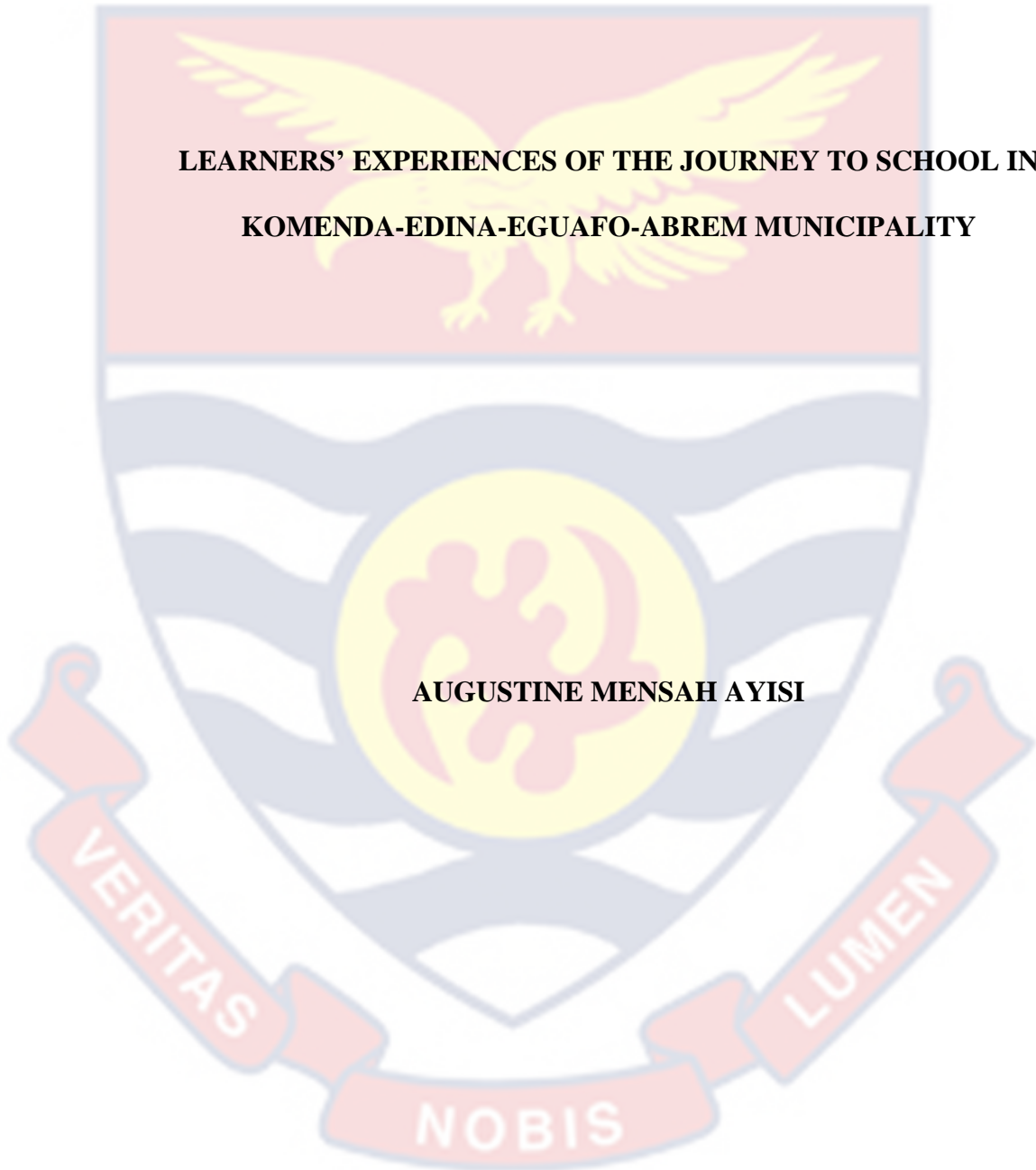


UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

LEARNERS' EXPERIENCES OF THE JOURNEY TO SCHOOL IN  
KOMENDA-EDINA-EGUAFO-ABREM MUNICIPALITY

AUGUSTINE MENSAH AYISI



2023

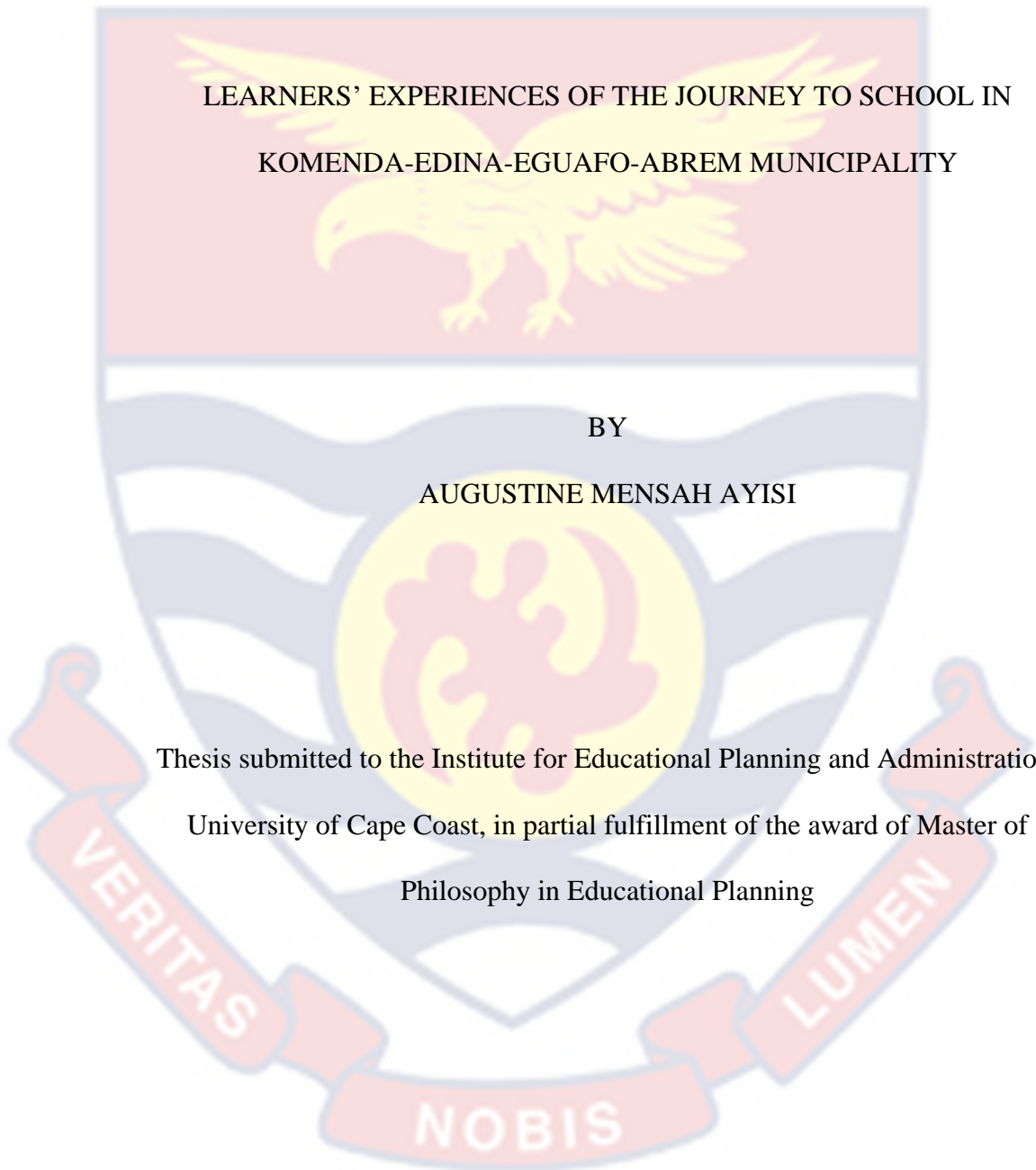
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BY

AUGUSTINE MENSAH AYISI

Thesis submitted to the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration,  
University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the award of Master of  
Philosophy in Educational Planning



AUGUST 2023

## DECLARATION

### Candidate's Declaration

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

Candidate's signature..... Date.....

Name: Augustine Mensah Ayisi

### Supervisor's Declaration

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

Supervisor's Signature.....Date.....

Name: Prof. Might Kojo Abreh

## ABSTRACT

The success of education and training which is typically tied to productivity and economic growth is incomplete minus the experience's learners' face on their journey to school. Attention to access to quality education and improved learning outcomes seems to miss this all-important consideration. Thus, this study explored learners' experiences of their journey to school. The study draws on drawing activity from learners and semi-structured interview guides within the context of phenomenological case study design to explore the phenomenon. Eighteen participants purposively selected from a remote basic school in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem Municipality formed the sample. Thematic analysis was carried out to situate the findings. Learners' journey to school experiences were influenced by factors like time, safety concerns, socialization, and route options. They exercise agency through planning, time management, safety strategies, hygiene, and advocating for neighborhood changes. Learners' persistence in completing school stems from academic achievement, institutional support, aspirations, and the recognition of education as a life-changing tool. The study concludes that learners face a complex journey to school experiences, requiring them to showcase their capacity to achieve their education goals. Based on these findings and conclusion drawn from the study, it is recommended that education policy makers and stakeholders put up measures such as infrastructure improvement that will ensure safe and smooth journey to school to enhance learner's completion and success.

