability to make meaning out of a given empowerment challenge by drawing on coping resources. Koelen & Lindström (2005) believe that empowerment should always be analysed within the framework of Salutogenesis. This is because empowerment and Salutogenesis are closely interdependent (Super et al., 2015). Empowerment thus necessitates utilising coping resources to deal with emerging stressors to "create consistent and meaningful life experiences" (Super et al., 2015:873). A stressor here refers to "a stimulus which poses a demand to which one has no ready-made, immediately available and adequate response" (Antonovsky, 1979:72); whereas coping also refers to the quest to mitigate the harmful effects of stressors by employing coping resources (Folkman, 2011).

The theory of Salutogenesis establishes a "documented relationship" between stressors and coping resources and strategies within the field of health of promotion (Darkwah, Asumeng, & Daniel, 2017:61). Thus, Salutogenesis emerged and is mainly regarded as a stress-coping model (Antonovsky, 1979). Furthermore, it is underpinned by the underlying logic that one's adjustment is defined by their life experiences (Mittelmark & Bauer, 2017). Therefore, a person with a strong sense of adjustment or coherence can identify and mobilise resources to deal with challenging stressors and manage tensions successfully (Mittelmark & Bauer, 2017). In this sense, the Salutogenesis theory refers to the orientation that focuses on the salutary – that is health-enhancing or the origins of health and assets for health – rather than pathogenic – that is, the disease-causing of health or the origins of disease and risk factors (Green & Tones, 2010:12; Mittelmark & Bauer, 2017).

The Salutogenesis theory is rooted in the ideas of Aaron Antonovsky, an American scholar born in 1923 (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2017). Antonovsky's Salutogenesis inspiration can be traced mainly from his life experience with people suffering discrimination, poverty, or the struggle to adjust to a new country as immigrants during his formative years in Israel (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2017). Antonovsky, although cognisant of the struggles of such immigrants, was quite

concerned with how some of these immigrants managed to maintain good health and well-being (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2017). Thus, he began to question why some of these people felt miserable while others managed their struggles quite well; hence his question – how is health created? (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2017). Antonovsky's answer to this question served as a basis for his concept of sense of coherence and Salutogenesis. To him, the ideal question one should be interested in is "not why does one become sick, but how one does move towards the health pole on the ease–disease continuum" (Antonovsky & Sagy, 2017:16).

The Salutogenesis theory hinges on two main threshold concepts; Generalised Resistance Resources (GRRs) and Sense of Coherence (SOC). The GRRs are "biological, material and psychosocial" resources within an individual or their environment that can be drawn on to mitigate the stressors of life (Koelen & Lindström, 2005: S11; Super et al., 2015). Thus, GRRs exist to offer people better chances to deal with the challenges of life. With this, one is mainly concerned with choosing resources that are most appropriate to apply to a given problem and not grieve endlessly when faced with stressful situations (Antonovsky, 1987; Antonovsky, 1996). SOC, on the other hand, also refers to the "pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environments are predictable and that there is a high probability that things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected" (Antonovsky, 1979:123). SOC is seen as the central tenet of the Salutogenesis theory and thus, bolstering people's SOC would increase their ability to impose structure on stressful situations and search for resources that could help them to overcome these stressors (Super et al., 2015:872).

One's SOC is shaped by the three key components of SOC: *Comprehensibility, Manageability, and Meaningfulness*. Comprehensibility (cognitive dimension to SOC) refers to the extent to which one can perceive and understand that the world and its stressors are structured and logical, rather than it being full of unexpected and unknown circumstances (Antonovsky, 1991 as cited by Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017). Manageability (managerial dimension to SOC) refers to the extent of one's ability to accept and appreciate the fact that adequate resources are always at one's disposal, and therefore crucial for dealing with life's stressors and tensions (Antonovsky, 1991 as cited by Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017). Last, meaningfulness (motivational dimension) refers to the extent to which one demonstrates a clear desire to resolve difficulties and willingness to invest energy in overcoming potential stressful situations (Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017). All these three components together influence one's ability to remain healthy despite the stress in their environments (Darkwah et al., 2017:61)

2.4 OPERATIONALISING THE THEORIES OF EMPOWERMENT AND SALUTOGENESIS: LINKING THEM TO ADDRESS THEORETICAL GAPS

The study develops a robust theoretical framework to provide theoretical insights into the nature and processes of student empowerment based on the provisions of the initial roll-out of the FSHSP. The challenge is to find the point of interaction between the processes of empowerment, the well-being of stakeholders involved in the processes, and the outcome of the empowerment outcome. First, the theory of empowerment is employed to offer restricted analysis to the overt or instrumental processes of empowerment. Here, the study aims first to identify and examine the empowering processes and outcomes of the FSHSP as perceived by the study's participants. The rationale is to understand the empowering processes, how the challenges of the FSHSP affect the empowering processes, and how they, in turn, account for the empowered outcomes. Furthermore, the study employs the three components of Zimmerman's theoretical model of individual empowerment, intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioural, to offer further insights into the interplay between empowering processes and empowered outcomes.

However, although the empowerment theory seems robust and can provide an in-depth empowerment insight to the FSHSP, its behavioural component seems vague. The behavioural component seems to offer less in unravelling the cognitive dimension of the empowerment process, specifically tension management (coping). Thus, this particular gap renders the usage of the theory of Salutogenesis, which Kelly and Charlton (1995) describe as a social model, very valuable as it neutralises the gap as mentioned above. The theory of Salutogenesis is employed to provide a coping perspective in understanding how the effects of stressors are mitigated with unique coping mechanisms (GRRs) in achieving better well-being en route to empowerment. The study focuses on identifying the extent to which participants differ in terms of their SOC. Based on the underlying tenets of Salutogenesis, it is expected that the coping responses of the participants in dealing with the stress that comes with the implementation lapses of the FSHSP should reflect their degrees of SOC. Check appendix 2.1 for an overview of the theoretical model developed for a comprehensive empowerment analysis of the FSHSP.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In sum, the chapter primarily offered a brief exposition on the study's theoretical approach for empirical analysis. The study employs the theories of empowerment and Salutogenesis in a complementary fashion. The next chapter discusses the extant literature reviewed for the study.

CHAPTER THREE
LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1   INTRODUCTION

As a point of departure for a critical discussion of the study's empirical findings, it is imperative first to provide a framework that contextualises and establishes the relevance of my study. The idea is to relate the study to a larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature to identify and fill in gaps that require scholarly attention (Creswell, 2014).

In this chapter, I primarily review the extant empirical literature on the ongoing discourse on free education initiatives, emphasising the policy trends in Africa. Discussions will further be narrowed down to Ghana's approach to free education, especially within the context of secondary or high school education. In a brief layout, I will recount what has been documented in the literature regarding free secondary education in Ghana. As part of the literature review, I will take a critical glance at challenges that have crippled free education initiatives in Africa and the dialogue on the attempts by policy actors to cope with these challenges. Again, the case of Ghana's approach to free education, particularly the free senior high school programme, will be spotlighted for critical review – what is the ongoing dialogue in the extant literature? This chapter will wind up by demonstrating the study's practical significance and reiterating how the study fills in the literature gaps. As a result of the gap in the literature, quite a number of the reviewed literature are fairly old and yet offer insightful contextual meaning to the study.

3.2   LITERATURE SEARCH PROCESS

The study went through a rigorous literature search expedition for relevant literature to offer leads on the trajectory of free education policy initiatives and to contextualise my study. I employed three different research information search strategies. The first strategy was to hand search in relevant journals. A catalogue of peer-reviewed journals was made after a google search of available open access educational journals. Although I managed to find a couple of relevant papers via this search, this strategy did not provide much. International Journal of Educational Research at ScienceDirect.com emerged as the most beneficial journal among the legion of educational journals identified. The second strategy also involved finding relevant references in reference lists. This strategy proved very helpful for my search expedition. It made it easier to navigate relevant literature directly linked to the subject matter under review. The last strategy also involved searching thematically in various types of databases. The primary databases that proved crucial for the search exercise were Oria (the University of Bergen Library Database), ERIC, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The selected databases were

considered due to the depth and comprehensiveness of their high-quality literature databases. ERIC, particularly, is regarded as one of the world's largest scientific, educational literature databases with open access to a wide range of educational issues across the globe.

By doing a systematic search of scholarly literature, I embarked on both reference and topic searches – for instance, "Free education in Africa" (Reference search) and "free education" (Topic search). Using Boolean search logic, I combined search terms with "AND" and "OR" to narrow and broaden the search, respectively. For example, some of the word strings used in the Boolean search included "free" And "education", "secondary" OR "high school" AND "education" AND "Ghana", "Challenges" AND "free education" AND "Africa" OR "Ghana", etc. These, together with several other variations of searches, generated very relevant empirical literature, primarily written and published in English.

3.3   EXPLORING FREE EDUCATION IN AFRICA: THE POLICY TRENDS

The notion of formal schooling has evolved to become a global standard for measuring national development. In its present form, schooling now provides a global framework to advance specific standardised ideas about lives, children, knowledge and prosperity (Lotte, 2009). The rationale is to use schooling as the modernised approach to developmental change – "the key to escaping poverty" – where children will be prepared to cope with the local and global webs of change (Nsamenang, 2004; United Nations, 2015). Lotte (2009:3), therefore, refers to this approach as "an optimistic model of planned change".

In light of the global optimism tied to the life-changing prospect of formal schooling, formal education and its inclusion has been a critical thematic area for both international and national policymaking. Owing to this, international organisations, governments, and community leaders in recent times have called on nation-states to ensure sustainable universal participation in education through education policies (Yeboah & Daniel, 2019). According to Levinson & Sutton (2001 cited by Lotte, 2009:8), these education policies define "who can be, and what it is to be, an educated person in a legal sense". It is noteworthy that the pursuance of inclusive educational policies has now been globally embraced as an ideal model for education, including Africa (Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Since the 1960s, Africa has shown immense commitment to advancing formal education through all-inclusive education policies and programmes (Glewwe & Kremer, 2006; Ratna & Rifkin, 2007). In fact, the literature projects Africa, over several decades, to have witnessed an increase in student enrolment through various education policies and programmes (Musau, 2018; Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

Accounting for the significant rise in student enrolment in the past few decades, it is evident that free education agendas have characterised most African educational policies and reforms. Since the dispensation of development goals, which was kickstarted by the introduction of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, some African countries have shown commitment towards reaching these educational ideals through their free education policies (Obiero, 2012; Oketch & Rolleston, 2007; Oketch et al., 2010). Oketch & Rolleston (2007) highlight this point in their assertion that the dispensations of the Education for All (EFA) and MDGs saw a surge in the (re)introduction of free primary education policies in sub-Saharan Africa. Notable among these countries include Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda (Glewwe & Kremer, 2006; Ahmed & Sayed, 2009; Chanimbe, 2019).

Empirical and theoretical studies (such as Brenyah, 2018, Little, 2010, etc.) have demonstrated how African countries have rolled out free education policies in recent years to enhance school enrolments. It is an empirically documented fact that free education has always been a catalyst for high enrolment (Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021; Matey, 2020). Literature on free education in Africa reveals an overriding focus of most African countries to enhance school enrolments through fee-free education programmes, be it at the basic/primary, secondary or higher education level (Brenyah, 2018). Ghana, for instance, after it had introduced its Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), under the dispensation of the MDGs, recorded a significant surge in net enrolment rates (NER) in 2005 (Brenyah, 2018). According to Brenyah (2018), the enrolment impact of free primary education was greatly realised in 2005 and 2015, where Ghana recorded a NER increase of 65.5% and 91.1%, respectively. Similarly, the drastic impact of free education programmes is also reflected in Kenya's free primary education programme in 2003. Kenya also recorded an enrolment optimum of 86.3% in 2007 under its free primary education intervention (Brenyah, 2018).

Despite the increased enrolment intent of free education programmes, these programmes differ in scope and approach, especially in Africa. This boils down to the exact contextual educational problem over and above economic conditions. For instance, a country like South Africa, after it was left with a racially divided education system and economic differences between racial groups in 1994, called for the need to provide free primary education, per the South African constitution (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009). Here, the trajectory of the South African educational reforms has been pro-poor (skewed towards the poor and the vulnerable), especially with the introduction of the fee exemption policy in 2006 (Ahmed & Sayed, 2009). This South African fee exemption policy presents quite a narrow approach to fee-free schooling, unlike in African countries including but not limited to Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania (Brenyah,

2018; Ruff, 2016). Countries like Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, and Tanzania rather adopt a broad (all-inclusive) approach to making education free (Brenyah, 2018; Ruff, 2016; Sakaue, 2018). Sakaue (2018), for instance, discloses how Uganda pioneered an all-inclusive approach to making education free in SAA by introducing a universal school fee abolition policy in 1997. To Sakaue (2018), this broad approach to fee-free schooling culminated in an expansion of access to primary education. Similarly, Ghana, under the fourth republic (since 1992), has made substantial strides in pursuing an all-inclusive free education agenda through programmes such as the FCUBE in 1994, PFSHSP in 2015, and the FSHSP in 2017 (Inoue & Oketch, 2008; Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018).

3.3.1 Making Secondary or Senior High Education Free in Ghana

The equity gaps in the provision of secondary education remain a striking challenge for most developing countries, including Ghana. Chanimbe & Dankwah (2021:1) report in their study that about 80% of 264 million children currently are unable to access secondary education across 65 countries under the Global Partnership for Education programme. These worrying equity gaps are regarded as a threat to global development and have redirected international attention to the importance of secondary education in development (Adu-Ababio & Osei, 2018; Andrés, Asongu, & Amavilah, 2015; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). However, as already mentioned, over the years, equitable access to senior high education in Ghana has been too far-fetched, as access to senior high education remains limited (Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021; Adu-Ababio & Osei, 2018). This is partly a result of the fact that Ghana, just like most developing countries, has been unable to meet the surge in demand for secondary education due to the mass production of primary school graduates (Kiprop et al., 2015; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). For example, Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) report that after introducing the FCUBE in Ghana, five out of 10 children could not access secondary education.

Heeding both the international and national calls to make senior high education accessible to all in Ghana, the formulation of free SHS policies and its politics have been an interesting one. As already introduced in chapter one, the adoption of an absolutely free SHS programme in 2017 was preceded by a public debate as to the right approach to making SHS free, both within the political and academic space (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). The scholarly discourse on free senior high education reveals two main propositions to making secondary education free as spearheaded by the two dominant political parties within the political space – *Progressive Free Senior High Education Versus Absolutely Free Senior High Education* (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019).

The first proposition, progressive free senior high education, as advanced by the New Democratic Party (NDC), favours a progressive approach to free education. This approach is inspired mainly by Ghana's constitutional provision that stresses the gradual introduction of an absolutely free secondary education (Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019). Accordingly, the NDC-led government introduced the PFSHSP in 2015 to mark time for the long-term pursuit of an absolutely free secondary education in Ghana (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018). The PFSHP's scope, which Chanimbe & Dankwah (2021) describe as a cost-sharing approach to free secondary education, encompassed the absorption of expenses of day students and fee waivers such as examination fees, entertainment fees, library, Students Representative Council (SRC) dues, sports fees, culture fees, science development and mathematics quiz fees, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) fees and co-curricular fees for day-students in public SHSs (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019).

On the other hand, the second proposition favours a broad (all-inclusive approach) to free education. With a different outlook on making SHS free, the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP) led government replaced the PFSHP with a new model of financing (FSHSP) in September 2017 (Huylebroeck & Titeca, 2015; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). However, this replacement was due to the lapses rooted in the cost-sharing approach of the FPSHSP (Huylebroeck & Titeca, 2015; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). Furthermore, it was also introduced in fulfilment of a promise to "redefine basic education to include SHSs, covering vocational, agricultural and technical schools, and make it available for free on a universal basis to all Ghanaians" (Asumadu, 2019:19).

3.4 GLANCE AT THE CHALLENGES OF FREE EDUCATION IN AFRICA

The structural and social systems necessary for an effective free education policy/programme implementation have mostly proved elusive in Africa. For this reason, there still exists the primary challenge of addressing educational exclusion amidst the existence of these free education reform frameworks (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015; Donohue & Bornman, 2014). Engelbrecht (2006 cited by Dohoue & Bornman, 2014) explains this phenomenon by linking the structural systems that undergird free education initiatives (the nature and scope of reforms) to the host social system. To Engelbrecht (2006 cited by Donohue & Bornman, 2014:2), educational exclusion, amidst the existence of free education frameworks, is "a reflection of the fragmentation and inequality that characterised society as a whole". This is because the nature and scope of these free educational agendas are unable to neutralise the already institutionalised

discriminatory practices that have created extreme disparities in the delivery of education (Donohue & Bornman, 2014).

The relationship between discriminatory societal practices and educational inequities amidst free education reforms are duly substantiated by empirical studies. Empirical studies establish that most free education reforms are even unable to confront educational injustices along discriminatory lines such as persons with disabilities (Donohue & Bornman, 2014; Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015), gender (Morojele, 2011), and low-income households (Nudzo, 2015; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). For instance, regarding educational inequities tied to persons with disabilities, Donohue & Bornman's (2014) discuss in their study that up to 70% of children of school-going age with disabilities are out of school in South Africa, regardless of over a decade attempt to push for universal education for all children.

Moving away from problems of free education linked to social systems, it is also worth noting that challenges are more contextual (context-specific). This means that they differ in nature across all contexts (within and among countries) (Essuman, 2008; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). The extant literature establishes that the challenges of free education have been different among countries due to the difference in contextual situations. For example, Sakaue (2018) projects how Uganda has struggled to control the proliferation of informal user charges among public schools after pioneering a fee abolishing policy in SSA to achieve universal primary education. His quantitative study identifies a significant exponential increase in informal user charges' frequency and size (from 40% in 2005/2006 to 80% in 2011/2012). However, it is interesting to note that while Uganda regards the mushrooming of informal user charges as a policy challenge, Kenya conversely views the payment of informal fees as a prerequisite for a successful operationalisation of its Free Secondary Education (FSE). For instance, studies such as Adan & Orodho (2015) and Kilonzo (2007) find the unwillingness of some parents to pay informal fees quite problematic since fee payment under the FSE is a shared responsibility.

However, although it is an empirical fact that implementation challenges vary across contexts, there as well exist common recurring challenges across all contexts. Chanimbe (2019), in his study, situates this particular phenomenon by addressing that the issue of insufficiency (that is, lack of financial, human and material resources) is one common challenge that mostly plagues free education reforms within the African context. As already mentioned, free education reforms instigate abrupt surges in school enrolments (Brenyah, 2018; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). Nonetheless, such surges bring about the issue of insufficiency that affects school management and learning (Chanimbe, 2019). African countries such as Kenya, Tanzania,

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Kenya, etc., have all struggled with the common problem of insufficiency (Chanimbe, 2019; Kalunda & Otanga, 2015). For instance, studies such as Kalunda & Otanga (2015) and Huylebroeck & Titeca (2015) corroborate the issue of insufficiency in Kenya and Uganda, respectively. Both studies reveal how increased student enrolment under their free secondary education programmes has culminated in insufficiency problems such as heavy teaching workload on teachers, insufficient teachers to meet the rising number of students and absence of adequate instructional materials (Kalunda & Otanga, 2015; Huylebroeck & Titeca, 2015).

3.4.1 The Case of Ghana's FSHSP: Are the Challenges a Threat to Quality Education and Empowerment?

Prior and even at the early phase of the FSHSP's implementation, there were several cautions on the potential challenges the policy was bound to face, given its approach. Unfortunately, the discourse on its successful implementation and approach was mainly dominated by several queries rather than answers on ways to avoid a rerun of differed free education challenges in Ghana (Cudjoe, 2018; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021; Chanimbe & Prah, 2020). Cudjoe (2018), particularly, cautioned that as much as IMANI as a think tank is not against the implementation of the policy, policy actors ought to engage in more realistic dialogues to confront the present capacity of the policy. According to Cudjoe (2018), this will foster sustainable growth in enrolments and deal with its ability to improve secondary education head-on.

Being cognisant of the expected pitfalls that could potentially plague the FSHSP, the scholarly space has witnessed several empirical studies that have investigated the realities of the policy implementation, with particular interests in the challenges of the policy. Such studies include Addo (2019), Asumadu (2019), Matey (2020), etc. However, one interesting observation from these studies is that most empirically established challenges are seemingly recurring, with few interesting variations. So, in implication, the generalities of the evidence from extant studies either confirm each other or add to the existing literature. On the whole, the empirically documented challenges of the FSHSP encompass poor learning and living conditions, increased workload due to insufficient teachers, funding lapses, infrastructural deficits, quality education issues, payment of illegal fees, and both student and teacher indiscipline (See Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018; Addo, 2019; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021).

The documented challenges give the impression that the policy left the "formulation table" with some salient issues unaddressed — What has been done wrong? In their evaluation of the policy, Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) were quick to label the programme's initial rollout a failure despite the programme itself being positively welcomed by the general populace. Mohammed

& Kuyini (2021) attribute the challenges of the policy to the implementation approach as operationalised by the policy actors. Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) argue that policy actors emphasised the political dimension of the policy (to shore up voter support) to the detriment of the right choices that ought to be made at the adoption, formulation and implementation stage of the policy. To them, the problem was ill-defined, policy actors failed to consider other viable alternatives and solutions, as well as poor execution of some attentive stages (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021).

In perspective, given the problems of the FSHSP, there is the need to question the extent to which the problems are bound to threaten the quality of education offered under the programme. The issues associated with the challenges of the FSHSP seem very clear in the literature. However, what remains unclear is the potential threat of the programme to quality education delivery. Without the effort to empirically substantiate the quality concerns of the policy both in theory and in practice, the policy goals (especially with regards to quality education) will be mere mirages rather than realities. Cudjoe (2018) notably did not shy away from advancing this claim that without a meaningful improvement in quality of education, expansion of secondary education would only waste resources without achieving the projected benefits (Cudjoe, 2018).

Despite the plethora of empirical studies on the FSHSP, there is a significant gap in the literature on quality issues. Most empirical debates have only focused on issues about access, implementation framework, and its related challenges, with scant attention on the content and the outcomes expected (quality of education) (Essuman, 2018). However, it is also noteworthy that quite a limited number of empirical works have superficially established the expected impact of the policy problems on the quality of education offered under the FSHSP (See Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019; Essuman, 2018).

3.4.2 Coping with the Challenges: A Mission Impossible?

In principle, coping is a resource for everyday life. Hence, coping with reform challenges is a dimension of reform analysis that cannot be overlooked. The ability of an operational reform or policy to adjust to its challenges is predicated on the efforts of policy stakeholders to ameliorate them by drawing on coping mechanisms (Chanimbe, 2019). According to Subair (2013 cited by Subair & Talabi's 2015), coping with reform challenges in schools is by no means a "mission impossible", in that it is the primary task of institutional management to identify and address adverse conditions and inadequacy within a given reform that require coping strategies.

Against the backdrop of Subair and Talabi's ideas, I must acknowledge that although empirical studies have shown that stakeholders have continually drawn on coping strategies in school management under specific reforms (Werner, 2011; Kaguri, Ibuathu, & Kubaison, 2014; Godda 2018), there is a gap in the literature on Ghana's FSHSP about this dimension of reform analysis. Justifiably, this gap in the literature on the cruciality of coping mechanisms points to the fact that the literature on FSHSP is still dominated by discussions on access and enrolments, as well as its challenges. The only empirical study I could review on coping strategies, vis à vis the poor conditions of the FSHSP, is the study by Chanimbe (2019). Nonetheless, Chanimbe's (2019) research was only concerned with coping at the institutional and management level to the neglect of coping at the individual level. In his study, Chanimbe (2019:182) concludes that "routine contributions of some actors were of indirect significance to the policy whilst others rendered direct assistance for purposes of mitigating the challenges of the free SHS policy" (Chanimbe, 2019:194). Chanimbe's (2019) study shares some similarities with Kaguri et al.'s (2014) Kenyan study, where school principals sought direct assistance by procuring goods on credit from suppliers in cases of insufficiency.

3.5 CONCLUSION AND CHAPTER SUMMARY

Conclusively, Ghana's FSHSP is relatively recent, and the gaps in the literature are apparent, as demonstrated in the review. For this study, the plan is to build on the existing literature as a process of catch-up in literature where I will delve deeper into the implementing realities on the ground to address literature gaps. The few existing studies have mainly focused on challenges and problems rather than bringing in value judgements. The absence of literature to understand how and why things have unfolded the way they ought and ought not to, and the cumulative contributions of key stakeholders (especially teachers and students) in realising policy goals make it difficult to project the exact implementation realities of the policy. With this as a point of departure, the study will mainly address this literature gap by synthesising data from all dimensions of the FSHSP implementation. The synthesis shall encompass the problems or challenges of the programme, the rationale behind the problems, coping with the problems both at the institutional and individual level and how they cumulatively define the quality of empowerment and education.

In sum, this chapter mainly reviewed the extant literature on the subject matter and the conceptual underpinnings of the study. The next chapter presents the research objectives of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the research objectives of the study. The research objectives direct the focus of the study by stipulating the dimensions of empowerment that the study intends to explore. As already discussed, the study aims to add to the extant literature and fill literature gaps in the scholarly discourse on Ghana's FSHSP. In achieving this purpose, I look at the broader picture, which begs the question - what do I seek to achieve with the study? - hence the central objective of my study. Additionally, to arrive at the broader picture, the focus of the study is to narrow down to the specific aspects of the research phenomenon through succinct sub-objectives. Here, the rationale is to explore how these particular aspects of the empowerment process help shape student empowerment under the FSHSP.

4.2   CENTRAL AND SUB-OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study intends to address the following objectives:

Central Objective

- To explore how the initial roll-out of Ghana's FSHSP has empowered participating students.

Sub-Objectives

- To explore the perception and realities of the initial roll-out of Ghana's FSHSP.
- To identify and map the challenges experienced by participating students and teachers.
- To explore the strategies and resources used by participating students and teachers to mitigate the challenges.
- To examine how participating students have benefited (knowledge, skills, competencies, etc.) from the FSHSP.

The next chapter discusses the research methodology of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE
METHODOLOGY

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a detailed account of the research methodology of the study. In this chapter, I elucidate the connection between the research problem and the study's findings by looking at the methodological framework that justifies the findings and interpretations of the study. The chapter opens with an exposition on the research design as defined by the underlying philosophical paradigm of study. The study adopts the qualitative approach in investigating the research phenomenon. Also, there is a detailed description of the methods of data enquiry that explicates the various data collection tools, participation and recruitment strategies. Finally, the chapter winds up with succinct discussions on the data analysis and interpretation procedures, the trustworthiness of the research and the ethical principles upheld throughout the study.

5.2   RESEARCH DESIGN AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION

The research design refers to the general plan and procedures of the study, right from problem identification to the presentation of findings (Punch, 2014; Creswell, 2014). This study and its research design are grounded in a philosophical paradigm that justifies the methodological approach. Neumann (2011) posits the need to make implicit choices on the right philosophical assumption (ontological and epistemological positions) for social research. This standpoint shapes the understanding of the choices made about the study (Neumann, 2011).

First, I align my ontological/epistemological position with the constructivist[6] philosophical paradigm. This choice is based on the epistemological assumption of constructivism that realities are socially and experientially based, which its form and content are based on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:110-111). In this sense, I believe that the constructivist philosophical paradigm was ideal for this research. It exposed me to a methodological approach that investigates reality and constructions subjectively and interactively, where my research participants developed subjective meanings of their experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Creswell, 2014).

The study adopted a qualitative approach to explore multiple realities within the empowerment process of Ghana's FSHSP. The approach ensured a thorough understanding of the phenomenon by making sense of and interpreting it in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

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[6] Constructivism is a philosophical paradigm, "typically seen as an approach to qualitative research that rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2014:8).

Furthermore, the study employed a case study research strategy in addressing the research problem. One main focus of case studies is to contribute to our knowledge of the individual, group, organisational, social, political, and related phenomena (Yin, 2003:1). In case study research, the researcher investigates the research phenomenon by focusing on a selected case or cases. A case refers to a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (Punch, 2014:121). Hence, the selected cases of the study were students and teachers actively involved in the FSHSP (multiple cases). Here, the rationale was to narrow the empowerment analysis to the selected cases by exploring their experiences relative to the research phenomenon.

5.3   DATA COLLECTION

5.3.1   Study Area

The study drew participation from four different regions in Ghana: The Greater Accra, Ashanti, Eastern and Central Regions of Ghana. The rationale to widen the scope of the research to encompass four regions was to offer a broader perspective to the FSHSP based on students and teachers' experiences from various parts of the country.

However, the idea of extending participation to the regions mentioned above was just situational since that was not the original plan. The study's original intent was to only focus on participants either schooling or teaching in SHSs situated in Accra. This initial choice was based on convenience as Accra happens to be my region of residence in Ghana. Here, I was looking at recruiting participants via my established networks with friends and colleagues in church. However, things did not pan out as planned; I was met with several participation and recruitment problems (I will elaborate further as the chapter unfolds). Getting participants who met my inclusion criteria was quite elusive. Although I managed to recruit seven participants from Accra, I realised that most of them schooled or taught outside Accra and inadvertently forced a change in my study area.

Furthermore, the issue of data insufficiency also made it easier to widen my scope of participation beyond Accra (I will also elaborate further as the chapter unfolds).

Brief Profiles of the Four Regions

The Greater Accra Region, with Accra as its capital city, has the smallest area of Ghana's 16 administrative regions, occupying a land surface of 3,245 square kilometres [7]. It houses all Ghana's key state institutions, including the seat of government. The region has 50 public senior

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[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greater_Accra_Region

high and technical vocational schools according to Ghana Education Service's (GES) 2020 schools' register[8].

The Ashanti Region, also with Kumasi as its capital city, is located in south Ghana. It is the third-largest of the 16 administrative regions, occupying a total land surface of 24,389 square kilometres.[9] The Ashanti Region also has a total of 133 public senior high and technical vocational schools according to GES's 2020 schools' register[10].

The Eastern Region is located in south Ghana and is one of the 16 administrative regions of Ghana. With Koforidua as its capital city, it covers an area of 19,323 square kilometres, which is about 8.1% of Ghana's total landform[11]. The Eastern Region also has 98 public senior high and technical vocational schools according to GES's 2020 schools' register[12].

Last, the Central Region is also one of the 16 administrative regions of Ghana, occupying a total land surface of 9,826 square kilometres[13]. The capital city of the region is Cape Coast, and it has a total of 74 public senior high and technical vocational schools according to GES's 2020 schools' register[14].

5.3.2 Participants and Participation

The study recruited a total of twenty (20) participants. The participants of the study mainly comprised students and teachers recruited from both more privileged (category A) and less privileged schools (categories B and C)[15] within the study area. For comparative analysis, I intended to examine some variations in participants' experiences, especially considering their contrasting backgrounds vis à vis their schools of affiliation. Therefore, for the sake of anonymity, the study will refer to both more privileged (category A) and less privileged schools (categories B and C) as simply **A and B schools**, respectively.

The general inclusion criteria for the study encompassed the following: participants must either be an SHS student or teacher, be affiliated to a public senior high and technical vocational school, and have some experience with the FSHSP. Also, the initial plan was to include

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[8] https://ges.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SHSTVET_SCHOOLS.pdf

[9] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashanti_Region

[10] https://ges.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SHSTVET_SCHOOLS.pdf

[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_Region_(Ghana)

[12] https://ges.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SHSTVET_SCHOOLS.pdf

[13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Region_(Ghana)

[14] https://ges.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SHSTVET_SCHOOLS.pdf

[15] The Ghanaian high school setting is characterised by schools with different reputations and resources. Some of the schools are seen to be more privileged with better teaching and learning resources than others.

participants from the Ministry of Education (MoE); nonetheless, this could not happen after several failed attempts. I made several phone calls to the ministry, but no one was willing to participate in the study. The officials at the MoE seemed unavailable for my research.

Furthermore, data collection for the study was done in two phases, and participation varied across the two phases. This study's two-phase data collection strategy was not a matter of convenience but rather a strategic response to the limitations of conducting a remote online study. The first phase of the data collection involved seven purposively selected participants with the help of a research assistant in the church, the President of the Young People's Guild (YPG). The second phase of participation also involved 13 participants, including two referrals. Eleven students and two teachers participated in this second phase. The essence of this second phase was to expand participation due to the insufficiency of data from the first phase of data collection. Also, there was a need for a second round of data collection since I could not recruit a single teacher during the first round of data collection. Table 5.1 presents a clear description of the distribution of my study participants.

Table 5. 1- Distribution of the study participants.

CATEGORY OF PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Phase One of Data Collection	
Students from A Schools	1
Students from B Schools	6
Total	7
Phase Two of Data Collection	
Teachers from both A and B Schools	2
Students from A Schools	7
Students from B Schools	4
Total	13

5.3.3 Recruitment Strategy

The study mainly used both purposive and snowballing sampling strategies to recruit participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. The purposive sampling strategy is a sampling or selection technique that "intentionally samples a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell & Roth, 2018:213). In contrast, the snowball sampling strategy is "a multistage technique that begins with one or a few people or cases and spreads out based on links to the initial cases" (Neumann, 2011:275). The main reason for employing both recruitment or sampling techniques was to, first, purposively recruit information-rich participants who could provide better insights into

the research phenomenon with their experiences and later extend participation to other individuals who met the inclusion criteria through referrals in case of data insufficiency.

The most dominant sampling technique was the purposive sampling technique in that I only recruited two participants (a teacher and a student) with the snowballing approach. At a point, I had only purposively recruited a teacher from the church (the initial targeted source of data) for the study, which was wholly inadequate. Therefore, I only recruited a second teacher, a friend to the already recruited teacher through his referral. The other referred student also came about when one of the participants requested that her friend participates in the study since she felt her experience could offer a different yet rich perspective to the research problem under investigation.

The recruitment of participants was not an easy one for the study. First and foremost, the targeted source of data, which is the church, could not provide the study with enough participants. I was able to purposively recruit just a handful of the participants from the church with slight variations pertaining to their backgrounds as well. All but one of the students recruited from the church were from B schools (in fact they were from the same school). This situation created an unbalanced representation of students, which in turn called for the need for the study to consider recruitment outside the church. With the help of the recruited teacher from the church, I purposively recruited some students in Kumasi with most of the students from the school he teaches. The teacher additionally recruited students enrolled in other schools through his private tutoring. The teacher purposely recruited a total of ten out of the 11 students.

Finally, gatekeepers were duly engaged for formal clearances to gain access to informants, especially those from the church and schools in Kumasi, as part of observing ethical research protocols. The primary gatekeepers involved in the study included the head minister of the church, administrator, presidents of the various youth and student groups and the recruited teacher from the church who doubled as both a gatekeeper and a research assistant in his school.

5.3.4 Methods of Data Collection

The study used qualitative methods of data collection. Nonetheless, data collection was remotely carried out as it resorted to online data collection tools and other remote strategies for gathering data. Thus, the study drew on in-depth online individual interviews, written responses to open-ended questions and an online document from the MoE for triangulation purposes.

Justifiably, due to the global threat of the Covid-19 pandemic and the various travelling restrictions put in place in that light, remote data collection strategies emerged as the surest

practical way of making this research possible. Moreover, since technological advancement, online data collection has emerged and increasingly become a popular research methodology in social research (Granello & Wheaton, 2004).

In-Depth Individual Interviews

The study aimed to draw on informants' experiences by way of in-depth interview engagements. According to Punch (2014:144), an in-depth interview is an effective way of investigating "people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality". As already mentioned, some of the study's data emerged from in-depth individual interviews via end-to-end encrypted online instruments: WhatsApp and Zoom.

I planned on using zoom to interact with participants due to its "ability to securely record and store sessions without recourse to third-party software" (Archibald et al., 2019:2). However, I ended up with only two face to face interviews for the study (two teachers), which was quite disappointing for me and posed a severe limitation to the study (further elaboration in the discussion chapter). The first interviewee consented to zoom videoconferencing, whereas the second instead opted for WhatsApp videoconferencing due to convenience. With the second interviewee, he felt comfortable participating on WhatsApp rather than on zoom. Moreover, he did not find it needful to download the zoom application when he already had WhatsApp on his device, which could equally serve the same purpose. Nonetheless, I had no problem agreeing to his request since WhatsApp videoconferencing also had the inherent security feature of real-time encryption of meetings. However, the session via WhatsApp was recorded with a digital audio sound recorder since it does not have a built-in recording feature.

With the two conducted interviews, informants were asked to share their thoughts on all the various dimensions of the study. The interviews were mainly in five parts (check appendix 5.1 for a copy of the interview guide). The interviews typically started with basic introductions, where the purpose of the study was well explained to the interviewees. Here, the intent was to make participants feel at ease with the interviewer without giving room for unintended tensions and anxieties. The interviews then proceeded with the second, third, fourth, and fifth parts. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on their perceptions of the FSHSP (including the realities of its implementation), their challenging experiences, their coping strategies, and empowerment issues, respectively.

The first and second interviews lasted for about 30 minutes and an hour, respectively. I had intermittent breaks for the second participant throughout his session as he felt exhausted after a stressful day in school. Also, as part of the introductory remarks, participants were made to

consent to the informed consent form and my intention of audio recording the entire meeting. All the participants agreed to my purpose of recording the entire exercise using either the zoom recording feature or an audio recorder for the WhatsApp meeting.

Written Responses to Open-Ended Questions

The study also employed written responses to open-ended questions as a data collection method. In fact, this particular data collection method emerged as the most prevalent or strategy for the study. However, it is worth noting that this specific method (written responses to open-ended questions) was unintended. It was employed as a creative alternative to both qualitative interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD) as initially planned. In addition to my inability to recruit enough participants for in-depth interviews, the study also failed with its initial idea of running an FGD with the student; hence, the need for an alternative data collection method.

Given the potential data collection challenges one is likely to face as a qualitative researcher, qualitative researchers believe that qualitative studies must be carried out flexibly to allow room for creativity in developing data collection strategies (Hanson, Balmer, & Giardino, 2011). In my study, this creative and flexible nature of qualitative studies was brought to bear when I had to deal with the challenges of insufficient participants for in-depth interviews and the failed FGD. On this account, I decided on using written responses to open-ended questions to gather relevant data until saturation[16] is reached. The usage of written responses to open-ended questions in qualitative research is not new to the literature. Weller et al. (2018:2) explain that written responses to open-ended questions can be beneficial in social research, where it can be used "alone or in combination with other interviewing techniques to explore topics in-depth, understand processes, and to identify potential causes of observed correlations".

This data collection tool was both employed at the first and second phases of the data collection. It was first used at the first phase of the data collection after I had failed to collect data through the FGD. It was subsequently used at the second phase as the only practical way to gather data from the students in Kumasi. Although this data collection strategy or tool produced lists and short answers, as cautioned by Weller et al. (2018), saturation was reached after gathering 11 responses as few or no new ideas and themes appeared. By operationalising this data collection strategy, participants (students) were asked to provide written answers to open-ended questions just as captured in the interview guide (check appendix 5.2 for a copy of the open-ended

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[16] The idea of saturation comes from grounded theory that refers to the point when you stop collecting data because the data no longer sparks new insights into the research phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

questions for students). In this sense, the students were able to share their experiences in writing under the supervision of my two research assistants - the President of the YPG (Accra) and the teacher who had earlier on participated in the study (Kumasi). Except for one participant who emailed her written responses directly, all written responses were scanned and forwarded to me by the research assistants. Table 5.2 presents a description of the distribution of both my interview and written response participants with their pseudonyms for anonymity.

Table 5. 2- Distribution of the interview and written response participants with their pseudonyms.

PSEUDONYMS	GENDER	PARTICIPATION	INSTITUTION
Students from B Schools			
Hilda	Female	Written Response	B1 SHS
Magdalene	Female	Written Response	B1 SHS
Patricia	Female	Written Response	B1 SHS
Annie	Female	Written Response	B2 SHS
Eric	Male	Written Response	B3 SHS
Victor	Male	Written Response	B4 SHS
Solomon	Male	Written Response	B5 SHS
Daniel	Male	Written Response	B1 SHS
Sampson	Male	Written Response	B1 SHS
Clarence	Male	Written Response	B1 SHS
Students from A Schools			
Griselda	Female	Written Response	A1 SHS
Mabel	Female	Written Response	A2 SHS
David	Male	Written Response	A3 SHS
Emmanuel	Male	Written Response	A3 SHS
Mark	Male	Written Response	A3 SHS
Paul	Male	Written Response	A3 SHS
Collins	Male	Written Response	A3 SHS
Mathew	Male	Written Response	A4 SHS
The Teacher from A School			
Joshua	Male	Individual Interview	A3 SHS
The Teachers from B School			
Dennis	Male	Individual Interview	B6 SHS

Secondary Source: Documents

Documentary data is widely regarded as a rich data source for qualitative research (Punch, 2014:158). Therefore, the study intended to resort to documentation reviews to help unravel the documented facts, especially regarding students' performances under the FSHSP and their living conditions. Furthermore, through documentation reviews, I intended to do a comparative

analysis of examination statistics of students before and after the programme's implementation. However, the study only managed to review a single online document[17] due to my inability to access participants at the MoE. This online document is the implementation guide of the FSHSP that was presented to the parliament of Ghana by the minister of education, Hon. Matthew Opoku Prempeh.

5.3.5 Data Management

First, all verbal data through the individual interviews were ethically recorded and processed using my personal password-protected computer. The written data (primarily handwritten) were also processed using my personal password-protected computer. All handwritten responses were typed into Microsoft Word files. Furthermore, the recorded audio data from the zoom and WhatsApp interviews were transcribed into textual data using Microsoft Word and stored at the University of Bergen (UiB) SAFE system via its Microsoft Remote Desktop and Cisco AnyConnect connection. I was the only one who had access to the data. My supervisor only accessed the data upon request. Furthermore, the data were transcribed and presented without giving room for identity tracing as personal details were deleted after the complete transcription of my data. This was achieved via the usage of pseudonyms for anonymity,

5.4 DATA ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Data analysis involves breaking down and interpreting complex field data into meaningful units shaped by the research questions (Creswell, 2014). The study employed NVivo and Attride-Stirling Thematic Network Analysis (2001) to manage and analyse the qualitative data. NVivo was mainly used to organise the data into codes and themes to demonstrate relationships between the emerged empirical data and the theoretical ideas that underpin the study. The analysis process was done systematically following Attride-Sterling's (2001) three-stage (six-step) thematic analytical framework.

The first stage was text reduction, reducing the bulky transcript texts into manageable text segments (Attride-Sterling, 2001). Being guided by a coding framework, I started by reducing the texts into basic codes using NVivo (step 1). The coding framework was based on recurring issues about the theoretical constructs and the study's research objectives. The codes were further abstracted into themes (step 2). This was done by first identifying the relevant codes and further refining these codes into meaningful patterns and structures (themes) after several

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[17] Check
http://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1250/330628101521_0001.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

rereading of the codes. After the themes were refined, I constructed my thematic networks by organising themes into basic themes, organising themes, and global themes (step 3). Finally, these themes were illustrated in a web-like manner to show their relationship as reflected in the data.

The subsequent analysis stage was to explore the texts by presenting my analysis in the findings chapter. Here, I mainly described, explored, and summarised the thematic networks identified to reflect my participants' experiences. Then, by describing, exploring, and summarising the networks (steps 4 and 5), I presented the global themes, organising themes, and basic themes in a sequential manner with supporting quotes (examples) for the audience/reader to follow and understand the data presented.

Finally, the analysis process ended with the integration of exploration stage. At this stage, I critically interpreted all the significant themes and related them to the research objectives and theoretical framework that underpin the study. This mainly happened in the discussion chapter. Check Appendices 5.3, and 6.1 for the coding table and thematic networks that were developed through the data analysis framework.

5.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF RESEARCH

The study employed Guba's (1981) four validity measures in enhancing the study's trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which study participants and readers consider the research findings credible and accurate (Yilmaz, 2013). In achieving credibility, the study aimed at using a known methodological approach in investigating the research problem. Since I was interested in exploring the subjective empowerment experiences of students and teachers under the FSHSP, a qualitative study (case study) was the known methodological approach that could grant me such insights. Moreover, similar previous FSHSP studies had also successfully employed qualitative methods in their studies. Thus, it was easier to follow suit and incorporate the appropriate operational measures such as the nature of questions asked, methods of data analysis to help enhance the credibility of my study (Yin, 2014; Shenton, 2004).

Also, in ensuring the data credibility, I drew on different methods (individual interviews, written responses to open-ended questions and documentation) and other categories of participants (teachers and students with diverse backgrounds) to enable data triangulation.

Using informants with diverse backgrounds was essential in ensuring triangulation. It gave me a rich picture of empowerment experiences in schools of different reputations (Shenton, 2004).

Familiarity also played a crucial role in enhancing data credibility. Before the study, I had already familiarised myself with the study context through formal and informal dialogues. Also, since some of the participants were from my church in Ghana, they were highly comfortable participating in the study, as their President (the gatekeeper) and I were no strangers to them. Participants in Kumasi similarly felt very comfortable working with their teacher. All the gatekeepers cooperated so well due to my "prolonged engagement" with them over the years (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson et al., 1993). This also served as a tactic to ensure honesty in the informants.

Furthermore, I also had the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues at school and sessions with my supervisor to discuss my data, its analysis and certain choices made. In this regard, I received valuable comments along with coding suggestions during the data analysis. This enhanced the credibility of my study.

Finally, I also provide thick contextual descriptions to depict the exact situations encountered and investigated. Without this description, it will be difficult to substantiate the validity of the study's findings (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

Transferability concerns how the study's findings apply to a similar setting or context (Yilmaz, 2013). The study achieved transferability by offering enough contextual information and thick descriptions of the research setting and other contextual behaviours. The aim was to provide a premise for similar studies in different contexts and add to the literature in similar settings on similar topics. Transferability will further be discussed in the discussion chapter.

Dependability

Dependability refers to how replicable the study is if it is repeated with the same methodological approach in the same context and with the same participants (Shenton, 2004). In this light, all procedures such as the research design and its operationalisation, data gathering processes (interview guides, interview processes, open-ended questions, etc.), and study limitations are accurately documented for future repeated studies.

Confirmability

Finally, confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher can demonstrate objectivity right from the data collection stage to the analysis and presentation of findings (Shenton, 2004).

Here, I achieve confirmability by showing that the research findings are objectively grounded in my data and not my own predispositions (Shenton, 2004).

5.6   ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

My role as the researcher in this study was examined from a reflexivity standpoint. Reflexivity is a concept in qualitative research that denotes the extent to which a researcher's background, biases and position influence directly or indirectly the aims, analysis and interpretation, and quality of the study (Malterud, 2001). Being cognisant of the effect of the preconceptions and biased positions that I could bring into the study, I needed to uphold the principle of objectivity throughout the whole research period. Considering how political Ghana's FSHSP is, I was faced with not bringing any political sentiment to the study as that could, in turn, twist the objective substance of the research data and its interpretation. Throughout the study, I kept reflecting on how my preconceptions emanating from my previous personal and professional experiences and the extant literature would not instigate competing conclusions vis à vis my actual data (Malterud, 2001).

5.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics in qualitative studies has to do with the "matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others" in the research (Bulmer, 2001:45). Thus, the researcher must pay attention to "what are good, right, or virtuous courses of action" (Punch, 2014:36). In this study, I was highly conscious of the potential threats of my actions and inactions on the rights of my participants (Bulmer, 2001). Therefore, all necessary ethical behavioural measures were put in place to ensure all participants felt secure and protected throughout the study. These include informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity and instances of ethical clearance.

5.7.1   Informed Consent, Confidentiality, and Anonymity

Informed consent is an ethical virtue that was well observed mainly at the data collection stage. It concerns how willing and prepared the targeted participants are to participate in the research. This principle specifies that "persons who are invited to participate in social research activities should be free to choose to take part or refuse, having been given the fullest information concerning the nature and purpose of the research, including any risks to which they personally would be exposed..." (Bulmer, 2001:49). In this connection, all participants were given a quick briefing on the study, its aim, and its implications without leaving them in doubt. Upon confirming their participation, all participants were asked to consent to informed consent forms

before engaging them in any form of discussion (Check appendix 5.4 for a copy of the informed consent form).