## KEY WORDS

Agency

Children agency

Experiences

Journey to school

Learners

Persistence



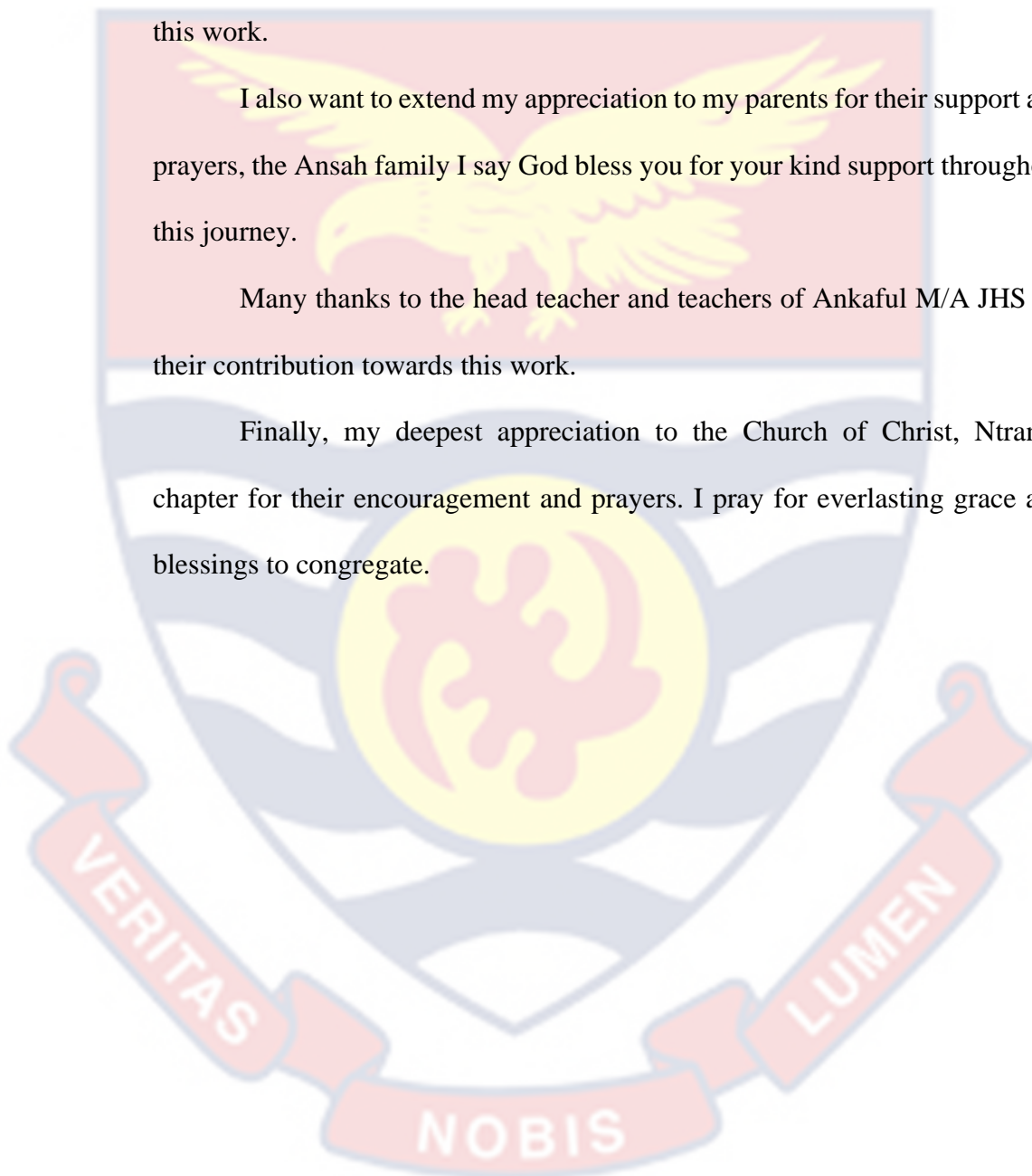
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I also want to extend my appreciation to my parents for their support and prayers, the Ansah family I say God bless you for your kind support throughout this journey.