Furthermore, the study saw that all participants were well protected by protecting their personal details while anonymising their identities to prevent identity tracing. All data were tightly controlled and stored under password protection through the UiB SAFE system. The data will be deleted right after the completion of the study. In terms of its presentation, the study anonymises all participants by disassociating any personal information from the research data.

5.7.2   Instances of Ethical Clearance

First, it was ethically binding to receive ethical clearance from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) through the University of Bergen. My clearance application was assessed and approved on the 5th of August, 2020 (See appendix 5.5 for the ethical clearance from the NSD). Also, the study was registered in RETTE, UiB's system for risk and compliance. Finally, I also applied for verbal clearances from the various gatekeepers engaged in the study.

5.8   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided a detailed account of the study's research methodology in an attempt to offer an ex-post insight into how the initial approach of Ghana's FSHSP has empowered participating students given its challenges. The study employed a qualitative approach, specifically a multiple case study with its cases being students and teachers actively involved in the FSHSP. Moreover, multiple sources of data collection were employed for data triangulation. The chapter also offered some discussions on issues of trustworthiness, researcher reflexivity, and the ethical principles upheld by the researcher.

The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER SIX
FINDINGS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present the findings of the study. The findings chapter offers empirical evidence and insights into the research phenomenon through the lens of the participants of the study. The chapter is structurally made up of four main sections organised along the four broad themes (global themes) that emerged from the study's data.

6.1.1   Organisation and Presentation of the Findings

The chapter interprets the analysed qualitative data garnered through in-depth individual interviews, written responses to open-ended questions, and a document analysis. As already discussed in the preceding chapter, after a systematic thematic network analysis process, the data transcripts were synthesised into basic themes (lowest order logics), organising themes (higher-order abstract principles), and global themes (super-ordinate logics). The global themes as teased out from the text transcripts include: *a) Initial Roll-out of the FSHSP - Purpose and Scope; b) Policy Implementation Experiences; c) Coping Strategies and Resources; and d) Empowerment.* By dint of this, the main sections of the chapter are organised to express the four central thematic constructs of the data as mentioned above. Furthermore, these sections are developed with sub-sections that dissect the main ideas into lower-order meaningful logics – what was said and how that is especially significant in the texts as a whole (Attride- Stirling, 2001:389. The rationale is to tell a coherent story with the basic themes and organising themes that form the basis for the global theme (the main section). Table 6.1 provides a succinct overview of the various themes teased out from the thematic network analysis of my data.

Furthermore, in terms of data presentation, pseudonyms will be used to identify participants for the purposes of anonymity and protection of participants. The study aims to project only the perception of students and teachers and instead not to give clues to the identities of these participants either by way of description or real names; hence, the usage of pseudonyms for both their names and institutions of affiliation. It is also worth noting that relevant quotes from participants will be used to illustrate the exact minds expressed by the participants. In addition, red and grey quotes will be used to represent quotes from participants from A and B schools, respectively, for clarity and comparisons between these two categories of participants. Black quotes will also be used to represent quotes from documents.

Table 6. 1 – Succinct overview of themes

Basic Themes	Organising Themes	Global Themes
- Economic intent of the programme - All-inclusive senior high education	Purpose of the Programme	Initial Roll-out of the FSHSP - Purpose and Scope
- What policy implementers provided - Fee payment under the programme	Scope of Implementation	
- Poor learning conditions - Poor living conditions - Poor attitude of teachers - A struggle free experience	Challenges of the Programme - Students' Perceptions	Policy Implementation Experiences
- Increased enrolment related stress - Economic related stress - Other challenges - A challenge free experience	Challenges of the programme - Teachers' Perceptions	
- Blame on institutions - Blame no one	The Blame Game	
- Intrinsic drive to mitigate challenges - Extra tuition	Individual level Strategies	Coping Strategies and Resources
- Government's Responses to Challenges - Efforts by the School Authorities	Institutional Level Responses and Resources	
- Well-being of students and teachers	Implications of the Institutional level Responses	
- Good quality tuition offered - A significant drop in the quality tuition offered	Perception of the Quality of Tuition	Empowerment
- Appreciable level of knowledge and competence gained - Problems with knowledge and skills acquisition	Knowledge, skills and competencies Acquisition	
- Impact of the free shs on students' academic development	Empowerment Implications of the FSHSP	

6.2   INITIAL ROLL-OUT OF THE FSHSP – PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This section offers insights into the implementation process of the initial roll-out of FSHSP through the lens of the study's participants (students and teachers). It presents findings on the perceptions and realities of the implementation process of the FSHSP. Hence, this section addresses the first sub-objective of the study.

Given this, the study was interested in knowing how students and teachers perceive and understand the purpose of the FSHSP. It also investigated the scope of the implementation at the school level (what has been done so far). Therefore, through interviews and the written responses to open-ended questions, participants were asked to comment on how they have understood the FSHSP; and how the programme's implementation has panned out at their respective schools. The subsequent sub-sections will discuss the issues mentioned above.

6.2.1 Purpose of the Programme

All participating students and teachers exhibited a great deal of understanding of the FSHSP. They demonstrated in various forms how the policy had been introduced to help the ordinary Ghanaian child go through senior high education without systemic obstacles in any shape or form. Participants talked about various aspects of the programme's purpose, cutting across the economic intent and all-inclusiveness of secondary education under the FSHSP.

First, eight of the participants pointed out the economic relevance of the policy. They generally stressed two broad issues concerning the economic intent of the programme. The first group (six out of eight of the participants – two teachers and four students) reflected on how the programme had been designed to eliminate all forms of financial constraints by making secondary education free of charge. Two out of the four students noted: *The FSHSP was to help reduce streetism and also help students who could not afford the fees.* (**Patricia from B1 SHS**); *"It is a policy implemented by the government with the intention that every Ghanaian student will get access to education at the secondary level free of charge* (**Paul from A3 SHS**). The two teachers also noted: *"It aims to take out the element of cost as a barrier to education at the senior high school level in Ghana.* (**Joshua from A3 SHS**)

> *Since financial constraints of some Ghanaians could be an impediment to the goal of the policy, the government decided to introduce and implement the free senior high school programme.* (**Dennis from B6 SHS**)

The remaining two out of the eight participants (Victor and Mathew, both students), while reflecting on the economic intent of the programme, also mentioned how the programme had relieved parents of their financial distresses. For instance, Victor discussed this relief: *"It is the programme the government brought to help our parents to save money"* (**A student from B4 SHS**)*. Mathew, on the other hand, also explained:

> *"The free senior high school programme is a policy by the government to ease financial burden on parents who find it difficult to enrol their wards in the senior high schools and the students are freely taken care of"* (**A student from A4 SHS**)

Even though eight of the participants accentuated the economic relevance of the programme, many of the participants (nine of them) instead looked at the all-inclusiveness of the programme. To these participants, the programme's primary purpose is to pursue an all-inclusive senior high education in Ghana. In light of this, eight out of the nine participants said that the programme offers an opportunity for all students to access secondary school.

Two of the students, for instance, mentioned: *"It was to enrol all students both poor and rich"* **(Magdalene from B1 SHS).**

> *The free Senior High School programme is a policy provided by the current government ensuring that every SHS student would have secondary education without paying fees. The policy is to ease financial burden on parents who find it difficult to enrol their wards in the senior high schools, and the students are freely taken care of* **(Griselda from A1 SHS).**

The two teachers also had this to say:

> *With the Free SHS policy, students who hitherto could not afford to be in the Senior High Schools now have the opportunity to be in school.* **(Joshua from A3 SHS)**

> *The aim of the government is to make the senior High school certificate the basic for all Ghanaians who have undergone formal education in the country.* **(Dennis from B6 SHS)**

Mabel, one of the nine participants, also gave a futuristic outlook on the programme and what it seeks to achieve with its all-inclusive senior high education. Mabel (a student) discussed that:

> *The free SHS programme was implemented to educate the youth of the nation so that majority of the people of this nation will be educated to help to improve the economy of the nation.* **(A student from A2 SHS)**

6.2.2 Scope of Implementation

The study's findings suggest that the policy's scope of implementation somewhat differed across the various schools. The findings reflected two main issues to the implementation of the programme: *what programme implementers provided and fee payment under the programme (fees that parents were made to pay).*

Regarding the first issue, the study was interested in ascertaining the exact programme features that characterise the initial roll-out of the FSHSP. Accordingly, the participants revealed two dimensions that reflect the elements of FSHSP as operationalised by programme implementers. First, some participants expressed the programme to have been duly implemented to reflect its exact purpose based on the packages provided by the programme implementers. Three of these participants (two teachers and a student) revealed the following programme packages offered at their respective schools. This is what the teachers said:

> *From admission to the completion of the three-year programme offered to the students, everything is cost-free. No admission charges, no tuition and boarding fees,*

no PTA dues. Everything is free of charge. Some items needed by students are also provided for free for them. Items like school uniforms, house jerseys, tracksuits, note and exercise books, pamphlets, calculators, mathematical sets etc., are all provided free of charge for the students **(Joshua from A3 SHS).**

Joshua, while speaking on the free SHS package, furthermore rhetorically questioned that:

Now on the students, the question should be: What has the government not provided for the students to help them in their studies? Simple, just their provisions (toiletries, snacks etc.) which is a necessity for every student. Apart from these, the government has provided almost everything free for the students; aside providing them with free tuition, they have also been provided with: free school uniforms, house jerseys, tracksuits, exercise and notebooks, calculators, mathematical sets etc. **(A teacher from A3 SHS)**

Dennis, also on the free SHS package, expressed:

The secondary school is a 3-year programme. Upon admission, students only report to school with personal and basic items including sponge, soap, toothbrush, white shirts, trousers, pair of shoes etc... The package of the free SHS programme include admission charges, tuition fees, feeding (3 square meals daily), accommodation, exercise books, textbooks, school uniforms and house attires **(A teacher from B6 SHS)**

Hilda, the student among the three participants, similarly noted that she knows that the *"free senior high school programme covers all fees, accommodation fees, WASSCE* [18] *registration fee for all students"* **(A student from B1 SHS)**. Second, while Joshua, Dennis, and Hilda reported on the various packages of the programme, Joshua, together with the reviewed online document from the Ministry of Education (MoE), also discussed the double-track system as one of the striking features of the programme introduced to ensure effective implementation. Joshua particularly commented that:

With the high intake of students, they have been grouped into two tracks which are the Gold track and the Green track student... Due to the high student intake and its associated problems, students need to be put into groups being the Gold and Green tracks. One track comes to spend some months in school, vacates and goes home for the other track to come and use the resources **(A teacher from A3 SHS)**

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[18] The West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASCE) is a type of standardized test for final year senior high students residing in anglophone west African countries.

The reviewed online document from the MoE revealed the double-track system as:

> *An intervention that allows schools to accommodate more students within the same facility and is often motivated by its potential to improve overcrowding as well as to save costs relative to new school construction in the short term* (***MoE document***)**.**

According to the MoE document, the double-track system seeks to: *Create room to accommodate increase in enrolment; Reduce class sizes; Increase contact hours*, and *Increase the number of holidays.* Figure 6.1 presents an SHS calendar demonstrating how the double-track calendar was run in tandem with the already existing single-track calendar for the second- and third-year students. Looking at figure 6.1, the SHS two and three students who were not on the FSHSP during the initial roll-out of the programme had to continue with the already existing single-track SHS calendar. As a result, they spent full 81 days of teaching days in each term. On the other hand, the FSHSP's first year students had to run a green and gold double-track system.
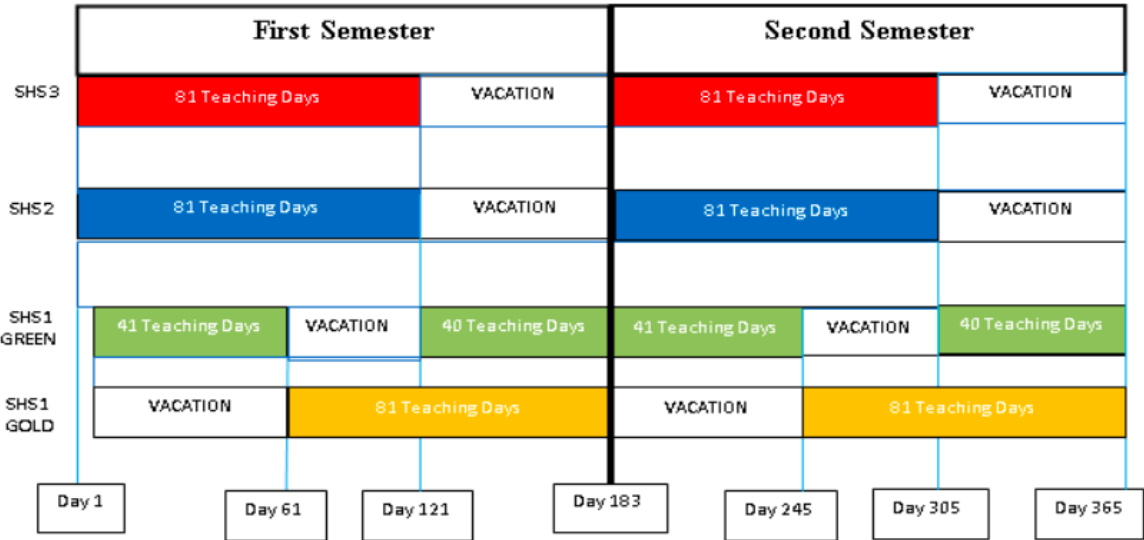
Figure 6. 1 SHS Calendar for both single and double-track systems *(Adopted from MoE, 2018)*

The second issue on the programme's implementation concerns the state of fee payment under the programme (fees that parents were made to pay). Most of the students (12) confirmed how the programme had been rolled out to eliminate all forms of cost in various measures. They generally expressed a fee-free programme when asked about what they still had to pay for under the programme. This is what three of the students mentioned: *"Guardians/parents/students pay nothing at all"* (**Eric from B3 SHS);** *"There is absolutely nothing to pay for under the free senior high school programme"* (**Mathew from A4 SHS);** *"Everything that needs to be paid for has already been paid and is absolutely free... The only thing paid in my school was club dues, aside that everything was free"* (**Annie from B2 SHS**).

While most students indicated that they had experienced a fee-free programme entirely, nine of the students revealed a contrasting picture of the state of fee payment under the programme in their schools. To them, the FSHSP was by no means entirely free. They still had to pay for other expenses, albeit they enjoyed most fee waivers under the FSHSP. Furthermore, these students expressed diverse forms of items and services that they were made to pay:

> *I still paid for my stationaries, extra textbooks, extra classes during vacation, which was quite expensive due to the duration of our vacations, some belongings such as snacks, clothes, cosmetics and many more* **(Griselda from A1 SHS).**

Adding to what Griselda said, certain items and services such as *"school apparel and others articles"* **(Emmanuel from A3 SHS),** *"certain uniforms"* **(Mabel from A2 SHS),** *Practicals* **(Victor from B4 SHS),** "*printing fees for class tests"* **(Collins from A3 SHS),** and *"basic provisions like milk, gari, sugar, milo and others"* **(Solomon from B5 SHS)** were all paid for by the students mentioned thereof under the programme. Mark **(a student from A3 SHS),** particularly, expressed his disappointment in having to *"pay for book fees of which the government has officially made it free for all students".*

Summing up...

The above-discussed findings indicate a robust implementation structure instituted by the government for an effective FSHSP implementation. Although some of the participants expressed some dissenting views concerning the fee payment under the programme, most participants did admit that the policy or programme was duly implemented as expected. Check appendix 6.1 for the thematic network analysis of the discussed findings.

6.3 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION EXPERIENCES

This section primarily builds on the preceding section as it delves deeper into the initial roll-out of the FSHSP at the school level. This section addresses the second sub-objective of the study, that is, *to identify and map the challenges experienced by participating students and teachers.* In this light, I present findings on the programme's challenges as perceived by students and teachers. In addition, I will outline participants' perceptions of stakeholders' responsibility for the FSHSP's implementation anomalies.

6.3.1 Challenges of the Programme - Students' Perceptions

It was the aim of the study to investigate the challenging experiences of students under the FSHSP. Participants were quite intent on revealing the various challenges they had to deal with throughout their stay in school. The students' challenges were mainly resource and system-related (poor learning and living conditions), and attitudinal (poor attitude of teachers).

However, the study's findings also reveal a category of students who appeared to have enjoyed a somewhat challenge-free experience.

First, most students expressed deteriorating learning conditions under which they were made to thrive. The students expressed different shades of learning challenges that had sprouted up due to worsened learning conditions under the programme. For instance, six of these students expressed the negative ramification of increased enrolments under the programme on the already existing resources of the school. According to them, schools have now been compromised by the sheer lack of enough learning resources to serve all students. Paul (**a student from A3 SHS**) particularly expressed how the situation has inadvertently engendered an undue *"pressure on the school facilities"* such as *"dining halls, labs, etc."* Mabel also recounted: *"Our teachers kept on changing since our numbers were huge. They needed more teachers for the job"* **(A student from A2 SHS).** However, I must say that the most prevalent resource challenge expressed by the students was the inadequacy of study desks and classrooms. Victor and Hilda, for instance, mentioned: *"Many students have been enrolled on the programme, and there are not enough classrooms etc."* **(Victor from B4 SHS);** *"Again, double-track made the desk insufficient for us"* **(Hilda from B1 SHS).**

While the students mentioned above discussed the issue of inadequate learning resources, seven of the students (including Mabel and Patricia) reflected on how they now have limited time to learn under the FSHSP and its double-track system. Generally, these students all agreed that the introduction of the double-track system compromised learning. In this light, David **(a student from A3 SHS)** particularly expressed that they are now faced with *"poor academic work"* and *"this is due to the double-track system.* David further added that *"this is because students do not get enough time to study".* Two of the students also noted:

> *One major challenge that students are facing under the free SHS policy is the inadequate time spent in school due to the track (green/gold) system...Due to the track system introduced as a result of the free SHS policy, I have not been able to complete most topics I am expected to* **(Mark from A3 SHS).**
>
> *The double-track system. We understand that the government wants to enrol the majority of the students in school. The introduction of the double-track system is not helping. Students spend little time in school so that the next track can also come for studies...For this reason, teachers are not able to complete the syllabus, accurate preparation towards their final exam, that is, the WASSCE* **(Mabel from A2 SHS)**

Due to the limited time for learning, two of the students (Paul and Mathew) expressed how they have been made to work under stressed conditions:

Long term vacation due to the double-track system has led to pressure on students to finish up with the expected topics to prepare towards the final exam (WASSCE) **(Mathew from A4 SHS)**

The school system has changed, but the syllabus remained unchanged. The change in the school system has restricted the number of days/terms we are going to spend in school. As a result of that, most topics under the various subjects have to be completed within this short range of time. **(Paul from A3 SHS)**

Still on the poor learning conditions under the FSHSP, two of the students (Griselda and Clarence) simply expressed how difficult the double-track system was: *"Also, though it did not really affect me, the double-tracking system did affect many of my friends who are a year or two younger than me"* **(Griselda from A1 SHS);** *"The double-tracking has been difficult and frustrating"* **(Clarence from B1 SHS).**

Second, the study's findings reveal that increased student enrolment also robbed students of a quality standard of living under the programme. Just like how increased enrolment of students exacerbated learning conditions, some of the students (five of them) also expressed how students had to struggle through certain poor living conditions in their respective schools due to increased enrolment. All but one of these students who expressed this sentiment were from B schools. For instance, three of the five students recounted how they faced feeding-related problems: *"Okay, for my school, certain privileges were removed due to this programme. Also, our delicious menu became a total wreck"* **(Griselda from A1 SHS);** *Some of the challenges are because of the free SHS. They are not able to cook well to feed the students....* **(Victor from B4 SHS);** *The only problem was the delay in food, and that was little frustrating* **(Annie from B2 SHS).** The other two students, Sampson and Hilda, also superficially mentioned the accommodation and water-related problems they had to deal with in their respective schools: *"Insufficient dormitories to accommodate all students. And for that matter, some have to move to the hostel"* **(Sampson from B1 SHS);** *"What was challenging for us mainly was getting water* **(Hilda from B1 SHS)***."*

Third, teachers were also identified as being one of the main problems of the programme. Here, three of the students revealed the poor attitudes of some teachers towards the FSHSP. Teachers play a crucial role in knowledge acquisition in the Ghanaian senior high education system. In this vein, poor attitudes of teachers imply ineffective teaching. Considering the cruciality of the role of teachers, David, Collins, and Eric, in their written responses, spoke ill of the attitudes of some teachers towards work and the programme. David and Collins particularly expressed:

This is because some teachers decide not to teach during classes hours since some of them claim that their money is being used to offer the free senior high school program **(David from A3 SHS)**

Some teachers disagree with this programme. So, they do not sometimes come to class and also exhibit negative work ethics **(Collins from A3 SHS)**

Eric also discussed how some teachers had prioritised their private extra classes to the detriment of effective tuition during regular tuition hours:

These teachers will organise extra classes which we have to pay for. These teachers give out their best during the extra classes but not the normal lesson period **(A student from B3 SHS).**

Last, the study identified seven participants who created an impression of having experienced a challenge-free life in school. Although they acknowledged the existence of some challenges with the FSHSP, they by no means experienced personal difficulties in school. However, some of the justifications provided for having a challenge-free experience create the impression that students may have faced challenges but opt to shield them due to gratitude. For instance, one of such participants noted:

I do not really have a problem with the free SHS programme because even though it has some challenges I am grateful to the government for pushing my academic life **(Hilda from B1 SHS).**

6.3.2   Challenges of the programme - Teachers' Perceptions

Given the systemic conditions of the FSHSP, teachers' welfare is one of the key areas the study sought to explore. The participating teachers expressed diverse experiences with the FSHSP, especially with its change of educational system. According to the teachers, the entire programme has been generally stressful for them. To them, they are now required to manage both increased enrolment and economic-related stress under the programme.