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**DEDICATION**

To my family



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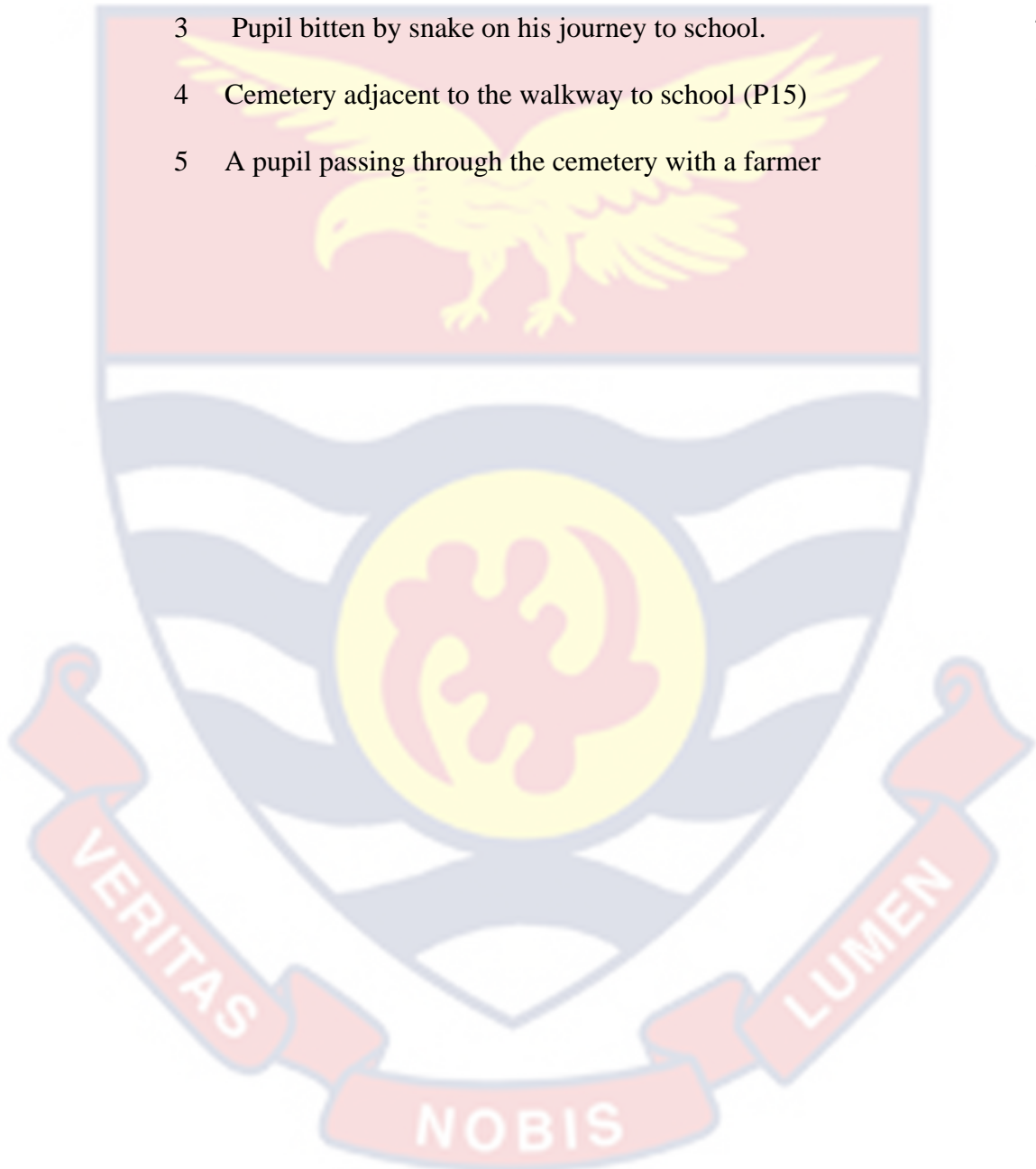
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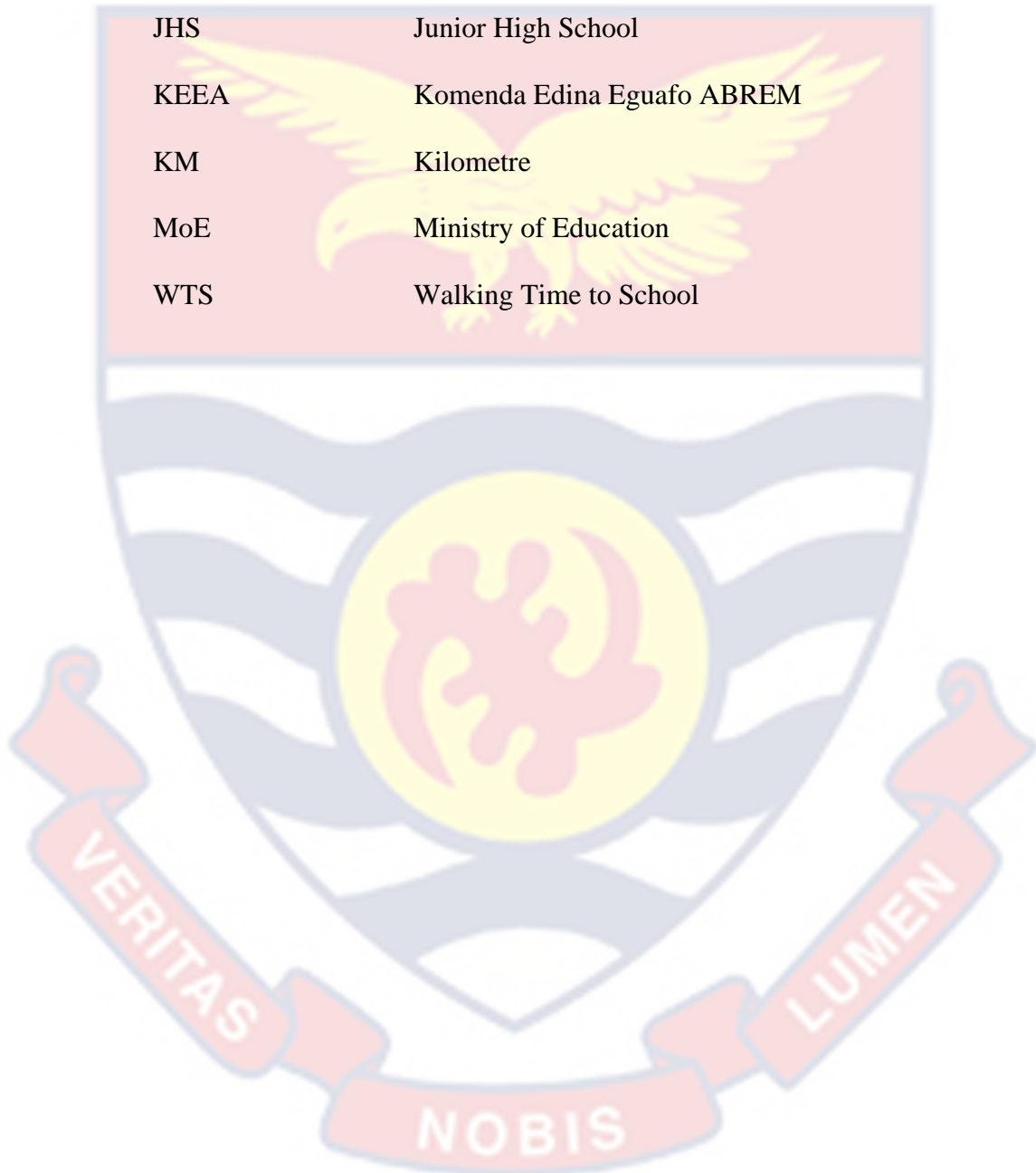
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**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

GES	Ghana Education Service
HR	Hour
IEPA	Institute for Educational Planning and Administration
JHS	Junior High School
KEEA	Komenda Edina Eguafó ABREM
KM	Kilometre
MoE	Ministry of Education
WTS	Walking Time to School



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Children's journey to school has received credence in the current literature. However, most of these literatures have paid particular attention to children in the Western World and the urban communities (Fusco et al., 2013; Egli et al., 2020; Gristy, 2019). In Africa, few studies attempted to investigate this phenomenon, with these even concentrated in the Eastern and Southern Africa (Dadla, 2012; Mablabi, 2014; Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2016; Wiener, 2017). In Ghana, although there have been media reports on the difficulty's children encounter in getting to school, children's experiences of the journey to school has not received much research attention. There is a need for in-depth research on the experiences of children's journey to school, particularly those who walk, to address the challenges they face through policy development. To unlock this gap in literature, this study explored learners' experiences of their journey to school.

The research findings will contribute to the development of initiatives that promote physical activity, independence, and learning during the journey to school, as well as creating environments that support children's education and overall development.

This chapter introduces the study, including a discussion of the background and context, the research problem, research purpose, research objectives and questions, the significance of the study, as well as delimitations and limitations.

#### **Background to the study**

Access to education is a fundamental human right, and all children should have the opportunity to attend school regardless of their gender, ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, or any other factor (Parreira do Amaral, Stauber & Barberis, 2015). Unfortunately, many children around the world do not have access to education due to a variety of factors such as poverty, conflict, discrimination, and lack of infrastructure (Suet Leng, Samat & Sirat, 2016).

To ensure that children have access to school, governments, and other organizations must work together to address these challenges (Voulgaris et al., 2019). This may involve providing financial support to families who cannot afford school fees or providing scholarships to disadvantaged students. It may also involve building schools in remote or impoverished areas, providing transportation to students who live far from school, and ensuring that schools are safe and conducive for learning. For instance, in England, free transport to school for children between the ages of 5 to 15 was introduced to enhance access to school for all children (Gristy & Johnson, 2018). In the United States, smaller schools have been combined into larger ones, new schools have been built in strategic locations, and a public-school choice policy has been put into place (Voulgaris et al., 2019).

In addition to these efforts, it is also important to address the social and cultural barriers that may prevent certain children from attending school. This may involve working with communities to change cultural attitudes towards education, promoting gender equality, and ensuring that children with disabilities have access to appropriate educational resources (Parreira do Amaral, Stauber & Barberis, 2015). Overall, ensuring access to education for all children is crucial for promoting individual and societal development and reducing poverty and inequality.