Generally, the two participating teachers expressed their frustrations with managing a larger student population under the FSHSP. According to the teachers, they now find it quite challenging to cope with several uncomfortable situations due to the increased enrolment of students. First, both Joshua and Dennis, just like some of the students, spoke about the undue pressure on limited resources due to increased student enrolment. For example, Joshua argued:

This has increased the number of students in the Senior high schools, thereby putting pressure on the limited resources (classrooms, laboratories, dormitories, dining halls etc.) in the various schools... **(Joshua from A3 SHS)**

Joshua again commented that:

> *Due to the high student intake and its associated problems, students need to be put into groups being the Gold and Green tracks. One track comes to spend some months in school, vacates and goes home for the other track to come and use the resources...I personally think enough infrastructure should have been put in place in addressing the issue of double-track* **(A teacher from A3 SHS)**

While commenting on the issue of pressure on the limited resources and increased student enrolment, Joshua from A3 SHS quickly added how the *"student-teacher ratio has increased"* in that regard. Joshua again spoke about the lack of rest for teachers under this new system: *"There are teachers who teach both tracks and as a result do not get enough rest"* **(A teacher from A3 SHS).** Dennis, on the other hand, also mentioned how the challenge of increased student enrolment has culminated in an insurgence of recalcitrant students in his school. Dennis noted:

> *The free SHS has introduced a lot of recalcitrant, wayward and unscrupulous students who, if they were to pay for the packages under the free SHS, would never wanted to be in school but have taken advantage of the programme to enrol for secondary education* **(A teacher from B6 SHS).**

Additionally, the study findings reveal some economic-related stress that teachers have had to deal with under the FSHSP. According to the teachers, the introduction of the programme has first of all culminated in the reduction of teachers' income. They noted:

> *Negatively, it has also taken money from the pockets of teachers since prior to the free SHS; there were some charges like the PTA dues, teachers' motivation etc. which made teachers a little bit richer* **(Joshua from A3 SHS).**

> *Before the introduction of the free SHS, some students usually engage teachers and pay for extra tuition in order to adequately complete the syllabus before they take their final examination. Extra tuition has reduced since the inception of the free SHS because some parents are not willing to pay anything aside what is being provided by the government* **(Dennis from B6 SHS).**

Dennis furthermore added that parents and students are now unwilling to commit financially to extra study needs: *"Secondly there are needful study materials that are not provided under the policy yet students are not willing to buy them"* **(A teacher from B6 SHS).**

Aside from the fact that the teachers revealed several increased enrolment and economic-related stress under the programme, they reiterated the challenges that students generally encountered in their respective schools. Joshua, for instance, spoke about how *"some students too become*

bored reading the same notes over and over again" and how *"they need guidance too if they decide to study new"* **(A teacher from A3 SHS).** Dennis also noted that *"some students complain of the low-quality nature of the foods being served under the free SHS programme"* **(A teacher from B6 SHS).**

Despite the challenges expressed by both teachers, Joshua surprisingly concluded that he by no means experienced any personal challenge: *"Personally, I do not have any challenges with the free SHS programme."*

6.3.3   The Blame Game

The preceding findings of the study reveal that the students and teachers experienced several uncomfortable moments vis á vis the systemic conditions of the FSHSP. For this reason, the study attempted to trace the roots of these challenges by investigating those who were deemed responsible for the plights of students and teachers– The Blame Game. The study revealed two different perspectives to the blame game: *Blame on institutions versus Blame on no one.*

The first perspective considered the prominent implementing institutions, that is, both the government and school authorities, as responsible for the struggles of students and teachers under the FSHSP. Most of the participants (13 of them) expressed their discontent with how both the government and school authorities, including teachers, have managed the entire programme implementation. First, eight of these participants (including the two teachers) believed that the government is mainly responsible for their predicaments under the FSHSP. These participants, by and large, perceived that the anomalies of the programme and its effect emanate from the inability of the government and its cohorts, that is, the MoE and the Ghana Education Service (GES), to anticipate challenges and put in place measures to mitigate these challenges. For instance, the teachers explained:

> *Both the government and ministry of education are responsible for the challenges. The government formulate policies, and they are implemented by the ministry of education, so both should have come to a consensus to make sure the requisite items, such as classrooms, boarding facilities, furniture etc., are enough before the implementation of the free SHS programme* **(Dennis from B6 SHS).**

> *The Ministry of Education is responsible for these challenges in that I personally think enough infrastructure should have been put in place in addressing the issue of double-track* **(Joshua from A3 SHS).**

Some of the students also noted: *"I would blame the government because of the delay in releasing funds to purchase those items"* **(Emmanuel from A3 SHS);** *"Ghana Education*

Service (GES) as whole is responsible for these challenges due to their inability to eliminate the track system" **(Mark from A3 SHS).**

As already mentioned, school authorities and teachers were also mentioned as agents of their problems, particularly for the students. Five of the students (Mabel, Victor, Collins, Eric and Solomon) expressed their discontent with school authorities and teachers' inability to manage students and learning under the FSHSP effectively. Students like Mabel and Victor noted: *"Me personally, I think it was the fault of the school since they could have chosen to let us maintain our teachers and give the new teachers to the class without teachers"* **(Mabel from A2 SHS).;** *"The headmaster because it is his duty"* **(Victor from B4 SHS)***;* Eric and Solomon, who had previously complained about the poor attitudes of teachers, were also quick to point fingers at some of their teachers for their misfortunes. For instance, Eric **(from B3 SHS)** blamed his *"teachers because of their selfishness".* Solomon **(from B5 SHS)** also just mentioned that *"some teachers but not all teachers"* are to blame for their troubles.

Counterfactually, the second perspective offered an entirely different outlook on who is to blame as far as the challenges of the FSHSP is concerned. According to the participants with this perspective (five of them), no one is to blame for the programme's challenges. Although they generally could not apportion any blame to anyone when asked whom they think is responsible for the challenges, one of the five participants (Hilda) was just oblivious of who could probably be behind their troubles. Hilda expressed: *"Well with the challenges we faced with the water crisis, I do not know who is responsible for it"* **(A student from B1 SHS).**

Summing up...

In a nutshell, the above-discussed findings on teachers and students' experiences depict various dimensions of the realities of the FSHSP. The findings reveal that the programme has been fraught with serious shortcomings, which indirectly or directly have affected the well-being of students and teachers. Who is to blame for these implementation anomalies? The participants, according to findings, predominantly pointed fingers at both the government and the school authorities (including teachers), although some blamed no one.

6.4   COPING STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

This section primarily presents findings on the coping strategies and resources participants employed in staying focused, given the nature of their experiences under the FSHSP. The primary purpose of this section is to address the third sub-objective of the study: *To explore strategies and resources used by participating students and teachers to meet the challenges.* The data garnered in this regard reveals two different coping levels, individual-level strategies and institutional level responses and resources, in managing the challenges of the FSHSP.

Additionally, this section also presents findings on the implications of the institutional level responses through the lens of the participants.

6.4.1 Individual-level Strategies

The study tried to ascertain how the participants could deal with the implementation challenges of the FSHSP. The rationale was to understand how participants understood, accepted their various conditions and employed different coping strategies to deal with them. Two main coping strategy themes emerged from the data garnered. These themes include the intrinsic drive to mitigate challenges and extra tuition.

As already stated, the study unearthed the intrinsic drive to mitigate challenges as one of the main coping strategies for participants staying focused in school. The participants who demonstrated this intrinsic resource were mainly students and a teacher. This particular resource or strategy encompasses all responses that emanated from participants' inner zeal to thrive amidst their challenges. First, the study identified eight students who resorted to strengthening their resilience by drawing on their intrinsic motivation, endurance and determination to succeed. Some of them wrote: *"I think I basically prayed and self-motivated myself"* **(Griselda from A1 SHS**); *"My determination to reach my goal is what had me going"* **(Mabel from A2 SHS);** *"Through endurance and determination, I sailed through"* **(Daniel from B1 SHS).** Hilda and Annie (two of the eight students) also stressed the power of positive thinking in their survival in school: *"Despite the challenges, what kept me through is that I overlooked the problems and made it a point to stay focused"* **(Hilda from B1 SHS);** *"Being determined and focused and not looking at the challenges"* **(Annie from B2 SHS)**.

The need for extra personal studies was also seen as a response induced by the intrinsic drive to succeed regardless of the limited time spent in class and school. Four students (David, Mark, Paul, and Eric) expressed how they made extra time and space for their personal studies. David, for instance, mentioned that students now have to *"devote all their time for their books since quality of tuition is very low"* **(A student from A3 SHS)**. He went on to add: *"...during vacation, I spend most of my time with my books".* Paul and Eric also discussed having additional studies late in the night (after prep hours): *"Setting out extra time to revise on my notes and also to learn on my own after prep hours"* **(Paul from A3 SHS);** *"I had to stay at night all by myself studying"* **(Eric from B3 SHS).**

In addition, the study revealed four participants (three students and a teacher) who also employed innovative intrinsic driven responses to their challenges. Emmanuel **(a student from A3 SHS)** spoke about *"adopting few learning strategies"* to address his learning needs. Victor **(a student from B4 SHS)** who had previously complained about the insufficiency of study

desks in his school also recounted reporting to school early to *"get a better place to sit because the desks are not many".* Solomon **(a student from B5 SHS)** also expressed his inner desire to overcome his challenges by mentioning how he used to "*address school authorities if there is a given challenge".* Finally, Dennis from B6 SHS (the only teacher to express this strategy) also described how he was bent on completing the syllabus by *"teaching at an appreciable speed".*

Extra tuition was also identified as a coping strategy for both students and teachers in managing the learning challenges under the FSHSP. Some of the students (three of them) engaged in extra tuition services to address the challenge of inadequate tuition periods due to the limited time spent in school. This is what some wrote: *"Engage myself in extra classes both in school and at home"* **(Paul from A3 SHS)***; "I do extra class apart from the normal one and also learn ahead* **(Collins from A3 SHS).** Similarly, the teachers expressed that they made extra tuition available to students to help meet their learning needs. However, as much as the teachers rendered these services to the students to meet their learning needs, these services also served as an additional source of income for teachers. Before this discussion, the teachers had already expressed how the introduction of the FSHSP had taken monies away from their pockets. In addressing the issue of inadequate tuition periods, Joshua, for instance, discussed: *"Intermittently, I organise extra tuition at a cost to students who are willing to study"* **(A teacher from A3 SHS).** Dennis **(a teacher from B6 SHS)** similarly also expressed that he *"reduces the cost of extra tuition for all students to be able to pay and participate".* However, Dennis went on to state that: *"I also have to teach others for free per my investigations into the finances of their parents."*

6.4.2   Institutional Level Responses and Resources

The study's findings reveal that the key FSHSP implementation stakeholders, the school authorities and the government, were not oblivious of the challenging experiences of both students and teachers. As discussed in subsection 6.3.3 of this chapter, it can be recalled that most of the participants had blamed both the government and school authorities for being responsible for their plights. Thus, in the institutional response to the challenges of students and teachers, the participants revealed several measures that the stakeholders put in place to help address the challenges of students and teachers – *"Government's responses to challenges" versus "Efforts by the school authorities".* These measures, in most cases, served as coping resources for the participants to help alleviate their problems.

First, the study reveals that the government was very much intent on addressing the challenges of the FSHSP. Some participants emphasised that the government has attempted and still strives

to improve and expand infrastructure, especially considering how the programme has been crippled with its infrastructural deficiencies. One of the teachers, for instance, expressed:

> *The government has built 24-unit classrooms and three extra dormitories to ease congestion. It has also built extra bungalows for more teachers to reside on campus and expanded dining halls* **(Dennis from B6 SHS)**

Paul and Hilda (both students) also added their voices to the government's improvement and expansion of infrastructure. However, they stressed it was a collaborative effort between the government and the school authorities. Paul, for instance, wrote: *"The school authorities in collaboration with the government are working to provide adequate facilities (classrooms, houses, etc.)"* **(A student from A3 SHS)**

With that being said, most students were keen on pointing out the efforts of school authorities in mitigating the challenges faced by both students and teachers. First of all, two of the students (Mark and Mabel) spoke about the measures introduced by their school authorities to improve learning systems: *"The school has been organising morning preps and other educational activities"* **(Mark from A3 SHS);** *"They have seen to it that every class maintains their various tutors"* **(Mabel from A2 SHS).** A couple of the students (Griselda and Collins) also expressed the emotional support offered by the school authorities to help improve their mental well-being. To them, the school authorities have been supportive by providing words of encouragement to the students. Griselda noted that the school authorities *"continuously encourage the students and put in their maximum best to teaching and learning in the school"* **(A student from A1 SHS).** Collins **(a student from A3 SHS)** also commented that the school authorities always advise them *"to focus on their aims no matter what happens".* In addition to the emotional support offered by the school authorities, some of the participants (five of them) spoke about how school authorities addressed challenges through petitions and requests to the government, which mostly yielded results. Joshua, a teacher, for instance, noted that:

> *The school authorities are really working. Various calls and letters have been sent to the appropriate authorities, which have yielded tremendous results. A 12 - unit classroom block has been built, a 24 - room dormitory block is near completion, and all structures in the school are being renovated. Yes, I mean ALL, including a 24 – classroom block abandoned since 2008, is now about 90% completed. So, I can say the school authorities in A3 SHS are up and doing* **(Joshua, a teacher from A3 SHS).**

Emmanuel and Annie (all students) similarly added: *"They have petitioned the appropriate authorities through letter writing and phone calls"* **(Emmanuel from A3 SHS);** *"A petition was sent to the government on the delay of food which was distracting students"* **(Annie**

fromB2 SHS). Four of the students also mentioned some monitoring systems instituted by the school authorities to effectively monitor and check behaviours of both the teaching and non-teaching staff. Some of them wrote: *"They also ensure teachers and other bodies in the school are working up to task"* **(Paul from A3 SHS);** *"Sometimes they go around and inspect whether lessons are in session or not"* **(Collins from A3 SHS);** *"In the first place, the extra classes were compulsory for students. Later on, the authorities instructed them to make it optional"* **(Eric from B3 SHS).** Furthermore, two of the students (David and Patricia) mentioned instances where school authorities had to internally raise funds or have recourse to other funding sources to address living and learning challenges. For example, David **(a student from A3 SHS)** mentioned that "*the school authorities spend some of their monthly salaries to help reduce the challenges".* A couple of the students (Daniel and Clarence) also mentioned other distinct responses by their school authorities to help address the FSHS related problems. Daniel **(a student from B1 SHS)** discussed that the challenges were addressed *"through an open forum and house meetings".* Clarence **(a student from B1 SHS)** also discussed how authorities in his school *"have done very well to put the challenges concerning the double-tracking under control".* However, two of the participants (a student and a teacher) expressed a dissenting perspective to the efforts by school authorities to address living and learning challenges. According to them, school authorities did nothing to help manage their problems under the FSHSP. Dennis (the teacher) for instanced expressed:

> *Ghana is a country where the corruption rate is very high. Every sector, including education, has been politicised. Most school authorities are in bed with the government and are mute to learning challenges for fear of victimisation* **(A teacher from B6 SHS).**

6.4.3   Implications of the Institutional level Responses

The study was interested in ascertaining how participants responded to the various responses of the institutional stakeholders and the implications on their well-being. That is to say, whether the responses improved their well-being or were deemed unbeneficial to their well-being. On that account, the study's findings reveal several dimensions of the impact of the institutional responses on the well-being of students and teachers.

A vast majority of the participants agreed to an improved well-being by dint of the already discussed responses by the institutions. First, some of the participants believed that all the various measures and responses put in place by the government and their school authorities were beneficial in improving their learning conditions and academic performance. For example, two of them (a teacher and a student) expressed: "*The 24-unit classroom has eased congestion*

making teaching and learning more effective and comfortable" (**Dennis, a teacher from B6 SHS**); *"Thee academic performance of students, in general, has improved a lot after maintaining balance"* (**Mabel, a student from A2 SHS**). Second, in addition to improved learning conditions and performance, three of the students (Annie, David, and Victor) pointed out how institutional efforts have improved students' living conditions. For instance, Annie and Victor, who had previously complained about their feeding-related problems, noted how things improved:

Annie: *It has because the arrival food was never on time* (**A student from B2 SHS**)

Victor: *They have better food now, and they feed them well* (**A student from B4 SHS**)

David (**a student from A3 SHS**) also cited an example where he described how the *"building of toilet facilities has helped easing of oneself to be done in an appropriate manner".* Furthermore, three of the participants (a teacher and two students) discussed the psychological relief gained from institutional efforts to deal with their challenges. Joshua (the teacher), for instance, discussed that: *"Both students and teachers are happy especially with the students"* (**A teacher from A3 SHS**). Hilda, one of the two students, expressed this relief that: *"Their efforts really eased us from the stress these problems were putting on us"* (**A student from B1 SHS**). Three of the students also just stated explicitly how the responses simply met their needs. One of them simply wrote: *"It met some of our need"* (**Daniel from B1 SHS**). Just as some of the students simply reported how institutional responses met most of their needs, a couple of the students explicitly mentioned the general improvement in their well-being:

Griselda: *It has positively improved the well-being of students* (**A student from A1 SHS**)

Paul: *Our well-being has changed for good as compared to the former situation* (**A student from A3 SHS**)

The study also identified a participant (Solomon, a student) who simply expressed his contentment with the institutional efforts to solve their challenges. He noted: *"The responses to our challenges take long but the authorities do their best to solve these challenges...In my school, the authorities are doing their best to solve the challenges students have"* (**Solomon from B5 SHS**). However, despite all the positive implications of the institutional level responses on the well-being of students and teachers, the findings of the study also revealed a couple of the students (Mark and Eric) who demonstrated no signs of improved well-being by dint of the institutional level responses: *"It has proven to be less effective since the time allocated to these responses are limited"* (**Mark fromA3 SHS**); *"It did not bring any change*

because the teachers also decided not to give out their best during normal lessons" **(Eric from B3 SHS).**

Summing up...

The above-discussed findings on the coping strategies and resources demonstrate that the given challenges of students and teachers have not been taken for granted. However, both the individual and institutional level responses suggest that all participating stakeholders have been keen on improving their well-being by drawing on their personal strategies or the responses of the government and school authorities. Check appendix 6.1 for a succinct presentation of the thematic network analysis of the foregone discussed findings.

6.5   EMPOWERMENT

The notion of effective and quality empowerment, since the implementation of the FSHSP, has been the main bone of contention within the education discourse in Ghana. For that reason, the study aimed at validating the core tenet of ensuring effective empowerment by examining how participating students have benefited (knowledge, skills, competencies, etc.) from the FSHSP (the fourth sub-objective of the study). By dint of this, this section presents findings on participants' perception of the quality of tuition, the process of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition, and the empowerment implications of the FSHSP.

6.5.1   Perception of the Quality of Tuition

As already mentioned, the study was interested in unearthing the participants' perceived quality of tuition offered under the FSHSP as part of the empowerment analysis of the FSHSP. Therefore, participants were made to share their thoughts on how they perceive the quality of tuition offered and contrast that with their experiences with paid tuition systems in Ghana. Participants (especially teachers) who had some experience with the previous paid senior high school system also contrasted the two systems regarding the quality of tuition offered. The findings of the study reveal two disparate perceptions on the issue of the quality of tuition. A category of the participants agreed to a significant drop in the quality of tuition offered, whereas the other category agreed to generally good quality tuition provided.

A slight majority of the participants rejected the notion that the FSHSP has instigated a decline in the quality of tuition offered. These participants were rather keen on affirming the excellent quality education provided under the FSHSP. First of all, some of these participants (eight) insisted that the quality of tuition offered has not changed. All the two teachers who belonged to this category of participants argued: "*The implementation of the programme hasn't affected the quality of tuition offered"* **(Dennis from B6 SHS);**

> *It is of high quality as always since teachers, our core mandate is to provide these students with quality tuition, and I can say that quality education is being offered to the students* **(Joshua from A3 SHS).**

Two of the students also noted: *"I do not think the quality of the tuition has changed in any way, perhaps the teachers are doing their best to teach students"* **(Solomon from B5 SHS);** *"In my school, the quality still remained the same like before"* **(Hilda from B1 SHS).**

Three participants (Griselda, Victor, and Mabel) similarly expressed effective and excellent tuition under the programme. For instance, Mabel **(a student from A2 SHS)** mentioned that *"tuition is of great quality since every student, whether weak or strong academically, is able to catch up".* Adding to the issue of good quality tuition offered under the FSHSP, two of the participants discussed how the quality of tuition has been effective and improved under the new system and programme. Again, Mabel, one of such participants, noted:

> *The quality of tuition has improved because now, there are enough teachers to handle the various classes as compared to before, teachers used to handle at least three classes which was very stressful* **(A student from A2 SHS)**

Some students (three of them) were relatively modest with their perception of the quality of tuition offered. For instance, Emmanuel **(a student from A3 SHS)** just mentioned that the quality of education was *"fairly good".* Daniel **(a student from B1 SHS)**, one of the three, responded that the tuition quality was just *"okay and lightly burden to heart".*

Counterfactually, a slight minority of the participants also agreed that the introduction of the FSHSP has resulted in a significant drop in the quality of tuition offered. Interestingly, this category also includes participants (Emmanuel, Daniel, and Magdalene), who had previously expressed fairly good quality tuition offered under the FSHSP. First, one of the participants (Mathew, a student from A4 SHS) made an interesting claim on the quality of tuition under the FSHSP, which the study found worthwhile. Mathew reflected on how quality tuition has only been available to students engaged in extra tuition classes with teachers. He noted:

> *The quality of tuition has become a fee paying for extra classes. This is because students are required by teachers to engage in extra classes in order to gain support from teachers so as to complete the syllabus on time* **(Mathew from A4 SHS).**

In addition, four of the participants revealed a low quality of tuition offered at their respective schools. For instance, David **(A student from A3 SHS)** explained that due to the low quality of education provided, students are left with no option than to *"devote all their time for their books".* Mathew **(A student from A4 SHS)** also expressed that *"the quality of tuition is not to the expected or maximum".*

Finally, some participants gave insights into the decline in the quality of education offered under the programme. Just like some of the students who had previously expressed an improved quality of tuition, these participants also discussed how the quality of tuition worsened under the FSHSP. First, David and Eric **(students from A3 and B3 SHS, respectively)** just argued that the quality of education has been on the decline, that is moved "from good to bad". Some of the participants also expressed: *The quality reduced due to the number of students. Periods used to teach also reduced* **(Magdalene from B1 SHS)**

> *The quality of tuition has declined. And this is as a result of some teachers being reluctant and also the reduced amount of time we are spending in school* **(Paul from A3 SHS)**

> *There has been a slight negative change in quality of tuition. The reason is that some teachers do not teach effectively well and also do not complete the topics they give students during the semester* **(Collins from A3 SHS)**

6.5.2 Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies Acquisition

Knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition were deemed crucial in understanding how students feel empowered given the conditions of the FSHSP. Hence, knowledge, skills, and competencies gained were employed as indicators to ascertain the state of student empowerment under the FSHSP. The study's findings primarily reveal a split perception on the level of knowledge, skills, and competencies gained under the FSHSP. A category of the participants agreed to an appreciable level, whereas the other category revealed several problems with knowledge, skills, competencies acquisition under the FSHSP.

A slight majority of the participants revealed an appreciable level of knowledge, skills, and competencies gained. First, six participants expressed very effective skills, knowledge and competencies acquisition under the new programme. There were students like Daniel and Hilda **(both students from B1 SHS)** who respectively revealed how *"best"* and *"helpful"* the processes of knowledge and competencies acquisition were. Also, considering how effective knowledge acquisition was, Griselda **(a student from A1 SHS)** noted that it translated in *"good marks in exercises that were given".* Joshua and Dennis (both teachers) also added:

> *Nothing has changed even though there are challenges in the free SHS... Students skills and knowledge acquisition have not been significantly affected since at every stage of a challenge, ad-hog measures are put in place to mitigate those challenges* **(Joshua from A3 SHS)**

> *Teachers are trained with skills and high competencies to overcome challenges making student's well-being and knowledge acquisition very effective* **(Dennis from B6 SHS)**

A couple of the participants (A teacher and a student) furthermore spoke about the increase in contact hours under FSHSP. Joshua (the teacher), for instance, expressed: *"Contact hours have increased. Prior to the free SHS, a lesson was approximately 45 minutes, but with the free SHS, a lesson is now one hour"* **(A teacher from A3 SHS).** With that being said, some of the students (four of them) were just modest with their assessment of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition under the FSHSP. Their responses revealed quite a moderate level of knowledge and skills acquired. Paul and Patricia **(students from A3 and B1 SHS respectively)**, for instance, used modest adjectives such as *"normal"* and *"okay"* respectively in describing their perceived knowledge, skills, and competencies. Solomon also noted: "*The knowledge and skills acquired are ok for most students, I think"* **(A student from B5 SHS).** In addition, four of the students (Victor, Collins, Mark, and Emmanuel) expressed how knowledge and competencies acquisition improved with time. Victor **(from B4 SHS)** noted that there was an *"improvement"* in the knowledge acquisition process. Mark **(from A3 SHS)** also mentioned: *"Knowledge and skills acquired after every semester is gradually improving with time".*

However, a slight minority of the participants expressed a dissenting opinion concerning knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition under the FSHSP. These participants instead reflected on the problems associated with knowledge and competencies acquisition. First, one of the students **(David from A3 SHS)** revealed that knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition was an individual affair. According to David, students' ability to acquire the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies mainly depended on their efforts. He reflected below:

> *Development of skills and knowledge acquisition has not been easy. Because students have to struggle for the own acquisition of skills and knowledge since tuition by teachers do not play in major role in the skills and knowledge development ... A change will be acquired by only serious students who study on their own but as for tuition only, there would have been no knowledge and skills acquired* **(David from A3 SHS).**

Furthermore, seven of the students went ahead to express their dissatisfaction with the knowledge and competencies gained under FSHSP. Although most of the participants seemed to be content with the state of knowledge, skills competencies acquisition, these seven participants were unhappy with how learning has panned out under the programme. To them,

the knowledge and competencies acquisition process has not been the best under the FSHSP. Some expressed their dissatisfaction. One of them (a teacher) particularly said:

> *The competencies, skills were higher in the pre-free SHS era, and this is due to the fact that a greater percentage of the students only enrolled because it is free and has no intentions of being serious with their studies* **(Dennis from B6 SHS)**

Two of them also thought that regardless of the problems with knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition, they could not have asked for more: *"It was not enough but okay"* **(Magdalene from B1 SHS);** *"Teacher per student ratio was not enough but quite ok"* **(Patricia from B1 SHS).**

6.5.3 Empowerment Implications of the FSHSP

In quest of examining student empowerment under the FSHSP, the study was also concerned with the implications of the empowerment processes (quality of tuition and knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition) of FSHSP on student's academic development.