Children's access to school begins and ends with a journey that can either be by active means or non-active means. Loo and Lam (2015) explained the journey to school as practically an everyday trip that involves travelling to clearly specified locations (often between homes and schools) and is among the significant trips for young children. Likewise, Gristy (2019) views children's journey to school as a time of connection and transition, tying them to their families, friends, neighborhoods, and other places. With this, this study operationalized journey to school as the ways and means through which children access their schools daily.

In various parts of the world, the journey to school can vary greatly depending on factors such as location, infrastructure, and access to transportation. For example, in the UK, children typically begin their formal education at the age of 4 or 5 years old in a reception class in primary school. Many children walk or cycle to school, while others may be driven by a parent or caregiver or take public transportation (Gristy, 2019). In the US, the journey to school can include walking, biking, taking a school bus, or being driven by a parent or caregiver (Kim, 2014). In larger cities, some students may take public transportation such as buses or trains to get to school.

In Africa, the journey to school can be challenging due to various factors such as long distances, poor infrastructure, and access to transportation (Dadla, 2012; Mablababa, 2014; Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2016; Wiener, 2017; Porter, 2010, 2011). For instance, study in Lesotho found that students in the rural areas may have to walk long distances to get to school, sometimes up to several kilometers, especially during the rainy season when the roads can become muddy and slippery (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2016). Similar situation was

also found among rural children in the study by porter et al. (2010) in Malawi, South Africa, and Ghana. In a different vein, Students in urban areas may have access to public transportation, but these modes of transportation can be overcrowded and unreliable. Many students in Africa also use bicycles or motorcycles to get to school, which can be more efficient but also more dangerous if proper safety precautions are not taken (Porter et al., 2011). In some areas, students may have to pay for transportation or school fees, which can be a barrier for those from low-income families (Wiener, 2019).

In Ghana, for example, the journey to school can vary depending on location and access to transportation. In urban areas, students typically use buses, taxis, or private cars, while in rural areas; students may have to walk long distances or use bicycles to get to school (Sofu, Asoala, & Thompson, 2019). Students may also use public transportation systems such as "trotro" or "shared taxis" in urban areas or hire private transportation in rural areas (Adom-Asare et al., 2015). Regardless of the mode of transportation, many students face challenges in getting to school, such as traffic, rough terrain, and other hazards.

Children's experiences on their journey to school can vary based on factors such as their age, mode of transportation, distance from school, and environment. For younger children who walk, their experience can be influenced by weather conditions and the presence of a parent or guardian (Fusco et al., 2012; Ross, 2007). Ross (2007) stressed that older children using public transportation may have more agency in route and mode but may also face safety and reliability challenges.

The journey between home and school can offer children a process of learning and a means of developing agency within their local environment

(Moris et al., 2022), they may need to learn how to read maps, schedules, and signs to navigate their journey effectively (Ross, 2007). In any case, it is important to empower children to make choices and decisions about their journey to school, while also ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to stay safe and healthy. This can involve teaching them about traffic safety, pedestrian rules, and how to recognize and avoid dangerous situations (Fusco et al., 2012). Again, ensuring safe and enjoyable journeys can positively impact a child's academic and personal development, motivating them to learn and participate (Romero, 2010). Studies that bring to light how children put autonomous behaviours in negotiating the school journey seem to be limited.

The journey to school can also impact children's persistence in completing school. A positive experience can foster a sense of belonging and engagement with their school community, leading to greater attendance and academic achievement (Ponto, 2017; Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2013). In contrast, a difficult journey can lead to fatigue, stress, and disengagement, affecting their ability to learn and attend school (Gristy, 2019; Mahlaba, 2014). It is essential to invest in infrastructure and promote healthy habits to create positive experiences for children that support their academic and personal success. Empowering children with knowledge and skills to navigate their journey while balancing safety and independence is also crucial.

Generally, the journey to school is an important part of a child's day and can have a significant impact on their wellbeing and ability to learn. Owing to this, Egli et al. (2020) recommended in their study that, it is important for parents, schools, and local authorities to work together to ensure that children can travel to and from school safely and comfortably, regardless of where they

live or their mode of transportation. Pieces of research evidence abound globally on the significant impact of children journey to school. According Yatiman (2014) study in Malaysia, positive journey to school experience enhances children's physical, social, and cognitive development (Yatiman, 2014). Thus, children's exposure to the natural environment assists in satisfying their core psychological demands for relatedness, competence, and autonomy and enhances academic performance. Adding to this, Ponto (2017) argues that when children walk within these spaces it can help improve their knowledge about their environment and enhance their academic performance. This implies that children's encounter with their environment expose them to some level of experiential learning.

Morris et al. (2022) synthesis of the literature on children's experiences of their journey to school found pieces of literature abound in high-income countries, however, the researchers' recommended further investigation in the middle- and low-income countries. Most of the evidence from the literature analysed showed a myriad of positive and negative encounters children had on embarking their journey to school. In addition, few studies in Africa (Porter et al., 2010; Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012; Mahlaba, 2014) also confirms that children's journey to school in Africa is not much encouraging particularly those in the rural areas who have to travel difficult journeys to get to school. According their research (Porter et al., 2010; Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012), children's experience of their journey to school is among the major factors that contribute to high rate of school dropout in the rural areas in Africa. This issue of high dropout rate among rural children is widespread in Africa of which Ghana is no exception. This is evident in a study at the Asunafo North district

(Adam, Adom & Bediakko, 2016). Similar report was made from a study in Northern region by Sofu, Asoala, and Thompson (2019). Nevertheless, the extent to which this claim is true in the case of learners in the rural schools in Komenda Edina Eguafo ABREM Municipality remains anecdotal. Given this, research attention is relevant on the journey to school and children persistence's in completing school, specifically those who walk to school on daily basis.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Walking to school has been estimated to be the leading mode of travel to school among learners in rural schools. According to a study by Sofu, Asoala, and Thompson (2019) in the Northern region of Ghana, learners who walk to school daily in rural areas constitute about 98.96% of the total population in the school, with the remaining travelling by bicycle and other active means. Adom-Asare et al. (2015) added that these school travel mode choices are often influenced by the location of the school and the ownership of schools (i.e. public and private). Thus, schools owned by private individuals sometimes have available transport options for their students. Again, walking to school remains the only travel option for learners in rural areas. This is as result of poor road conditions and inadequate transportation options in the area making it difficult for students to access nearby schools, leading to a high rate of school dropout among rural schoolchildren (Amoako-Sekyi & Owusu, 2012; Seidu & Adzalie-Mensah, 2010).

It is evident in literature from the Northern regions of Ghana that children who walk to school face several challenges, including traveling long distances, crossing dangerous rivers, and negotiating difficult terrains (Sofu, Asoala, & Thompson, 2019). This is not quite different from a study in the

Central region by Porter et al. (2010). However, these issues have received little attention, especially the physical and psychological challenges that students face in their daily commute to school. The government's effort appears to be addressing economic factors, such as the cost of education. This is evident in the policies like the free compulsory universal basic education (fCUBE) and the school feeding programme (Anlimachie, 2019; Takyi et al., 2021).

The challenges students face in walking to school are among the contributing factors of school dropout in the central region (Porter et al., 2010; Seidu & Adzahlie-Mensah, 2010) where children attend school at far locations. In KEEA Municipality, rural schools serve many smaller communities due to their population which does not meet the requirement for school siting hence causing long travel distances in accessing schools. For instance, Ankafu Mental Junior High School (JHS) is a public school sited at the premises of the Hospital. The pupil profile of the school indicates that those who attend it are from low socio-economic backgrounds and live in faraway communities averaging 5 kilometers away. The majority of the learners' journey to school daily is made by walking. In some of the communities the school serves, learners pass through cultivated lands and areas of bush on a narrow, unpaved route to and from school. These routes are often used by farmers in the morning and late in the evening after their farm work. Besides, learners who travel on paved roads share the road with vehicles traveling to neighboring communities.

Despite these challenges, many children demonstrate remarkable agency in navigating their daily journey to school, finding creative solutions to overcome obstacles, and persisting in their education (Adom-Asare et al., 2015). However, how children exercise agency during their journey to school and what

factors motivate them to persist in completing their education is unknown. Whereas studies exist on how learners in the rural areas in Ghana journey to school, there seems to be limited knowledge of the learner's experiences on their journey to school. This study aims to address this gap in knowledge by exploring the experiences of children on their journey to school, identifying the strategies they use to overcome challenges and examining the role of motivation in their persistence towards education. Understanding children's experiences of the journey to school and their agency in navigating this journey is important for policymakers, educators, and parents to support children's education and well-being. By identifying the factors that enable children to persist in their education despite challenges, this study can contribute to developing effective interventions to support children's educational outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study aims to explore learners' experiences of the journey to school at Ankaful Mental M/A JHS in Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-ABREM Municipality.

### **Research objectives**

The present study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore the learners experiences of their journey to school in Ankaful Mental M/A JHS in Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-ABREM Municipality
2. To investigate how learners of Ankaful Mental M/A JHS exercise agency in navigating their journey to school.
3. To explore why learners of Ankaful mental M/A JHS persist in completing school amid their experiences of the journey to school.

### **Research Questions**

These questions will drive the study:

1. How do learners of Ankaful Mental M/A JHS describe their experiences of the journey to school?
2. How do learners of Ankaful mental M/A JHS exercise agency in navigating their journey to school?
3. Why do the learners of Ankaful mental M/A JHS persist in completing school amid their experiences of the journey to school?