First, most of the participants expressed how the FSHSP has impacted students' academic life and personal development in diverse ways. To begin with, some of the students (five of them) discussed that the challenges of the FSHSP have by no means affected their personal development. This is what some of the students expressed: *"Frankly speaking the free SHS programme challenges has not affected my personal life as a student"* **(Hilda from B1 SHS);** *"There was a lot of challenges but it did not have much effect on me"* **(Magdalene from B1 SHS);** *"The challenges concerning the free SHS did not affect my personal development at all because I was ready for the exams"* **(Clarence from B1 SHS)**

Three of the students (Patricia, Hilda and Annie) also spoke about how the programme's primary intent of making secondary or high school education free gave them the peace of mind to develop. Annie **(A student from B2 SHS)**, for instance, described their entire academic development as okay since they just had to *"study and not to be disturbed by fees because it was taken care by the government."* Patricia **(a student from B1 SHS)** also explained having *"full concentration on studies"* under the programme. Another striking impact of the FSHSP, as revealed by some of the participants, also has to do with the extent to which the programme has strengthened students' resilience to overcome academic challenges and commit to self-dependency in pursuing their desired academic targets. According to these participants, these two virtues, self-dependency and resilience, became crucial in their academic and personal development under the FSHSP. For instance, Griselda **(a student from A1 SHS)** asserted that: *"It has helped me not to rely on anybody for my own development".* Paul **(A student from A3**

SHS) also noted how self-dependency and resilience improved his personal development: *"Somehow improved since I have to work at a faster rate and also more efficiently in order to adapt with the situation".*

Having said that, the study also unearthed some of the students (three students) who remained adamant of experiencing little impact of the FSHSP on their academic development due to system anomalies. Two of them wrote: *"Personally, I have become handicapped in certain subjects* **(Mabel from A2 SHS)**; *"Difficulty in understanding some topics due to the fact that syllabus is not completed on time"* **(Mathew from A4 SHS)**

Summing up...

The findings presented in this section succinctly conveys the broad picture of how the initial rollout of the FSHSP has influenced student empowerment and academic development. Considering the above-discussed findings, regardless of the programme's challenges, most participants felt they had and still can thrive and develop, especially for the students. Although most of the students generally believed strongly that the quality of tuition offered was top-notch, many of them (a slight minority) instead had a pessimistic view of their level of knowledge and competencies acquired. The findings somewhat project self-dependency as also being crucial for student empowerment. Check appendix 6.1 for a concise presentation of the thematic network analysis of the findings discussed in this section.

6.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter primarily presented the findings of the study. The chapter opened with discussions on the purpose and scope of the initial rollout of the programme. Here, findings on how participants comprehended the policy or programme and the implementation scope were presented. The chapter further elucidated the experiences of students and teachers. It was unearthed that both students and teachers encountered several challenges at any point in time. This triggered several coping strategies both at the individual and the institutional levels. The chapter winded up with insights into how the initial rollout of the FSHSP and its related challenges have influenced student empowerment and academic development

With this as a point of departure, the next chapter will discuss the implications and significance of the above-discussed findings of the study.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DISCUSSION

7.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the significance and implications of the findings presented in the preceding chapter. The rationale is to demonstrate the relevance of this new knowledge on the free senior high education programme in Ghana. This new knowledge will mainly be situated within the theoretical framework (the theories of empowerment and Salutogenesis) underpinning the study. The chapter will also discretely discuss the relevance of my research findings within the discourses on health promotion, education, and sustainable development in the Ghanaian context. By dint of this, lessons (positive and negative) from the findings will be drawn up for both health promoters and educational development actors towards the pursuance of the Agenda 2030/sustainable development goals (SDGs). Also, as part of discussions, the chapter will reflect on some emerging, expected and unexpected themes, trace the relationships, and their theoretical and practical implications. Finally, the chapter will wind up with critical discussions on the limitations of the study.

7.2   IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS: THROUGH THE LENS OF THE THEORY OF EMPOWERMENT

The adoption of the theory of empowerment provides a theoretical framework for an empowerment analysis of the FSHSP. In this analysis, the empowerment theory is by no means utilised in an evaluative way to determine the success or failure of the FSHSP. Instead, it is employed as a framework to analyse the FSHSP's empowering processes and outcomes within the context of individual empowerment. Being guided by empowerment theory, it is a worthwhile attempt to understand how the processes of a given empowerment intervention programme like the FSHSP define and shape outcomes within a stipulated implementation period. This is because intended empowerment levels are seen as functions of the interplay between the empowering processes and empowered outcomes (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

As already discussed, the fourth sub-objective of the study was interested in knowing how the participating students benefited from the FSHSP - how empowered students felt, given their experiences with the programme. From the data of the study, the themes, *quality of tuition* as well as *Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies Acquisition* emerged as key indicators in ascertaining and analysing the empowering processes and empowered outcomes of the FSHSP, respectively. These themes/indicators are similarly mirrored in Organisation for Economic Co-

operation and Development's (OECD) education indicators in their education at glace[19] annual reports where elements of quality of tuition and acquisition of knowledge and competencies are captured as sub-indicators under the education indicator D (the learning environment and organisation of schools) (OECD, 2021).

7.2.1 Quality Tuition as An Empowering Process

Quality tuition is considered one of the prominent features of contemporary educational reforms (A-Maawali & Al-Siyabi, 2020; Sakarneh, 2015). The empirical literature on quality education indicates that although quality teaching or tuition is challenging to define, perceived teaching or tuition quality is likely to be one of the most important determiners of student satisfaction of empowerment levels (Hill, Lomas, & MacGregor, 2003; Xiao & Wilkins, 2015). For instance, Hill et al. (2003) discuss in their study that student satisfaction of empowerment levels is influenced by the quality of teachers and tuition, the quality of feedback given to students in lessons and on assignments and the interpersonal interactions between students and teachers.

Cognisant of the prominent feature of quality tuition in education, the study deems it an essential indicator of the empowering process of the FSHSP based on participants' perceptions and satisfaction. This position is further premised on Chan's (2012) proposition that an educational programme is best assessed in terms of the quality of its inputs by looking at elements that include but are not limited to tuition services, facilities, and support to students. The proposition by Chan (2012) reflects the earlier proposed theoretical framework by Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) to assess educational systems by focusing on the tuition and its content (how quality they are). Nonetheless, in their framework, Owlia and Aspinwall (1996) also point out several other educational assessment indicators such as competence, attitude, and academic resources.

Accordingly, the study's data demonstrate two central outlooks on the perceived quality of tuition as an empowering process under the FSHSP. The first outlook is directly ascertained from participants' perceptions and satisfaction with the quality of tuition under the programme. In contrast, the second outlook is inferred by examining the impact of the double-track system (DTS) and its related problems on tuition and learning.

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[19] Education at a Glance is an annual publication by OECD Directorate for Education and Skills that "addresses the needs of a range of users, from governments seeking to learn policy lessons to academics requiring data for further analysis to the general public wanting to monitor how their countries' schools are progressing in producing world-class students" (OECD, 2021:3)

Regarding the first outlook, the data show two differing perspectives on the quality of the empowering process under the programme – *good quality tuition versus poor quality tuition*. The study reveals a nearly split perception of the quality of tuition, where a slight majority of participants appear to be quite optimistic and satisfied with how tuition has panned out, with many participants (a slight minority) thinking otherwise (dissatisfied). The implication here is that considering the nearly split perception of the quality of tuition, it appears to indicate that in terms of what the programme has to offer vis à vis an acceptable tuition standard, the programme still has some tuition problems to address. This indicative proposition is not new to the extant literature. The proposition is similarly advanced and substantiated by studies such as Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) and the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC) (2020). Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) substantiate the proposition by arguing that the FSHSP still has tuition issues to fix, considering the existing gaps in the quality of tuition offered. To Mohammed & Kuyini (2021), these issues result from the scant attention given to the tuition element of the programme (curriculum reform, teacher-student ratio, learning outcomes, etc.). Their evaluation is similarly mirrored in PIAC's (2020) study, where the PIAC also calls on the government to invest resources in improving the process of empowerment (quality tuition). Therefore, the PIAC (2020:4) recommends that schools, especially the technical and vocational schools, be "adequately resourced with the necessary equipment and teaching materials" for effective tuition.

Owing to this, it is unsurprising to see the nine participants instead pointing out a drop in the tuition standards in my study. This finding throws more light on the reflection by Essuman (2018:29) where he discusses in his study that the goal of expanding the access to education through the FSHSP will be useless when reforming "what would be taught" as well as "how they are taught" are ignored or given scant attention. To Essuman (2018), the FSHSP's tuition problems will likely be compounded and will have a long way to go until that is addressed. This discussion is again well accentuated by Mohammed & Kuyini (2021). In their study, Mohammed & Kuyini (2021:156) similarly argue that policy actors are yet to make changes to the teaching and learning approaches that will help crystallise the goal of increasing knowledge and skills as proposed by FSHSP.

Therefore, against the backdrop of Essuman (2018) and Mohammed & Kuyini's (2021) assertions vis à vis the study findings, there seems to be an indication that the provision of quality tuition, as an empowering process, has been compromised. The programme itself appears to have failed to improve the institutional capacity of schools to meet tuition and learning demands. For instance, taking a critical look at the responses by Paul (student from A3

SHS) and Magdalene (student from B1 SHS) on their perceived quality of tuition, their satisfactions carry one clear implication. It is implied in their assertions that increased student enrolment under the FSHSP seems to have given rise to some unintended consequences tied to tuition, such as lack of enough tuition periods and contact hours with teachers and poor attitude of teachers.

These findings interpreted above confirm earlier empirical studies and add to the extant literature on the FSHSP and free education in Africa. First, the interpretation of the unintended consequences tied to tuition corroborates PIAC (2020) and Mohammed & Kuyini (2021) findings. The findings from both studies demonstrate that increased student enrolment has culminated in a reduction in the contact hours, thereby compromising effective quality tuition. In this light, PIAC (2020), in their recommendations, called on the government to expedite action on providing adequate teaching and learning resources to extend contact hours and relieve staff of the attendant extra pressures. Second, the study finding and interpretation on the inability of the FSHSP to improve the institutional capacity additionally concurs with findings of other earlier studies on the FSHSP (See Chanimbe & Danquah, 2021; Addo, 2019; Asumadu, 2019; Matey, 2020; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019). Furthermore, the finding also corroborates studies from other African contexts (Mukhanji, Ndiku, & Obaki, 2016; Wanzala, 2013). Mukhanji, Ndiku, & Obaki (2016), for instance, explicate in their study how the quality of teaching and learning in Maseno University was compromised due to the lack of any significant commensurate development and improvement of teaching and learning conditions to meet the rising enrolments. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the study finding on the poor attitude of teachers to tuition due to increased enrolment adds to the extant literature on FSHSP. Unfortunately, there seems to be no existing empirical study that demonstrates poor attitudes of teachers to teaching and learning under the FSHSP. Nonetheless, the finding resonates with a similar conclusion from Huylebroeck & Titeca (2015) Ugandan study. Huylebroeck & Titeca (2015) conclude in their research that the lack of additional sources of income for teachers such as transport and accommodation allowances together with meagre pay under the USE programme led to demoralised teachers who, in turn, showed poor attitudes towards teaching and classroom delivery.

The second outlook sheds further light on quality tuition as an empowering process by examining the impact of the double-track system (DTS) and its related problems on tuition and learning. First, the study findings reveal the DTS as an integral element of the tuition system under the FSHSP. It was anticipated considering the trajectory of free education implementation frameworks in Ghana. In Ghana, free education programmes, especially the FCUBE, have

always thrived on "shift systems" (Takyi et al., 2019). The study findings reveal that the DTS is anchored in four pillars: create room to accommodate the increase in enrolment; reduce class sizes; increase contact hours; and increase the number of holidays. For instance, Joshua (teacher from A3 SHS) confirms this by expressing how students have now been grouped into two tracks, gold track and green track students, in a shift system where one track stays in school at a time. The implication is that it seems quite apparent that the DTS achieved a significant part of its core objects by making room for more students within the same facility. This confirms findings from earlier FSHSP and its DTS studies (See Takyi et al., 2019; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). For example, Takyi et al. (2019) and Tamnja & Pajibo (2019) reveal in their studies that enrolment levels at the selected SHSs are expected to increase by 31- 50% through the DTS. Takyi et al. (2019) further find that the introduction of the DTS has also increased the number of teaching hours from six hours to eight hours.

This positive effect of the DTS additionally confirms the extant literature on the overarching concept of multi-track year-round education (MT-YRE)[20]. The Literature on MT-YRE is quite optimistic about the positive effect of MT-YRE on school management (Mcmullen & Rouse, 2012b; Skinner, 2014; Graves, McMullen, & Rouse, 2018; Takyi et al., 2019). The proponents of MT-YRE believe that MT-YRE is designed to positively influence the inputs and processes of education, specifically tuition, through a cost-effective way of managing the continuous increasing enrolments in secondary schools (Cooper et al., 2003; Takyi et al., 2019). This MT-YRE position has also been substantiated by studies such as Graves et al. (2013) and Mcmullen and Rouse (2012b).

However, while the DTS of the FSHSP has made considerable strides in managing increased enrolment under the FSHSP, the study findings reveal unfavourable unintended consequences of the DTS on the quality of tuition offered. This negative ripple effect of the DTS on tuition was entirely unexpected. In principle, DTS is rather meant to improve students' academic achievement/performance and not negatively affect teaching and learning (Skinner, 2014; Takyi et al., 2019). Although the study did not delve much into the unintended consequences of the double-track approach, the findings on the struggles of the students and teachers seem to imply that the impact of the double-track system was somewhat superficial. It appears to have

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[20] Multi Track Year-Round Education (MT-YRE) is an educational calendar system in which the "school days are evenly distributed across the calendar year, also divides the student body into separate tracks that rotate on and off break, allowing the school to serve a larger student body by making continual use of the school facility" (Graves et al., 2018:2).

only addressed problems tied to "quantity" rather than "quality". This is linked to one of the themes of the study that the DTS seemingly compromised learning.

However, while the study finds the adverse ripple effect of the DTS on tuition unexpected, it seems to confirm the literature dialogue on the impact of DTSs and MT-YRE. Several empirical studies have refuted the optimistic effects of MT-YRE on education and school management (See Cooper et al., 2003; Mcmillen, 2018; Graves et al., 2018; Mcmullen & Rouse, 2012a; Wu & Stone, 2010). These studies generally argue that the MT-YRE can be detrimental to tuition and learning outcomes (academic performance) and school systems (extracurricular activities of students, vacations, and administrative costs). These given adverse effects are seemingly mirrored in the study findings. The study findings reveal the difficulties and frustrations of some students in working within short academic terms or semesters due to long holidays and hence, compromising effective tuition and learning. The implication is that the shortening of academic semesters and the increased number of vacations appear detrimental to tuition. The study finds the situation inconsistent with the core tenets of MT-YRE. Literature on MT-YRE demonstrates that the system is designed to rather thrive on shortened breaks to alleviate human capital loss and prevent students from losing valuable skills (Alexander et al., 2007; Takyi et al., 2019; Skinner, 2014).

The unintended consequence of the DTS (unexpected finding) is not new to the extant literature on the FSHSP. Evidence from limited empirical studies confirms how the introduction of the DTS has affected learning and students' performance (See Takyi et al., 2019; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). The empirical studies generally agree that the shortening of the semester and the increased number of holidays have compromised students' performance, as students tend to lose some classroom teaching and extracurricular activities (Takyi et al., 2019; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019). Furthermore, in their study, Takyi et al. (2019) also confirm the position that the holiday structure of the DTS is inconsistent with tenets of MT-YRE.

7.2.2 Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies Acquisition as an Empowered Outcome

As already mentioned, the study operationalises and interprets knowledge, skills, and competencies acquisition as an indicator for an empowered outcome through the lens of the participants. Although there exist several pedagogical paradigms such as transformative learning, service learning, contemplative practices, etc., the expected outcome of all pedagogical processes is the acquisition of knowledge and skills (Reames, Blackmar, & Pierce, 2020; Goralnik & Marcus, 2020; Michel, Holland, Brunnquell, & Sterling, 2020; Xiao & Wilkins, 2015). However, while most pedagogical paradigms aim at imparting knowledge and

skills, the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies is more grounded in transformative learning[21]. With transformative learning, it is not just about the means of attaining subject knowledge, but instead thinking in terms of educational aims and outcomes such as knowledge, competencies, and the development of critical skills even beyond structural forces such as the examination system. (Michel et al., 2020; Lawson, 2011). Lawson (2011) describes this learning approach within the empowerment dialogue as "liberatory empowerment". This is the type of pedagogy that the FSHSP seemingly favours. Against this background, what has been the empowered outcome, given the empowering pedagogy of the FSHSP? What explain the empowered outcomes?

Generally, the study findings reveal a nearly split perception among participants on their skills, competencies and knowledge levels (empowered outcomes). This finding implies that it seems not all students feel duly empowered with the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies expected of them as high school students. The FSHSP aims to empower students in a transformative way in order to acquire what the programme describes as employable skills (GoG, 2018). However, this transformative approach appears to be lacking in the tuition process (the pedagogy) and hence, explaining why some students feel dissatisfied with their empowered outcomes. This interpretation is in line with the position of Michel et al. (2020) and Birsa (2018) that learning outcomes such as knowledge, skills, and competencies should reflect the personal impact that quality tuition or teaching has had on students. Birsa (2018) particularly advance that the operational pedagogy must be well-structured (well-organised stock of knowledge acquired in appropriate contexts and with proper support) to achieve effective and sustainable learning outcomes.

Additionally, the above-outlined study finding and its implication join the literature dialogue on pedagogical practices and outcomes in global education. The study finding appears to reinforce the international call to rethink pedagogies that today's learners need to develop (Scott, 2015). The empirical literature has highlighted the appalling gap between existing pedagogical practices and outcomes, which are meant to be employable workplace skills (See Scott, 2015; Jang, 2016; Ukobizaba, Nizeyimana, & Mukuka, 2021). As outlined in the preceding paragraph, the pedagogical lapses (poor quality tuition) of the FSHSP seem to account for students' dissatisfaction with their competencies, skills, and knowledge acquired. This may require the need to revisit and revise the existing pedagogical practices of the FSHSP,

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[21] Transformative learning requires the "learner to be presently receptive to a new perspective that he or she will come to find is 'truer' and more 'justified' in guiding future action" (Michel et al., 2020:185).

as they do not seem to meet the learning needs of students effectively. This seemingly pedagogical ineffectiveness of the FSHSP mirrors Scott's (2015) position that considering the fact that learners need employable skills through quality teaching, some existing pedagogical practices do not seem to deal with these aspects adequately.

Although the FSHSP's pedagogy and its effect on learning have received scant attention in the literature, the unsatisfactory learning outcomes of educational interventions and their pedagogies in developing countries are not new to the empirical literature on education (See Conn, 2017; Piper, 2017; Ganimian & Murnane, 2016; McEwan, 2015). First, this study finding concurs with studies such as Ganimian & Murnane (2016), McEwan (2015) and (Conn 2017). Ganimian & Murnane (2016), in their research, similarly find that most educational interventions have only sought to increase student enrolment by introducing pro-poor measures such as reducing the cost of attending school without improving educational outcomes through effective pedagogies. They further explain that most reforms and pedagogies have only been more of the same and still lack certain contemporary pedagogical practices such as addressing students' individual learning needs, helping teachers personalise instructions, providing additional help to struggling students, and letting students learn at their own pace (Ganimian & Murnane, 2016). Furthermore, McEwan's (2015) study corroborates the finding that education reforms (especially in primary schools) in developing countries only increase school enrolment and lack sufficient conditions for improving learning. Finally, Conn's (2017) study similarly confirms the study finding by revealing how poor learning outcomes and performance, along with poor teacher pedagogy, continue to dominate student learning in SSA amidst the plethora of educational interventions.

In conclusion, although there have been significant strides in pushing the all-inclusive educational agenda, this has not translated into learning (Prichett, 2013). Studies measuring learning outcomes among school children across low- and middle-income countries continue to project low levels of learning with many children leaving school without mastering specific requisite skills such as basic numeracy and literacy skills (Prichett, 2013; Robinson, 2011; UNESCO, 2012; Snilstveit et al., 2017). Furthermore, considering the seeming lack of empirical studies on the educational outcomes of the FSHSP, the limited evidence gathered from the study adds to the literature and serves as a point of departure for further research into the pedagogical framework of FSHSP.

7.2.3 Assessing Students' Empowerment using Zimmerman's Theoretical Model of Individual Empowerment

How can we explain the interplay of the empowering process and empowered outcome discussed in the preceding subsections using Zimmerman's theoretical model of individual empowerment? Zimmermann's theoretical model of individual empowerment is operationalised in this study to provide further insights into how empowered processes interact via the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioural components to achieve empowered outcomes. This is against the underlying empowerment argument that the interaction of the intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioural components of the empowerment process define an individual's psychological empowerment (Zimmerman & Eisma, 2017; Zimmerman, 1995).

Intrapersonal Component: The study identifies students' perceived competencies and control through the knowledge acquired as the intrapersonal component of student empowerment. This is because the intrapersonal component of individual empowerment is mainly concerned with cognitive perceptions about one's perceived control, competence, and efficacy since that form the "basic element that provides people with the initiative to engage in behaviours to influence desired outcomes" (Zimmerman, 1995:589). In this case, taking a critical look at competence, skills and knowledge acquisition as an empowered outcome, it seems to infer that regardless of the self-belief of most students in their competencies and control over their academic life (through self-reflection), there appears to exist substantial gaps in the intrapersonal component of the entire empowerment process. This is justified by the fact that, by way of self-reflection, many students still feel less competent and confident about themselves, especially considering the acceptable level of competencies required for their academic development.

Self-reflection is an integral part of assessing empowerment (Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; Lawson, 2011). It is worth mentioning that the research design and approach of the study (qualitative approach) also made it easier for students to self-reflect on their competencies and control through the knowledge acquired. Driven by global legal developments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 and national policies like personalisation in the United Kingdom, self-reflections of both students and educators are supposed to provide an overview of what happens in schooling (Lawson, 2011). This, to Lawson (2011:97), is linked to "notions of empowerment and the liberatory and transformative aspects of education". Other studies have also accentuated the cruciality of self-reflection in learner empowerment assessments (See Naidoo, 2015; and Stemn, 2010).

- **Interactional Component:** This component involves resource mobilisation and skill development through one's interaction with the environment (Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017;

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Botvin, Griffin, & Nichols, 2006). First, the study reveals poor learning conditions as one of the main characteristics of the empowerment environment of the FSHSP. The implication of this is that students appear to be compromised in terms of resource mobilisation. First, the role of teachers as crucial resource agents seems to be undermined due to increased student enrolment, insufficiency of learning resources, and poor work ethics. This situation is inconsistent with the notion of empowerment. Educational empowerment literature and studies advance that learners require the right and meaningful contexts to thrive (Naidoo, 2015; Hand, 2012; Stemn, 2010; Perkins and Zimmerman, 1995; Lawson, 2011). Therefore, teachers are supposed to act as the primary agents in providing meaningful contexts in learning (Hand, 2012; Naidoo, 2015). In this light, they ought to be aware of the relationship between learning, learners, and socio-political structures (Hand, 2012; Naidoo, 2015). This is seemingly lacking in the interactional component of the empowerment process; and hence, justifying the seeming weakness in the empowering process (quality tuition) of the FSHSP.

Furthermore, building on the absence of meaningful contexts for learning in the interactional component of the FSHSP, another interesting, unexpected finding and interpretation in the interactional component is that context did not play a role in defining the quality of tuition in the various schools. As already operationalised and discussed in this study, one of the study's primary aims was to examine variations in the participants' experiences - *A Schools Versus B schools*. In principle, it is expected that participants from A schools should relatively enjoy better tuition services. This is because empirical evidence shows that individuals living in disadvantaged contexts are mostly marginalised and disenfranchised, hence, limiting their opportunity to access and manage resources influencing their conditions (Pearrow, 2008; Pearrow & Pollack, 2009 cited by Zimmerman & Eisman, 2017:177). Nonetheless, this expectation could not be confirmed by the study. The study findings instead reveal that most participants from A Schools relatively reported poor learning conditions in their respective schools compared to participants from B schools.

The implication of this unexpected finding is that, although context shapes empowering processes like tuition, its effect can be superficial when the empowering process itself is compromised by poor empowering conditions like inadequate learning resources, over-population, limited tuition time, as argued by Pritchett (2013) and Snilstveit, et al. (2017). Furthermore, while this finding concurs with Prichet (2013) and Snilstveit et al.'s (2017) findings, it also adds to the empirical literature on the FSHSP.

- **Behavioural Component:** The behavioural component of individual empowerment in the case of my study mainly involves the coping processes of participants that are bound to influence empowerment outcomes. This particular component has to do with all actions and behaviours meant to help students and teachers manage stress and stay healthy (Zimmerman, 1995). To be healthy is to be empowered, as health is regarded as a resource for everyday life (Green & Tones, 2010:12). However, the study's findings reveal no traces of stress management and coping programmes or systems inculcated in the FSHSP pedagogy. The implication here is that participants seem to have drawn on their coping abilities managing challenges under the FSHSP. This is in line with Jensen, Dür, & Buijs's (2017) argument that children are able to master challenges as they grow and thus convey positive coping experiences. Against this backdrop, what accounted for participants' successes and failures in staying healthy while coping and adapting to change? In addressing these questions, the study employs the theory of Salutogenesis to offer further insights into this behavioural component by examining how students and teachers managed stressful empowerment situations.

7.3   IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS: THROUGH THE LENS OF THE THEORY OF SALUTOGENESIS

As already indicated, coping with challenges is deemed integral to individual empowerment (Zimmerman, 1995). This is because empowerment necessitates utilising coping resources to deal with emerging stressors to "create consistent and meaningful life experiences" (Super, Wagemakers, Picavet, Verkooijen, & Koelen, 2015:873). Therefore, the second and third sub-objectives sought to unravel the various stressors that students and teachers had to deal with and subsequently delve into how they could mitigate these stressors to achieve empowered outcomes. Hence, two of the four global themes, *"Policy Implementation Experiences" and "Coping Strategies and Resources",* brought to light the salutogenic elements of the study.

First, the theme, policy implementation experiences, addresses the second sub-objective of study, as it sheds light on the various stressors (challenges) that characterise the empowerment process of the FSHSP. As already mentioned in chapter two, stressors are seen to be ubiquitous and, thus, are "omnipresent in human existence" (Antonovsky, 1979:70). With this standpoint, it was crucial for the study first to situate the notion of "ubiquity of stressors" within empowering process of the FSHSP. The study's findings reveal that both students and teachers had to deal with several challenges (later operationalised as stressors) throughout their stint in school. The nature of these challenges appears systemic, as these challenges were mainly tied to the shortcomings of the FSHSP. For instance, when you consider challenges such as *poor*

learning conditions, poor living conditions, poor attitude of teachers, increased enrolment related stress as well as economic-related stress, they may reflect, by and large, systemic challenges that came with the FSHSP. In implication, these challenges were inevitable, with the reason being that it is something the participants had no control over.

By employing Antonovsky's conception of stressors, the salutogenic implication of this finding is that students and teachers perceived systemic challenges as stressors that they had to deal with under FSHSP. First, the notion of the ubiquity of stressors makes it suggestive that both students and teachers were bound to perceive these challenges as stressors to a considerable degree. This is in line with Antonovsky's (1979) salutogenic position that, even under comfortable, benign, sheltered environments, people are continuously made to deal with fairly serious stressors. Against the background of Antonovsky's (1979) conception of stressors, the challenges of the FSHSP emerged as stimuli from the external environment (unlike routine stimuli) that elicited coping demands. However, participants had no immediately available and adequate responses to meet the coping needs and thus instigated what Antonovsky (1979:69) refers to as a movement down the dis-ease end of the health continuum.

In light of the preceding discussion, I address the salutogenic questions: how did participants manage stressors and prevent them from leading to stress? What explains some participants' ability to identify resources at their disposal to mitigate stressors (at least some of the time)?

7.3.1 Towards A Sense of Coherence (SOC)

SOC, the key concept of the salutogenic theory, is operationalised as the primary analytical framework to understand how humans perceive and manage stressors, the capacity to find coping strategies and resources, which Antonovsky terms as GRRs, to meet changes in everyday life (Eriksson, 2017). Here, the actual starting point is that SOC can only be understood if we understand the coping process (Antonovsky, 1992). Therefore, the study finds it imperative to examine the coping processes of participants as functions of their SOC, as it enables a movement along the health continuum. By reviewing the coping process, it means a systematic investigation of participants' capacity to assess and understand the stressful situations they found themselves in (comprehensibility), the motivation to move in a health-promoting direction (meaningfulness), and having the capacity to do so (manageability) (Eriksson, 2017).

The global theme, coping strategies and resources, mirrored in the third sub-objective of the study, provides empirical insights into the coping process of the participants, given the various stressors they had to manage. The study findings reveal that although there existed systemic

stressors tied to the FSHSP, efforts were made by both individuals and institutional stakeholders to stay focused amidst all tensions[22] by drawing on available GRRs. Coping strategies varied among participants depending on the meaning they ascribed to a given stressor and hence, the tension outcome. For instance, the findings reveal how the students reacted and coped differently when faced with stressors and tensions tied to poor learning conditions. A category of participants resorted to *extra personal studies* (David, Mark, Paul, Eric) as a resistance resource; another category also resorted to *extra tuition* (Joshua, Dennis, Paul, Collins and Mathew) as a resistance resource in coping with the tension, etc.

Here, the implication is that the participants seem to have perceived stressors and tensions in a transactional[23] manner and hence, the disparate nature of their coping strategies. This particular phenomenon reflects and substantiates Antonovsky's (1979) idea of the flexibility of coping strategies and how strategies are utilised in a contingency manner and willingness to consider them based on one's evaluation of a stressor. Antonovsky (1979:113) contends that "given the dynamic character of coping with stressors, the strategy that is open to constant, built-in evaluation and subsequent revision...is bound to be more successful, other things being equal, than other strategies". This interpretation can also be elaborated with the findings of Kitano & Lewis's (2005) study. In their study, they argue that children, when faced with adversity, demonstrate some flexibility based on their cultural experiences and values in drawing on a range of coping strategies with support from teachers and peers (Kitano & Lewis, 2005).

Owing to these discussions, what are the implications of my findings in understanding one's SOC defined by their coping process? In addressing this, participants' SOC will be analysed based on their orientation toward the world and its stressors, perceived on a continuum, as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful (Antonovsky, 1996:15).

Comprehensibility

First, it is quite suggestive from the data material that participants appear to have exuded a general sense of comprehensibility (CO) of the situation in which they found themselves. The logic of CO has it that the ability to exhibit a great deal of understanding of a stressful situation is deemed a coping prerequisite: "what one comprehends is easier to manage" (Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017:97). This, according to the salutogenic theory, drives the development of

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[22] Tensions are aroused by stressors whose consequence can be negative, neutral, or salutary (Antonovsky, 1979; Sullivan, 1989).

[23] According to Antonovsky (1979, 94), stressor is a transactional phenomenon based on the meaning of the stimulus to the perceiver.

one's SOC to enable a movement along the health ease/dis-ease continuum (Antonovsky, 1993; Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017). The study's findings seem to indicate that participants' responses to a given stressor and tension were clear manifestations of their orientation to life stressors as predictable and orderable.

Second, the findings suggest that participants' CO appear to be entirely subjective and varied among participants. Although the quality of the study's data does not allow for the determination of participants' CO levels (whether high or low), the data offer leads on participants' levels of CO based on the meaning they ascribed to the stressful situation as rationally understandable and predictable. For example, the findings reveal instances where students seem to have demonstrated different levels of CO relative to the stressor - poor learning conditions that came with the FSHSP. The findings indicate that while some of the students had predicted the negative consequence of the stressor as mentioned above by adopting strategies like extra tuition (Paul, Collins, Mathew), extra personal studies (David, Mark, Paul, Eric), and the adoption of learning strategies (Emmanuel), there were also a couple of the students (Mabel and Patricia) on the other hand who seemed relatively unresponsive to the stressor. Although Mabel and Patricia had complained about limited time for learning, their responses did not suggest any effort to deal with the problem head-on. Here, arguing from a salutogenic standpoint, the difference in responses may reflect how students understood the stressor differently. Students with a good understanding of the stressor (good sense of CO) were able to create structures (extra tuition, extra personal studies, and the adoption of learning strategies).

The variations in the sense of CO among participants' do not emerge as a surprise since the study recruited different participants (especially the students) of different ages and SOCs that had developed over time. Research shows that SOC develops over the entire life cycle; that is, it increases with age (Feldt et al., 2007; Nilsson, Leppert, Simonsson & Starrin, 2010 cited by Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017:102). In this study, students were seen to be in their adolescence, and hence, still going through their SOC development phases. Although my study did not examine the impact of age on CO, there seems to be an indication that some participants (especially students) displayed maturity in dealing with their problems. This inference is well mirrored in Griselda's comment: "*Though it did not really affect me, the double-tracking system did affect many of my friends who are a year or two younger than me".* However, Somerville, Hare, & Casey (2011 cited by Braun-Lewensohn, Idan, Lindström, & Margalit, 2017:123) argue that "tension between regulation of behaviour and sensitivity to positive environmental cues makes the response of the individual during the period of adolescence more complex".

The findings of my study (the variations in students' CO) confirm this complex, which makes the unresponsiveness of some of the students in certain situations unsurprising.

Manageability

Another component that is deemed crucial in understanding one's SOC is manageability (MA). As already defined in chapter two, MA mainly involves the perception that resources (GRRs) are readily available in one's environment and thus, requires the ability to identify and utilise them in a salutary manner to mitigate challenges at hand (Eriksson & Lindström, 2008; Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017; Hanson, 2007; Darkwah, Asumeng, & Daniel, 2017). In this sense, the study identifies the concept of GRRs as a point of departure to illustrate participants' sense of MA since the ability to identify and utilise GRRs determines one's survival of a given stressor.

The study's findings reveal several resources and strategies utilised by participants as resistance resources (GRRs) to mitigate the stressors of the FSHSP. They include *intrinsic drive to mitigate challenges* (individual level GRRs); *and the government's responses to challenges and efforts by the school authorities* (Institutional level GRRs). The finding implies that movement towards good health amidst the systemic challenges of the programme lay in the participants' hands. Therefore, there was the need to identify and tap on relevant resistance resources. This confirms the salutogenic position that surviving a given stressor requires identifying and utilising GRRs in a salutary manner (Eriksson & Lindström, 2008; Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017; Hanson, 2007; Darkwah, Asumeng, & Daniel, 2017). Furthermore, this dichotomy of resistance resources (Individual Versus Institutional levels of GRRs as revealed by the study) confirms Antonovsky's (1987) idea that coping resources at one's disposal can be under one's control or controlled by legitimate others, in this case, the government and school authorities. To further elaborate this, as much as both students and teachers drew on their managerial abilities to identify "informal" internal resources (individual level GRRs), they similarly found "formal" resources provided by institutional stakeholders very crucial for the management of the prevailing stressors (Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017:98).

The implication here is that in situations where individuals found themselves in stressful conditions, survival was collective, that is, a joint effort by both individuals and institutions. This confirms literature that in schooling systems, which are firmly in the hands of the state, the state along with schools is responsible for the well-being of students through the provision of relevant resources in the educational production (The Economist, 1999; Wößmann, 2003; Frydenberg et al., 2004)). This finding is also congruent with the findings from Wößmann (2003) and Frydeberg et al. (2004). For example, in their study, Frydenberg et al. (2004)

emphasise the role of schools and the state in developing and providing requisite resources to help build students' resilience or coping skills in dealing with stressors. Wößmann (2003) also concludes that the institutional environment necessary for students' achievements is shaped by many institutional resources made available to students.

Meaningfulness

Coping requires that one exudes a great deal of motivation and commitment to achieve resilience against prevailing stressors; and, at the same time, finding meaning in managing the stressful situation (Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that the intrinsic drive to mitigate challenges emerged from the study's findings as a resistance resource. This particular theme of inherent drive to mitigate challenges defined participants' (especially students) coping processes amidst their prevailing stressors. It furthermore serves as a point of departure for discussions on meaningfulness (ME), the motivational component of SOC.

Although participants' intrinsic drive to mitigate challenges emerged as a psychological resource to enhance stress resilience, it also allows for a positive association between participants' manageability and their meaningful world. This association, first, is in line with the salutogenic assumption that psychological resources such as self-efficacy instigate life experiences crucial for the individual's meaningful world (Idan, Eriksson, & Al-Yagon, 2017). Second, the study's findings project participants' innate self-desire to resolve stressful challenges being the primary starting point of their movement towards positive well-being. It is seen that almost all the individual level resistance resources of students seem to trace their roots from the participants' sense of motivation to do well while avoiding distress.

The implication here is that participants seemed keen on achieving their academic goals by investing energies to avoid the distress that could hamper academic success. This finding is in line and substantiates the salutogenic position that there is the need to put "one's fate in one's own hands" by investing energy to avoid distress if you want rewards to occur (in this case, academic success) (Eriksson & Mittelmark, 2017; Antonovsky, 1979:153). This is what Antonovsky and Rotter describe as "sense of control" and "internal locus of control", respectively (Antonovsky, 1979:153). Thus, for instance, in situations where students had to study under constrained resources and limited time for personal studies, some exhibited the desire to invest their energies into extra individual studies at night, adopt learning strategies, go to school early, etc.

The finding further implies that when one is able to develop emotional resilience under stressful situations, one is able to perceive the situation as a mere challenge. This, in turn, shows the

commitment to draw on the relevant GRRs available. Darkwah, Asumeng, & Daniel (2017:81) refers to this resilience as strength in the face of adversity, indicating a positive move towards health despite prevailing stressful conditions. This finding additionally supports earlier studies where students' value of the motivation to succeed amidst challenges is deemed quite salient (See Frydenberg, 2004; Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). Struthers, Perry, & Menec (2000), particularly in their study, find a positive relationship between academic stress and motivation. Their study finds that academic stress hampers students' performance and, thus, the motivation to overcome academic stressors is crucial for college students (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). In this sense, the onus lies on college instructors encouraging students to plan and manage their time to facilitate greater motivation and performance (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000).

Winding up on the theoretical discussion...

In sum, the complementary usage of both theories of Empowerment and Salutogenesis has been highly worthwhile for the study. This is by the framework's strength to offer both theoretical justifications for the empowerment processes and outcomes and the nature of participants' psychosocial reactions to the empowerment processes. Furthermore, by viewing coping processes as a behavioural component of empowerment, the theory of Salutogenesis offered insights into how participants' orientation of life situations (SOC) was fundamental in their quest to achieve empowered outcomes. Figure 7.1 provides an overview of the empowerment – Salutogenesis theoretical synthesis.

With that being said, it is noteworthy, the limited evidence and its theoretical discussion on the cognitive/coping/behavioural dimension to empowerment under the FSHSP contribute to the extant FSHSP literature by adding and filling the gap in that light. That aspect of the FSHSP analysis is quite missing in the empirical literature.

7.4 OTHER EMERGING THEMES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

7.4.1 Fee Payment Under the Programme: Absorption of All Fees Versus Payment of Other Expenses

One emerging yet unexpected finding was the inconsistency of the perceived programme objective (absorbing all fees) with an FSHSP's implementation reality (payment of other expenses). The study findings reveal that the majority of the participants understood the programme as an empowerment intervention to make senior high education in Ghana accessible to all by eliminating cost barriers. The implication is that the participants, especially the students, did not expect fee payment in any shape or form under the programme.
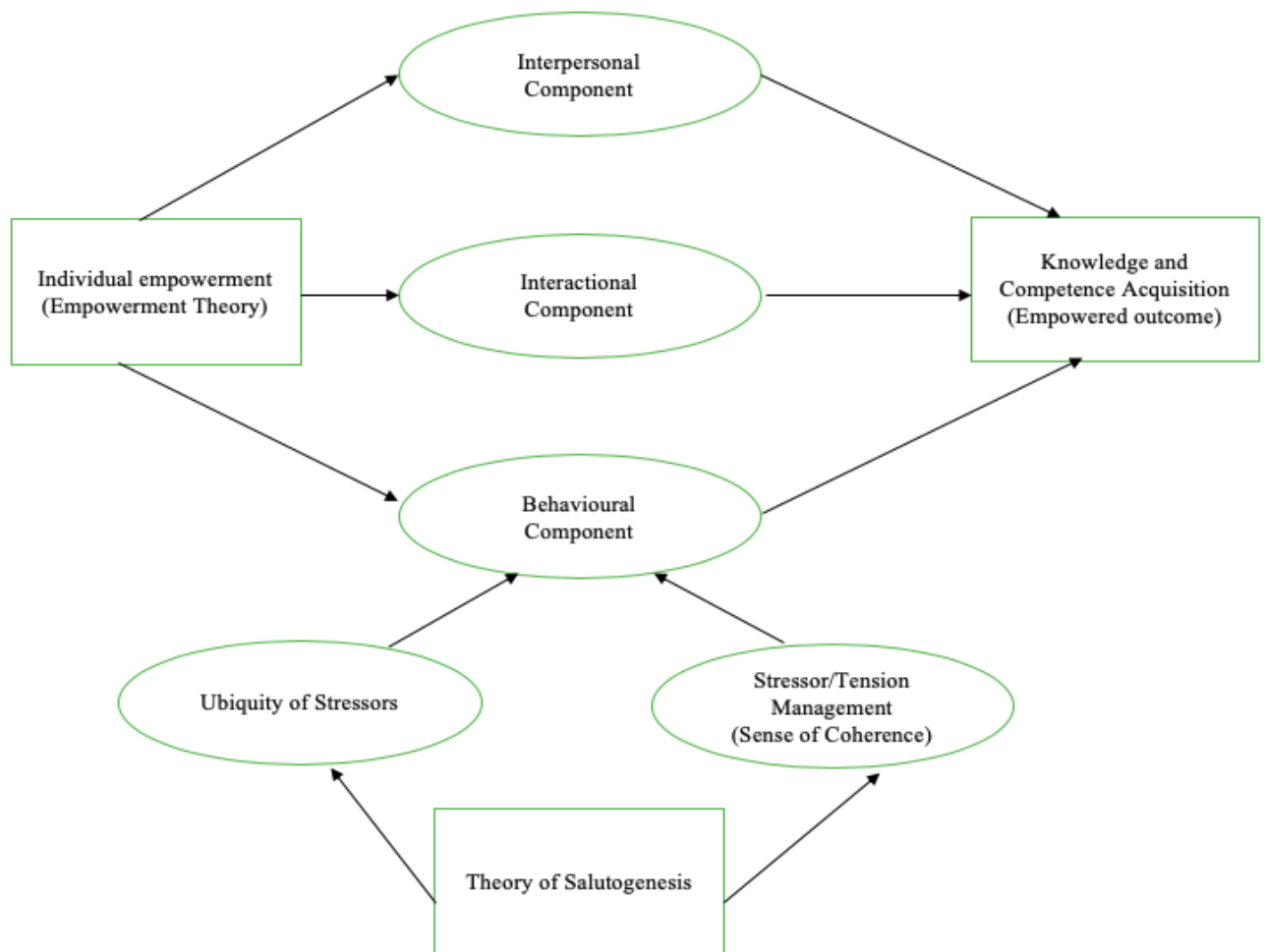
Figure 7. 1The Empowerment – Salutogenesis Theoretical Synthesis

Nonetheless, there appeared to be an inconsistency between this policy intent and what was instituted at some schools. Participants like Griselda, Emmanuel, Mark, Paul, Mabel, Victor, Collins, Solomon and Hilda all confirmed this inconsistency in their respective schools.

However, I found this particular inconsistency quite fascinating. Why must students pay for expenses that are meant to be free as captured by the programme objectives? Unfortunately, my study could not offer any in-depth insight into this phenomenon due to the study's intent. However, inferring from the assertions of some of the participants, it is seemingly suggestive that this inconsistency is by virtue of a lack of enough financial resources to support an effective fee-free programme. Many participants described, directly or indirectly, how the entire programme lacked a robust funding framework, culminating in inadequate learning resources and infrastructure, poor feeding, etc. This finding and interpretation resonate with findings from extant empirical studies (Addae, Affi, & Boakye, 2019; Tamnja & Pajibo, 2019; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). Findings from these studies reveal that the introduction of the FSHSP has taken a toll on the country's economy and thereby causing some parents to be coerced into paying certain extra fees due to the insufficiency and untimely release

of funds (Addae, Affi, & Boakye, 2019; Tamnja & Pajibo, 2019; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021; Chanimbe & Dankwah, 2021). Therefore, Cudjoe (2018) has been critical about this funding conundrum and has called on the government to address the financial pressure and develop strategies to enhance an effective fee-free programme.

Furthermore, the challenge of informal user fee collection under free education programmes does not seem to be context-specific to Ghana's FSHSP. This finding also adds to the extant empirical dialogue on the informal fee payment syndrome under free education initiatives. Empirical studies have projected this trend in many developing countries, particularly SSA (Sakaue, 2018; Byamugisha & Nishimura, 2015; Kayabwe & Nbacwa, 2014). These studies reveal that regardless of the great strides made by free education initiatives/programmes, parents/guardians are mostly coerced into making certain informal/illegal fee payments in most public schools due to insufficient programme grants to cover school budgets (Sakaue, 2018; Byamugisha & Nishimura, 2015; Kayabwe & Nbacwa, 2014).

7.5 RELEVANCE OF THE FINDINGS WITHIN THE DISCOURSES ON HEALTH PROMOTION, EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

7.5.1 Lessons for Health Promoters

This study was mainly premised on the concept of empowerment, which has been central (a core pillar) to the field and practice of health promotion as part of the transition to a post-Ottawa Charter world (Berry, Murphy, & Coser, 2014; Green & Tones, 2010). Through empowerment, health promoters are bent on transforming power relations by ensuring that people have the requisite skills to control their own lives and make healthy decisions through enablement (Luttrell, Quiroz, Scrutton, & Bird, 2007; World Health Organisation, 1986).

In this vein, the first lesson from the empirical findings for health promoters is analysed within the landscape of health promotion's power transformation and empowerment. The study findings reveal that it is the primary purpose of the FSHSP to pursue an all-inclusive senior high education by making it free for all. From a health promotion perspective, this finding implies that the FSHSP intends to equitably redistribute power (knowledge) by ensuring children from all households (impoverished households) are duly empowered with high school education. This is a vital lesson for health promoters, for it mirrors their position on power being the core of empowerment (Laverack, 2004). To health promoters, working towards empowerment means addressing the causes of disempowerment caused by how power relations and resources are inequitably distributed in the community (Berry et al., 2014; Luttrell et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the purpose of the FSHSP does not seem to drift off from the redistributive power agenda of empowerment initiatives. To illustrate this, the study findings depict a transformative distribution of power (power with)[24] (Laverack, 2013; Luttrell et al., 2007). With power with, key secondary stakeholders[25] (in this case, FSHSP implementers) are resolved on deliberately distributing state's resources equitably (using their power over)[26] to equip all children with knowledge and employable skills in order to seize control over the influences on their lives and health - a sense of mastery (power-from-within)[27] - in a top-down fashion (Laverack, 2004; Luttrell et al., 2007). In this situation, the FSHSP implementers act as outside agents who exercise control and monitor the programme planning and funding while the targeted groups (the students) only participate according to the implementation framework provided (Laverack, 2004). In sum, I identify this as a positive lesson for health promoters because health promoters are keen on understanding how health promotion can work on the health inequities like disempowerment that remain at the root of poor health outcomes in many developing countries through empowerment agendas (Berry et al., 2014).

Notwithstanding this, empirical health promotion literature demonstrates that many empowerment programmes do not achieve their intended outcomes, as what planners intend to achieve mostly differ vastly after its implementation (Berry et al., 2014; Campbell & Mzaidume, 2001). Based on the study findings, the FSHSP does not seem to be an exception. Hence, this emerges as a negative lesson for health promoters. The findings confirm this literature position by outlining some empowerment lapses: unsatisfactory skills development (both the processes and outcomes) revealed by a slight minority of the participants. Considering the value placed on skills development (an action area of health promotion), this growing trend does not augur well for the field of health promotion (WHO, 1986; Laverack, 2004).

Hence, trying to understand why some programmes fail to achieve expected results, health promoters somewhat attribute these failures to their approaches, that is, experts imposing

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[24] Power with describes a different set of social relationships, in which power-over is used carefully and deliberately to increase their individual choice and capacity for self-reliance (power-from-within), rather than to dominate or exploit them (Laverack, 2013:16; Luttrell et al., 2007:6).

[25] The secondary stakeholders refer to "the people or organisations that act as an intermediary in the delivery of the programme; they are the outside agents" (Laverack, 2004:33)

[26] Power over is the "social relationships in which one party is made to do what another party wishes them to, despite their resistance and even if it may not be in their best interests... The exercise of power-over does not always have to be negative. It can be used as a state legislation to redistribute market income to prevent poverty" (Laverack, 2013:15)

[27] Power-from-within is described as experience of self... that increases the feelings of value and a sense of individual mastery" (Laverack, 2013:15)

implementation frameworks from above (Laverack, 2004; Berry et al., 2014). Laverack (2004) and Berry et al. (2014) advance that mostly implementation stakeholders, who are seen as experts, do not have the requisite information to instigate change through predetermined indicators within the community. The findings of the study seem to also align with this justification for the problems of the FSHSP. Most of the participants pointed fingers at the government and its cohorts (MoE and GES) for being responsible for the FSHSP's empowerment failures. The implication is that policy implementers appear not to have appropriately contextualised the programme before its initial roll-out. There seem to have existed fewer contextual consultations, which Price, Dake, & Ward (2016) describe as a needs assessment. According to Price et al. (2016), proper needs assessment provides a foundation for programme planning to help with a proper allocation of health resources (in this case, social health resources)[28] and to establish a baseline against which to gauge the effectiveness of the program (through evaluation of interventions). Matey (2018), in his study, also accentuates this lack of contextual consultation by similarly linking the FSHSP's implementation lapses to the absence of adequate stakeholder consultation, and hence, a hasty implementation.

Another lesson for health promoters is the prevalence of health equities (social injustice) within the empowerment process of the FSHSP. The findings on the challenges and coping strategies and resources seem to imply that the initial approach of Ghana's FSHSP has been saddled with some social injustices emanating from health inequities in the course of the empowerment. This is anchored on the premise that conditions in the society must be fair as well as resources being equitable distributed, which was not the case in my study (Green & Tones, 2010). It can be inferred from the study findings that despite the prevalence of empowerment challenges, the impact on participants' well-being was not the same. While some students could stay healthy amidst their challenges, a section of them struggled to maintain good health (like dealing with stress). However, it appears that the health inequalities among students resulted from inequities in the coping opportunities available to students. For example, only students from affluent families got the chance to enjoy extra tuition services to improve their performance.

Inequalities tied to socio-economic inequities is empirically grounded. According to Reardon (2011), children from high income families tend to perform better due to the level of investment

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[28] Social heath is a "dimension of health that is conceptualised by using variables such as educational status of a population, level of poverty and near poverty, crime rates, and a wide variety of other indicators" (Price et al., 2016:88)

by their families in their cognitive and intellectual development. Reardon (2011) argues that children from rich families will always have the requisite resources and opportunities to develop cognitive and academic skills, unlike children from low-income families. Caucutt et al., (2017) also in their study establish how poor children are unable cope with academic challenges due to insufficient academic investments by their poor parents. According to Caucutt et al., (2017), poor parents are unable to provide extra books, lessons and extracurricular activities to their children to help them cope with the learning demands in school.

7.5.2 Pursuing Quality Education (SDG4): Lessons for Educational Policy Actors

The modern approach to education has now become a transnational affair where both national and international actors interact through what Castells (2004 cited by Moutsios, 2010) term as "network states" (network of both nation-states and global actors) to determine what ought and ought not to be for educational development in various nation-states. Thus, the United Nations, which is regarded as one of the key international actors within the governance structure of modern education, advances quality education as the key to breaking the cycle of poverty (United Nations, 2015). Given this, the United Nations, through the Agenda 2030 (specifically SDG 4), advance an educational blueprint for policy actors to shape educational programmes around the globe. The SDG 4 seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Ghana's FSHSP is a classic example of the Agenda 2030 inspired educational programme (Chanimbe & Prah, 2020; Addae et al., 2019). Being premised on the core values of SDG 4, it is the programme's objective[29] to ensure equity and quality education by eliminating all cost barriers to secondary education in Ghana. On this note, lessons from the study findings for the FSHSP implementation actors are tied to the issues of equity and quality education.

The first positive lesson for the policy actors is the success chalked up in ensuring equitable and free access to high school education under the FSHSP. This success is also well-substantiated in the FSHSP literature. Several earlier studies have demonstrated how the FSHSP has alleviated senior high enrolment inequities by increasing the enrolment rates of students (See Nurudeen et al., 2018; Addae, 2019; Adu-Ababio & Osei, 2018; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). For instance, Mohammed & Kuyini's (2021:154) findings reveal that "in the Free SHS period, enrolment rose from 472,730 in 2017, 500,000 in 2018 and then jumped to 600,000 in 2019". The findings of my study confirm this success by revealing the reduction of educational

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[29] Check https://freeshs.gov.gh/index.php/free-shs-policy/

exclusion at the high school level as one of the major impacts of the FSHSP. Equity in education underscored by this programme has been noted as the first of its kind in the African contexts, especially West Africa (Nir, 2019). This is an achievement that the policy formulators and actors must be proud of due to its pre-eminent presence within the educational space in West Africa and Africa at large Nir, 2019). Nir (2019) reports that while elementary and middle school are compulsory and free in some parts of West Africa, tuition-free high school is rare.

Second, an issue of concern and hence a lesson for policy actors has to do with the quality of education offered under the FSHSP. As already demonstrated in section 7.2, the issue of quality education under the FSHSP, is mainly tied to its pedagogical framework. The study findings reveal the pedagogical framework of the FSHSP as being saddled with poor tuition practices, DTS problems, poor attitudes of teachers, limited role of teachers in academic development, etc. The first implication of this is that the goal of equipping students with employable skills through transformative learning is ostensibly under threat. It seems evident in the study findings that the FSHSP did not introduce a pedagogical framework that suits its intent of equipping students with 21st-century employable skills. As already mentioned in section 7.2, in acquiring 21st-century employable skills, the pedagogical process must be transformative, in that it must ensure pedagogical practices that foster the interaction of learners with their facilitators, mentors, and peers, as well as practising and applying newly acquired skills and knowledge (Michel et al., 2020; Scott, 2015; Saavedra & Opfer, 2012). In the case of this study, the pedagogical framework seemingly lacked these transformative elements.

However, one may argue that the FSHSP has instead built students assertiveness (an employable skill) by making them self dependent (as per the study findings), which Lawson (2011) describes as personal effectiveness. To me, this will be a misinterpretation of data. Self-dependency emerged as a function of students' resilience towards the empowerment challenges. The study findings indicate that due to the limited role of teachers in the empowerment process, success was never guaranteed without personal effort (self-dependency). This concurs with the literature that individual effort and self-regulated learning are rather meant to complement and enhance student achievement (See Radl & Miller, 2021; Dunlosky et al., 2020).

7.5.3 Improved Well-being as A Requirement for Quality Education: The Role of Health Promoters and Educational Policy Actors

Education and health are two mutually inclusive aspects of sustainable development (SD) that the study cannot overlook. This is rooted in the assumption that good health is essential in fostering quality education in schools (Jensen, Dür, & Buijs, 2017). Based on this documented

assumption, implementing stakeholders of the Agenda 2030 believe that, like all the other goals, the implementation of the SDGs related to health (SDG 3) and education (SDG 4) should not be pursued in a fragmented and siloed fashion but rather identify the salient areas for partnerships due to their interactive nature (Nilsson, Griggs, & Visbeck, 2016). However, proponents of education for sustainability do not only see the mutual inclusiveness of health and education in SD, but also how their interaction instils sustainability knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours in favour of the environment and its economic and social implications on their well-being (Besong & Holland 2015; Leal Filho & Pace 2016; Michel, 2020). To them, this interaction also enforces the achievement of all the other SDGs[30].

In this connection, there is the need to situate the role of health promoters in the pursuance of SDG4 through the FSHSP. First, to pursue an effective provision of quality education while maintaining the positive well-being of students and teachers, it is imperative to form an interactive partnership between health promoters and educational policymakers right at the policy formulation and implementation phases of the policymaking process (Laverack, 2013). Today, as part of their contribution to the Agenda 2030, health promoters are now keen on ensuring healthy policymaking, including educational policies, through the Health in All Policies Approach (HIAP) (Laverack, 2014). The HIAP, according to the 2013 Helsinki Statement, refers to the "approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health implications of decisions, seeks synergies, avoid harmful health impacts in order to improve population health and health equity" (World Health Organisation, 2014:2). Therefore, in ensuring that the FSHSP is health-promoting (a healthy policy), health promoters will be much concerned with the social determinants of health within the school setting by seeking to avoid its potential implications on health and health equity when making educational policies (Buss, Fonseca, Galvão, Fortune, & Cook, 2016). However, Laverack (2013) advances that pursuing healthy policymaking is always not an easy task. According to Laverack (2013:52-53), the power struggle among competing interests involved in many healthy public policy decisions always makes it challenging to advance health-promoting ideas since every group is keen on protecting their influence and interests of their stakeholders.

The findings and several interpretations of the study seem to indicate the silo formulation and implementation of the FSHSP with total disregard for the principles of HIAP. Were health promoters or promotion practitioners involved in the FSHSP's formulation and

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[30] Check appendix 7.1 for the interactivity of all the SDGs with the SDG 3 at the center of the interaction.

implementation? The study findings do not seem to reflect any such partnership. First, issues of health inequities, as discussed in subsection 7.6.1, seem to suggest that policy actors failed to consult and consider the social determinants of health in students' empowerment and thus, leading to detrimental consequences on students and teachers' well-being. Second, the findings reveal that the programme lacked course curricula that could enlighten students on many protective factors for health and reduce health-risking behaviours. Such curricula would have been essential in the coping processes of students when faced with health-threatening situations.

Furthermore, the welfare of teachers seems lacking in the FSHSP implementation framework. The empowerment system of the FSHSP is more student-centred to the neglect of teachers' welfare and empowerment. Teacher empowerment cannot be overemphasised without linking it to the number of positive outcomes in classroom delivery, such as greater work satisfaction and improved teaching (Lawson, 2011; Naidoo, 2015). Conclusively, considering the preceding arguments, it may be argued that an enabling and supportive environment (as enshrined in the action areas of health promotion) was not duly established for students and teachers to enhance healthy living; and hence, effective empowerment.

7.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

7.6.1 Participation and Data Sources

In pursuit of the central objective of the study, the plan was to draw participation from three-level stakeholders involved in the implementation of the programme: the ministerial level (main policy actors), the teaching body, and the student body. Hence, the MoE, teachers, and students were my intended participants for the study. The rationale was to gather in-depth data from the categories of participants mentioned above with different perspectives for data triangulation and rich insights into the processes and impact of the FSHSP. However, as already mentioned in chapter five, participation at the ministerial level proved to be a daunting one. I only managed to have a brief informal phone discussion with one of the MoE officials. However, the information gathered via that discussion was inadequate to contribute meaningfully to the study.

On this premise, I acknowledge that the impact of the missing data from the MoE was quite detrimental. First, the study was unable to ascertain perceptions of policymakers and key implementers concerning the progress and the significant successes of the FSHSP as far as student empowerment is concerned. Second, the inability to access participants at the MoE also denied me access to relevant policy documents that would have shed valuable light on the state of empowerment under the programme. The plan was to unravel the documented facts on students' performances (examination statistics) and living and learning conditions under the

free SHS programme. However, this plan was curtailed due to my inability to access the MoE. The only found online policy document detailed the core objects of the FSHSP.

7.6.2 Negative Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Study

Another significant limitation of the study is the research constraint posed by the upsurge of the Covid-19 pandemic. I must admit that the Covid-19 pandemic hampered the study from optimising its full potential. Research at the higher education level has considerably been affected since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic (Marinoni, Van't Land, & Jensen, 2020). Marinoni et al. (2020:32), in the IAU global survey report, reveal how scientific researches have completely stalled or are in the danger of not being completed at as much as 80% of higher education institutions around the world (424 universities from 109 countries) mainly due to the cancellation of international travel for researches.

My study in this regard could not prove immune to this threat of Covid-19 on research. First, due to stringent travel restrictions imposed by the Norwegian government, the initial plan of travelling to Ghana for the research could not materialise. This limitation greatly affected the planned design of the study, and hence, the quality of data garnered in that light. I ended up having recourse to online data collection techniques as a substitute for the already planned in-person face to face interviews and focus group discussions.

7.6.3 Challenge of Conducting an Online Research

I wish to acknowledge that the challenge of conducting online research as a novice was intensely felt and inadvertently affected the quality of my data. First and foremost, gathering and managing data via online research instruments seemed a little bit cumbersome and eventually got messy at a point. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I had no option but to relinquish my planned focus group discussion (FGD) at a point in the research. Although I managed to set up an FGD meeting with some of the participants with the help of my contracted research assistant, the meeting did not pan out as expected. The entire discussion was poorly moderated and recorded. As a result, I struggled to keep up with discussions as an online observer. In a nutshell, I found this unfortunate situation very disappointing due to my earlier optimism and excitement of running an online focus group discussion. Extant literature projects online focus group discussion of having a "considerable potential of gathering high-quality data within a relatively short period of time from respondents who are unable or unwilling to engage in traditional group discussions" (Tates et al., 2009:8). However, I only succumbed to the weakness of having an online focus group discussion and thereby opting for participants to provide written responses to open-ended questions.

Against this background, the study admits that data garnered through the written responses to open-ended questions were not the best. The data were much fraught with lots of ambiguities due to how superficial they were as well as several contradictory responses. This situation made analysis and interpretation a very daunting task. First, on data ambiguity, some of the written responses lacked explicit meanings. In some cases, they provided leads on certain situations without detailed descriptions of what happened. This can give room for misinterpretations. For example, with a question like: *How do you see the knowledge and skills acquired after every term of tuition?* Hilda, for instance, responds: *"It was not enough but okay"*. With this particular response, it carries a double meaning. On the one hand, the participant sees some gaps in knowledge and skills acquisition, that is, *"not enough";* on the other hand, knowledge and skills acquisition is okay. In such a situation, it is tough to ascertain the exact picture of knowledge and skills acquisition as perceived by the participant. Furthermore, the study recorded lots of short and vague responses such as "YES", "NO", "MOST", "NOTHING MUCH", "NO ONE", etc., from participants without vividly recounting their individual experiences under the FSHSP. Unfortunately, due to the nature of the data collection tool, I was unable to delve into such responses with follow up questions, which affected the quality of data garnered.

Second, on the issue of contradiction, there were lots of inconsistencies in some of the participants' responses. For example, Griselda responds to the question – *"How do you perceive the quality of tuition being offered under the free SHS programme?"* – that: *"Generally, it is effective"*. However, she continues to comment that the "Free SHS has helped her not to rely on anybody for her development" in response to the question: *How have the free SHS related challenges affected your personal development (skills and knowledge acquisition) as a student?* Again, this makes interpretation very difficult because it seems there exist some tuition gaps that forced Griselda not to rely on anyone for her personal development. Meanwhile, she had already claimed tuition was generally effective, and hence, the contradiction.

In sum, by putting on these challenges in perspective, it would have been quite beneficial to interact with participants in person in order to control some of these challenges tied to the nature of the research (remote online research).

7.6.4 Generalisability and Transferability of the Study

The limitation of generalisability is tied to the study's research approach (qualitative approach – case study). In principle, qualitative studies, especially case studies, have limited leeway to make generalisations beyond cases to wider populations (Yin, 2003; Punch, 2014). This is because "since the findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular

environments and individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations" (Shenton, 2004:69).

First, the findings and conclusions drawn by the study cannot be generalised to reflect the state of student empowerment under the current FSHSP across the nation (the wider population). However, it is worth noting that it was not the intention of the study to make generalisations beyond the study findings to the wider population, that is, student empowerment under the FSHSP across the nation. According to Denzin (1983 cited by Punch, 2014:122), generalisation should not always be the objective of all research projects. In this light, the study intended to rather understand the complexity of the research phenomenon within the specified scope or context of the research and make suggestive propositions that can be assessed for their applicability and transferability to other contexts (Punch, 2014). For this reason, the study only made suggestive interpretations by using words and phrases such as "seem", "seemingly", "may indicate", "appear to", etc. to acknowledge the absence of generalisable data. However, by ensuring that these propositions can be assessed, applied and transferred to other similar contexts or studies, thick descriptions of setting, contexts, participants, actions, and situations have been provided and operationalised throughout the study (Yilmaz, 2013).

Furthermore, regardless of the absence of generalisable data, some theoretical interpretations have been generalised from the empirical findings to the theories (confirming theoretical assumptions) employed by the study through analytical generalisation (a level of generalisation) (See Gibbert et al., 2008; Punch, 2014).

7.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter primarily examined the implications of my findings, mainly vis à vis the study's theoretical framework and the discourses on health promotion, education, and SD in Ghana. Finally, the chapter winded up with discussions on the limitations of the study.

The next and final chapter concludes the study.

CHAPTER EIGHT
CONCLUSION

8.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter wraps up the study by recapping the main findings, implications and conclusions drawn by the study. It also offers brief reflections on the significance and contribution of the study to the relevant research fields and practice (policymakers and practitioners). Finally, the chapter winds up with recommendations for further research and practice.

8.2   SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The study's central objective was to explore how the initial roll-out of Ghana's FSHSP has empowered participating students. In this vein, the study focused on examining both the empowerment processes and outcomes of the FSHSP.

SOBJ1: To explore the perception and realities of the initial roll-out of Ghana's FSHSP

The essence of this sub-objective was to unravel how students and teachers perceived and understood the FSHSP, vis à vis its realities of the implementation ("what was promised" versus "what was delivered"). At the end of the study, participants demonstrated a great understanding of the programme based on the public sensitisation of the policy. They generally talked about both the economic intent and all-inclusiveness of secondary education under the FSHSP. However, with the realities (scope) of the implementation, it somewhat differed across the various schools. Some participants revealed how the programme had been duly implemented to reflect its exact purpose and scope as promised. However, some students expressed otherwise that there were instances where they had to pay for other expenses in their schools.

- **Implication:** These findings imply that participants perceived the policy as a senior high educational exclusion intervention. They seemed optimistic about its future impact on child education in Ghana. However, some inconsistencies existed in the FSHSP's initial roll-out, in that what was generally promised somewhat differed from what was delivered. Although programme critics have raised some inconsistency issues, this was an unexpected finding.

- **Contribution:** The findings contribute to the literature. It mainly adds to the literature by providing empirical insights and justifications for arguments by policy analysts and critics that the programme has failed to achieve its fee-free high school education agenda effectively.

SOBJ2: To identify and map challenges experienced by participating students and teachers

The rationale for this sub-objective was to understand how challenging the empowerment process has been under the FSHSP and further ascertain its implication on empowerment. In

this light, the participants revealed several implementation challenges that affected the empowerment process: *poor learning and living conditions, poor attitude of teachers* (students' perceptions), *increased enrolment related stress, economic-related stress, and other challenges* (teachers' perceptions). Nonetheless, some participants were revealed to have had somewhat struggle-free experiences. Furthermore, participants blamed both the government and school authorities for being responsible for the challenges. However, some blamed no one.

- **Implication:** The first implication of the finding is mainly situated within the Salutogenesis theory. Thus, the empowerment challenges were perceived by participants as stressors that required coping mechanisms. Due to the notion of the ubiquity of stressors, this finding did not emerge as a surprise. Participants were expected to face stressors as part of the empowerment process since stressors are supposed to be omnipresent in human existence. Second, the double-track system and its related problems (poor learning conditions) also imply a compromise on the quality of tuition offered (empowering process). This emerged as an unexpected finding because the system was meant to improve students' academic achievement/performance and not negatively affect teaching and learning.

- **Contribution:** This finding is of relevance to both fields of health promotion and educational development in Ghana. First, this finding adds to the plethora of empirical evidence that provides empirical insights into the applicability of Salutogenesis in schools. Second, it also adds to the literature that seeks to unearth the challenges of the FSHSP and inform policy actors on the need to revise the pedagogy to meet the purpose of the FSHSP.

SOBJ3: To explore the strategies and resources used by participating students and teachers to mitigate the challenges

The purpose of the third sub-objective was to delve deeper into the stress management aspect of the empowerment process. The study revealed two different levels of coping strategies: the individual and the institutional level. Two main coping strategies emerged at the individual level: *intrinsic drive to mitigate challenges and extra tuition.* At the institutional level, two coping themes emerged: the *government's response to challenges and efforts by the school authorities.* However, with a couple of exceptions, most participants further revealed that the measures by the institutions were beneficial in improving their well-being.

- **Implication:** The implication of the findings from this sub-objective was mainly situated within the theory of Salutogenesis using the three components of SOC. In essence, the findings on the coping process of the participants imply that participants perceived stressors

differently and hence coped based on how they understood these stressors. Moreover, these differences were very much reflective in participants' CO, MA, and ME.

- **Contribution:** This finding is of both theoretical significance to Salutogenesis and the discourse on the FSHSP. First, it contributes to the literature on SOC in schools by providing empirical evidence. Second, the study contributes to the discourse on the FSHSP by contributing to the literature gap on the stress management bit of the FSHSP's empowerment.

SOBJ4: To examine how participating students have benefited (knowledge, skills, and competencies) from the FSHSP

With this sub-objective, the plan was to examine the state and empowerment processes under the FSHSP. Thus, the study identified two empowerment indicators: quality tuition and knowledge, skills and competence acquisition. With the quality of tuition, most students generally believed that the tuition offered was top-notch, with many of them being pessimistic. It was a nearly split perception among participants. Furthermore, it was also a nearly split perception of the level of knowledge, skills, and competencies gained under the FSHSP. A slight majority of the students revealed a good level of knowledge and competence gained. However, the findings somewhat project self-dependency as also being crucial for student empowerment.

- **Implication:** Guided by the empowerment theory, the two empowerment indicators, quality tuition and knowledge and competence acquisition, defined the empowering processes and outcome of the FSHSP. However, context did not play any significant role in determining the empowering processes and outcomes. This emerged as an unexpected finding.

- **Contribution:** First, this finding adds to literature and discourse on the quality education for SD in Ghana. It provides empirical insights into the issue of quality education, given the empowerment approach that has been the prominent bone of contention within the discourse on FSHSP. Second, it contributes to the literature gap on the applicability of the empowerment theory in education researches; Not so much has been done in that regard.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Areas for Further Research

The study identifies two interesting aspects of empowerment that can be considered for further research since they were either left unexplored or under-explored by my research:

- With the FSHSP's core object to pursue quality education mirrored in SDG4, there is the need for more in-depth studies into the empowerment process with a much broader

population. This will help make better generalisable conclusions and interpretations on the best approach to empowerment given the current quality of education offered.

- The other empowerment aspect that needs further exploration is stress management. Salutogenesis provides a robust theoretical framework for such an analysis. However, since the study was mainly interested in all dimensions of empowerment, it could not explore all the salient elements of Salutogenesis. SOC was underexplored — the interconnectedness of participants' CO, MA, and ME, and the development of SOC with age as an explanatory factor.

Recommendations for Policy actors and Health promoters

Based on the findings and implications of the study, the study recommends:

- **A revision of the existing pedagogy and its pedagogical practices:** There seems to exist a pedagogy that does not complement the FSHSP's object of equipping students with employable skills through quality transformative education. The findings project several pedagogical anomalies such as poor learning conditions, limited role of teachers, etc. This is a threat to the quality educational system that the FSHSP intends to institutionalise.

- **Improve living and learning resources to help end the double-track system:** It seems quite evident that the double-track system has caused more harm than good, hence the need to turn to a rather single-track system. This can be achieved through local or international partnerships to improve living and learning resources crucial for an effective single-track system. Given its limited funding framework, policy actors must be enterprising by liaising with local and international development agencies and the private senior high schools for resource support to improve empowerment conditions.

- **Making the FSHSP health-promoting:** This recommendation is anchored on the goal of Health promotion to influence healthy public policies. It seems the policy was formulated and implemented in a siloed fashion. Thus, health promoters have a role to play in reforming the existing FSHSP. Health promoters and practitioners must take steps to advocate for the need for health-promoting schools (HPS) through a healthy FSHSP. Edwards et al. (2001, cited by Laverack 2013) advance a six-step strategy for health promoters when taking such a step: 1. Identify and define the health issues; 2. Analyse the existing policy to serve as the basis of the policy reform; 3. Undertake consultations; 4. Move towards decisions with the government; 5. Implementation towards the desired outcomes; and 6. Evaluation of the reform.

Furthermore, health promoters must propose the inculcation of practical stress management course contents or programmes into the existing pedagogy to help students effectively manage or avoid stress when faced with stressful situations.

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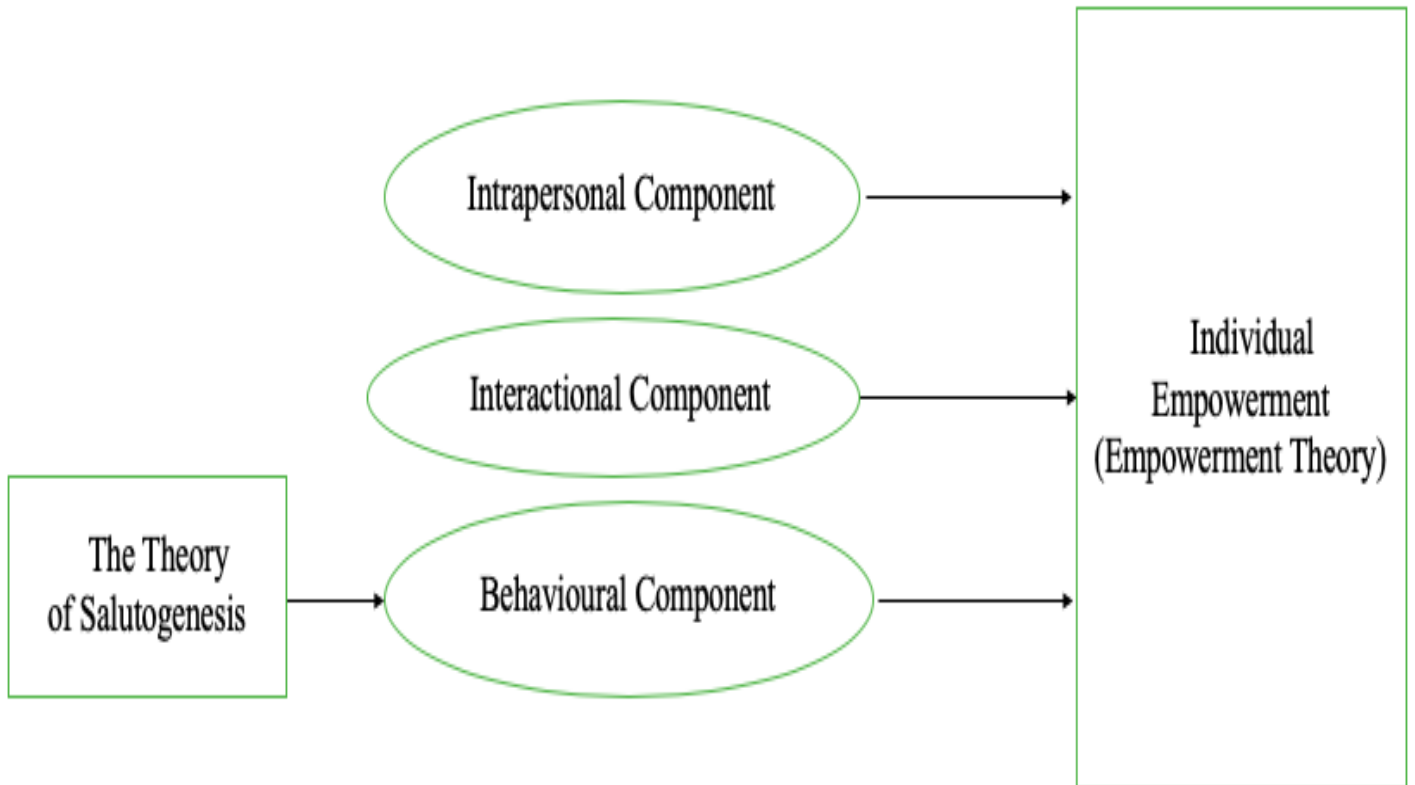
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APPENDIX 2.1 – THE THEORETICAL MODEL FOR EMPOWERMENT ANALYSIS

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Intrapersonal       │ ──────►
                    │ Component           │
                    └─────────────────────┘

                    ┌─────────────────────┐              ┌──────────────────────┐
                    │ Interactional       │ ──────►      │ Individual           │
                    │ Component           │              │ Empowerment          │
                    └─────────────────────┘              │ (Empowerment Theory) │
┌──────────────┐    ┌─────────────────────┐              │                      │
│ The Theory   │───►│ Behavioural         │ ──────►      │                      │
│ of           │    │ Component           │              │                      │
│ Salutogenesis│    └─────────────────────┘              └──────────────────────┘
└──────────────┘
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APPENDIX 5.1 – INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

- **Introductory Remarks and Informed Consent**

- **Background:**
  - Please tell me about yourself and your senior high school of affiliation.

- **Free Senior High School Policy**
  - Can you tell me what you know about the free senior high school programme?
  - How is the programme rolled out in your school?

- **Challenges of Teachers:**
  - Generally, what has been difficult, frustrating, and/or challenging for teachers in your school under the free SHS programme?
  - What have been your personal challenges under the free SHS programme?
  - Whom do you think is responsible for these challenges? Why?
  - How do you see teachers' well-being if secondary education had not been free?

- **Coping Strategies and Resources:**
  - What have you done in meeting these challenges?
  - Have they changed with time? Why?
  - What have been done by the school authorities in addressing the learning challenges?
  - What have been done by the government in addressing the learning challenges?
  - How have the responses of the school authorities and government improved the wellbeing of students and teachers?

- **Empowerment**
  - How do you perceive the quality of tuition being offered under the free SHS programme?
  - Considering the given learning challenges, how do you perceive the competencies, skills, and knowledge of students after every term of tuition vis a vis students in the pre-free SHS era?
  - How has the free SHS policy impacted the performance of students?
  - How have the learning challenges affected skills and knowledge acquisition of students?

APPENDIX 5.2 – OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

o **Please tell me about yourself and the senior high school you attend/attended.**

Ans:

o **Can you tell me what you know about the free senior high school programme?**

Ans:

o **What do/did you still have to pay for?**

Ans:

o **Generally, what has been difficult, frustrating, and/or challenging for students in your school under the free SHS programme?**

Ans:

o **What have been your personal challenges under the free SHS programme?**

Ans:

o **Whom do you think is responsible for these challenges? Why?**

Ans:

o **How do you see your well-being if secondary education had not been free?**

Ans:

o **What have you done to stay focus on studies in spite of the given challenges?**

Ans:

o **Have what you have done changed with time?**

Ans:

o **What have been done by the school authorities in addressing the challenges of students?**

Ans:

o **How have the responses of the school authorities improved the wellbeing of students?**

Ans:

o **How do you perceive the quality of tuition being offered under the free SHS programme?**

Ans:

- **How has the quality of tuition changed due to the free education programme? Why?**

  Ans:

- **How do you see the knowledge and skills acquired after every term of tuition?**

  Ans:

- **How do/did you see your readiness for your final end of school (WASSCE) examination considering the quality of education offered?**

- Ans:

- **How have the free SHS related challenges affected your personal development (skills and knowledge acquisition) as a student?**

  Ans:

APENDIX 5.3 – DATA ANALYSIS CODING TABLE

Codes	Basic Themes	Organising Themes	Global Themes
Eliminate financial constraints and make secondary education free of charge Economic relief for parent	Economic Intent of the Programme	Purpose of the Programme	**Initial Roll-out of the FSHSP - Purpose and Scope**
Opportunity for all students to access secondary school Educating the youth for the future	All-Inclusive Senior High Education		
Free Senior High School Package Double Track System	What policy implementers provided	Scope of implementation	
Nothing or just a little to pay for Paid for other expenses	Fee Payment Under the Programme		
Inadequate learning resources Limited time for learning Working under stressed conditions Difficult double track system	Poor Learning Conditions	Challenges of the Programme - Students' Perceptions	**Policy Implementation Experiences**
Feeding related problems Problem with water Insufficient dormitories	Poor living conditions		
Dislike for the programme affecting normal tuitions Teachers prioritise their extra classes	Poor attitude of teachers		
No personal challenge	A Struggle free experience		
Pressure on limited resources Increased student - teacher ratio Teachers do not get enough rest Introduction of recalcitrant students	Increased Enrolment related stress	Challenges of the programme - Teachers' Perceptions	
Reduced income for teachers Refusal to buy extra needful study materials	Economic related stress		
Reading same notes becomes boring Low quality meal served	Other Challenges		
No personal challenge with the FSHS	A Struggle free experience		
Blame on the government Blame on school authorities and teachers	Blame on institutions	The Blame Game	
No one is to blame	Blame no one		
Self-motivation, endurance and determination to stay focused Extra personal studies Adoption of learning strategies Come to school early due to insufficiency of desks	Intrinsic Drive to Mitigate Challenges	Individual level Strategies	**Coping Strategies and Resources**

Teaching to complete the syllabus Inform school authorities of the challenges			
Organising extra tuition for students Making extra tuition available to the poor Enrol in extra classes	Extra Tuition		
Improving and expanding Infrastructure	Government's Responses to Challenges	Institutional Level Responses and Resources	
Improving learning systems Encouraging students Through Petitions and Requests Creating Monitoring Systems Resorting to other funding sources Other distinct responses No Response by school authorities	Efforts by the School Authorities		
Improved learning conditions and performance Improved living conditions Improved Mental Health Meeting our needs Satisfied with institutional efforts Improved wellbeing No significant improvement of teachers' and students' wellbeing	Wellbeing of students and teachers	Implications of the Institutional level Responses	
Quality of teaching has not changed Effective and great tuition Improved quality of tuition Fairy good and manageable	Good quality tuition offered	Perception of the Quality of Tuition	**Empowerment**
Low quality of tuition Partially bad quality of tuition Worsened quality of tuition Quality tuition shifted to the fee-paying extra classes	A significant drop in the quality tuition offered		
Skills and knowledge acquisition very effective Increased contact hours Moderate knowledge and skills acquired Improved knowledge and skills acquired	Appreciable level of knowledge and competencies gained	Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies Acquisition	
Knowledge and skills not the best under the FSHS programme Knowledge and competence depend on personal studies	Problems with knowledge and skills acquisition		
Little impact due to system anomalies Self-dependency and resilience are key Peace of Mind to Develop No Impact of Challenges on Personal Development	Impact of the free shs on students' academic development	Empowerment Implications of the FSHS Programme	

APPENDIX 5.4 – A COPY OF THE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Are you interested in taking part in the research project?

"(Making Senior High Education Free in Ghana - Getting the Approach Right: An
Empowerment Analysis of Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy Based on
Participating Students' Experiences in Accra, Ghana)"?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to have
an empowerment analysis of the Free Senior High School Policy of Ghana. In this letter we
will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will
involve.

Purpose of the project

My name is Jac Hage Gyimah. I am a student pursuing Master of Philosophy in Global
Development-theory and practice at the University of Bergen, Norway. In fulfilment of the
requirements to earn this degree, I am undertaking a research project on the Free Senior High
School Policy of Ghana. The proposed study intends to explore how the initial approach of
Ghana's free SHS has empowered participating students, given its challenges.

Research Objectives

Central Objective – To explore how the initial roll-out of Ghana's free SHS policy has
empowered participating students.

Sub-Objectives

• To identify and map the challenges experienced by participating students.

• To explore strategies and resources used by participating students to meet the challenges

• To explore how participating students, benefit (knowledge, skills, competences, etc.)
from free SHS

Who is responsible for the research project?

University of Bergen is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

The study will employ purposive and snowball sampling approach in the selection of my qualitative research participants. The main rationale for the random sampling is to target information rich participants for the study.

What does participation involve for you?

I will interview at least 3 people individually for the study of which you will be one of them. Each interview will last for approximately 1 hour. It will be an in- depth interview consisting of casual conversations. You are not required to answer the questions if they make you feel uncomfortable. At any time, you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and your participation in the study and there is no penalty in discontinuing participation. Aside this research contributing to existing research and policy formulation by policy makers, it will also aid me in the writing and completion of my master thesis in order to acquire a master's degree.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- The researcher will keep your information confidential. The interview audio recordings will have numbers and carry no names. This consent forms which you have to sign will have no connection with the tapes. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data

collection is complete, your data would be returned to you or destroyed. Your data would also be destroyed upon your request if you withdraw from the study after the data collection is completed.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end in June 2021 and your data will be destroyed after the analysis is made and the thesis completed.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you

- request that your personal data is deleted

- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified

- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and

- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with University of Bergen, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- University of Bergen via Jac Hage Gyimah (jachage.11.30@gmail.com/ Jac.gyimah@student.uib.no) and Marguerite Daniel (Marguerite.Daniel@uib.no).

- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Jac Hage Gyimah (jachage.11.30@gmail.com/ Jac.gyimah@student.uib.no)

Researcher

Marguerite Daniel (Marguerite.Daniel@uib.no)

Supervisor

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *"(Making Senior High Education Free in Ghana - Getting the Approach Right: An Empowerment Analysis of Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy Based on Participating Students' Experiences in Accra, Ghana)"* and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

☐ to participate in an interview

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. June 2021

(Signed by participant, date)

APPENDIX 5.5 – ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM THE NSD

NSD NORSK SENTER FOR FORSKNINGSDATA

NSD's assessment

Project title

"Making Senior High Education Free in Ghana - Getting the Approach Right: An Empowerment Analysis of Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy Based on Participating Students' Experiences in Accra, Ghana".

Reference number

256930

Registered

20.07.2020 av Jac Hage Gyimah - Jac.Gyimah@student.uib.no

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

Universitetet i Bergen / Det psykologiske fakultet / Hemil-senteret

Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate)

Marguerite Daniel, Marguerite.Daniel@uib.no, tlf: 97432721

Type of project

Student project, Master's thesis

Contact information, student

Jac Hage Gyimah, jachage.11.30@gmail.com, tlf: 45572360

Project period

17.08.2020 - 31.12.2021

Status

06.07.2021 - Assessed

Assessment (2)

06.07.2021 - Assessed

NSD has assessed the change registered on 05.07.2021.

The research period has been extended until 31.12.2021.

Please note that in case of further extensions, it may be necessary to inform the sample.

NSD will follow up at the new planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Contact person at NSD: Tore Andre Kjetland Fjeldsbø
Good luck with the rest of the project!

05.08.2020 - Assessed

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 05.08.2020, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

SHARE THE PROJECT WITH THE PROJECT LEADER
For students it is mandatory to share the Notification form with the project leader (your supervisor). You can do this by clicking on "Share project" in the upper left corner of the Notification form.

NOTIFY CHANGES
If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the information registered in the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION
The project will be processing general categories of personal data until 30.06.2021.

LEGAL BASIS
The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that the informants who are 15-17 years old will be able to give their own consent to participate in this project. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn. The legal basis for processing personal data is therefore consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a).

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA
NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent
- purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
- data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
- storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS
Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: transparency (art. 12), information (art. 13), access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data.

NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13.

We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

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NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).
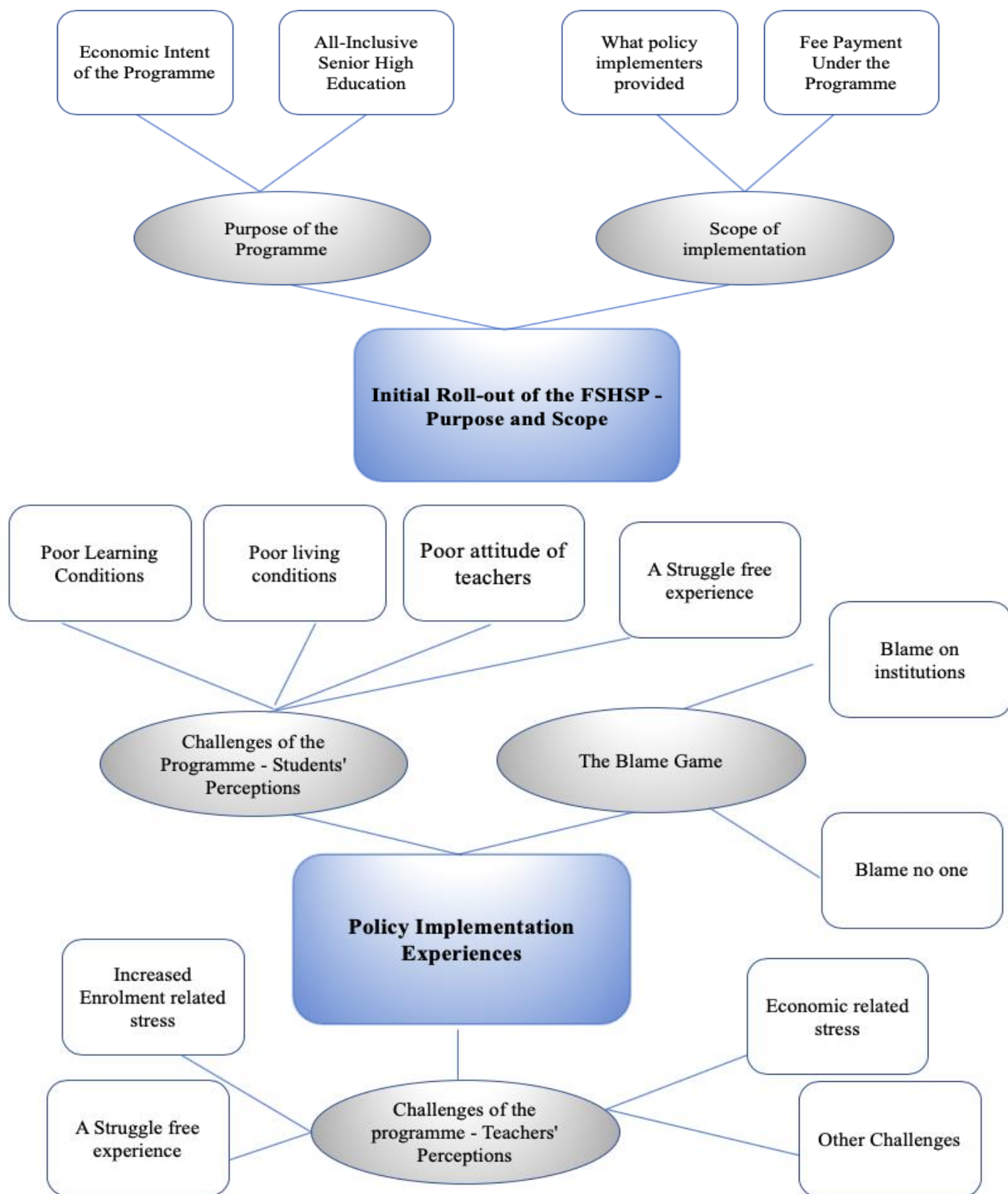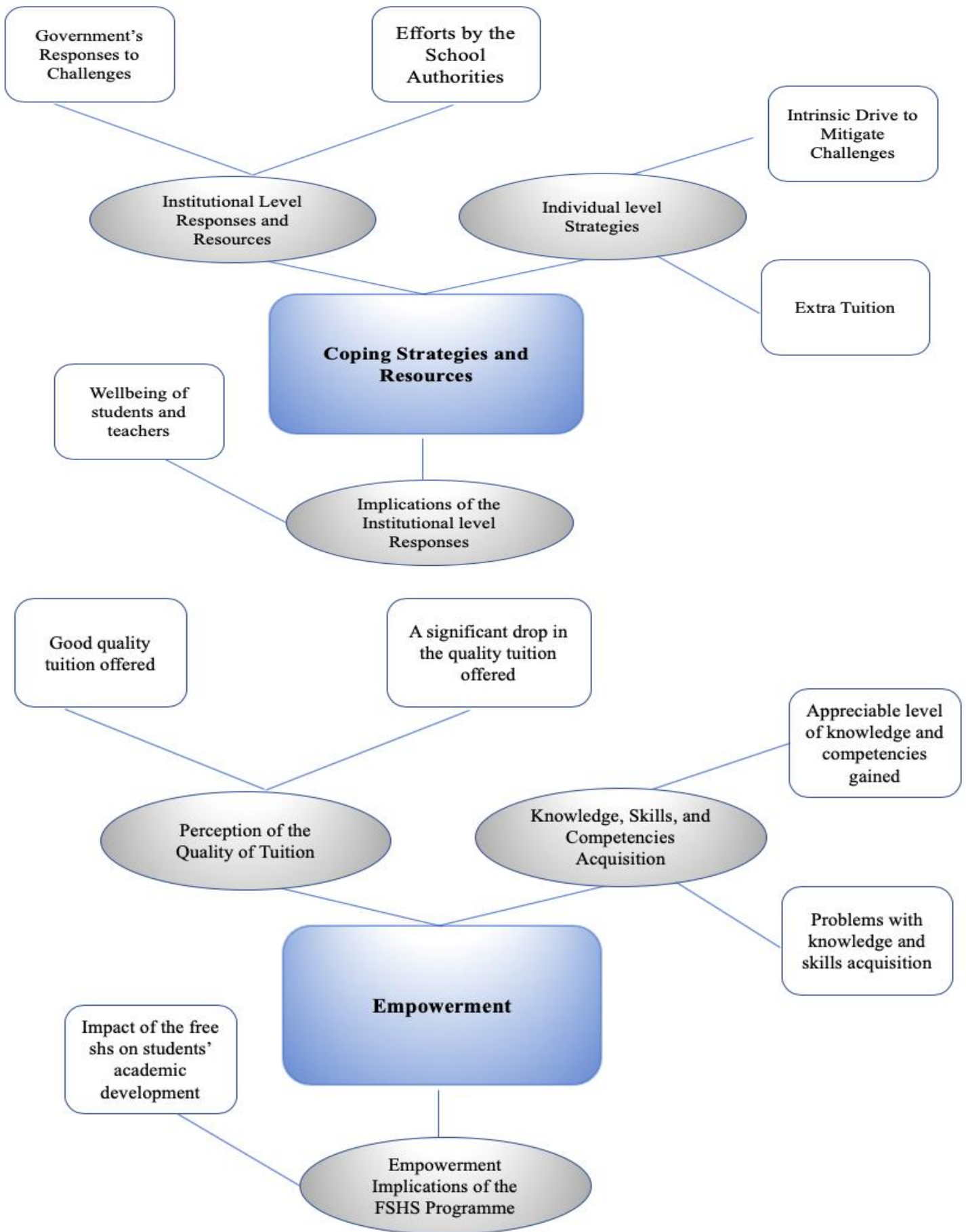
FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT
NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

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APPENDIX 6.1 – THE THEMATIC NETWORKS FROM DATA ANALYSIS