### **Significance of the study**

This study will contribute to the body of knowledge on rural children's journeys to school and children's schooling experiences in the developing world. This will help address the current shortage of research in this area and provide a practical understanding of students in rural areas and their access to schools. The findings from this study will directly benefit the learners themselves by shedding light on the complex barriers and experiences they encounter on their path to education. This knowledge can then inform policies and interventions to better support rural students and improve their access to quality schooling. Ultimately, this study aims to empower and uplift the learners at the heart of the research, ensuring their voices and realities are documented and used to drive positive change.

Also, the findings of this study will shed light on the challenges regarding school location and transport systems in rural basic schools in Ghana. Finally, the study will contribute to the development of initiatives that encourage physical activity, independence, and learning on the journey to school and foster environments that are favourable to children's education and overall development.

### **Limitations of the study**

The study could benefit from the voices of schoolchildren from the entire basic education setting. However, the particular school needing the attention of this study is a Junior high school only. Therefore, the findings of the study may only be applicable in a JHS setting and not in a complete basic school context. Again, one school was included in the study. The researcher opted to concentrate on one rural school rather than multiple schools within the Municipality, believing that it offered a unique and rich source of experiences and insight into the phenomenon being studied. Last but not least, the commuting time of the students, which was a crucial factor in sample selection, was based on student self-reporting rather than objective assessment.

### **Delimitation of the study**

Ankaful Mental Hospital M/A Basic School in Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-ABREM Municipality in the central region of Ghana was the focus of the study. The reason for selecting them was because they possessed all the characteristics in relevant to the study. The study was limited to learners in Ankaful M/A JHS. Primary data was generated from learners who walk more than 30 minutes to and from school.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

This study adopted the following definitions for the terms used in the research:

**Access to education:** Access to education refers to the availability and opportunity for individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background, gender, race, or other characteristics, to participate in and succeed in educational programs.

**Access to school:** Access to school refers to individuals' ability to attend and participate in formal educational institutions, ensuring access to programs and resources. It involves the presence of schools and educational facilities in proximity to the community and individuals where learners can access them at a reasonable distance.

**Agency:** Agency refers to an individual's capacity and ability to act independently, make choices, and take purposeful actions to influence their life circumstances and the world around them.

**Experiences:** Experiences are life events, activities, and interactions that shape an individual's perception, understanding, and memory of the world.

**Independent mobility:** Independent mobility involves an individual's freedom to travel and explore without relying on assistance, enabling exploration and activities without dependence on others.

**Journey to school:** Journey to school refers to students' regular commute from home to school, following a specific route.

**Learners:** A learner is an individual who engages in acquiring knowledge, skills, or understanding in a subject or field, often referring to students or individuals participating in formal or informal learning activities.

**Persistence:** persistence refers to the attribute of resolutely continuing one's education until successful completion despite difficulties or obstacles.

**Safe route to school policy:** this refers to the initiatives and strategies governments adopt to ensure a secure and conducive environment for learners to walk or ride bicycles to school.

**Walking to school:** this involves traveling on foot from one's place of residence to the schools they attend.

**Walking school bus system:** Walking school bus involves either parents or a volunteer in the community to escort a group of children on a set route to school.

### **Organisation of the Study**

The study has five chapters. In chapter one, the background to the study has been introduced, and the statement of the problem has been highlighted. The research objectives and questions have been identified, and the value of such research argued. The scope of the study, the limitations of the study has been discussed, significant terms defined, and the organization of the study highlighted. Chapter two presented the review of relevant literature on children's journey to school, independence mobility, walking to school, children's agency, and persistence in completing school. The chapter presents the reviewed literature under the conceptual literature review, and empirical review and also highlights the theoretical framework that underpins the study. Chapter three outlines the research methodology employed in the study. It provides a detailed account of the procedures used by the researcher to gather data and address the research questions. The chapter covers various aspects of the research design, including the population, sample, and sampling techniques, as well as the tools and data collection procedures utilized to gather data. Additionally, it outlines the analytical methods employed to analyze the data gathered.

In Chapter Four, the study's results and conclusions are presented. This includes a discussion of the findings and an analysis of the data gathered. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's key conclusions.

While, Chapter five provides a summary of the entire study, including a brief overview of the research questions, methodology, and findings. The

chapter also presents policy and practice recommendations based on the study's results, as well as suggestions for further research in the field.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to reviewing literature on the subject of children's experiences of their journey from home to school, how they exercise agency in navigating the journey to school, and why they persist in completing junior high school despite their daily walks to school. The chapter first presents the theories that underpin the present study and reviews literature in relation to other competing theories, followed by a conceptual review. Thereafter, a presentation of an overview of the concept of the school journey, children's independent mobility on the school journey, children walking to school, children's agency on independent mobility, and learners' persistence in

completing school are reported. The chapter presents empirical studies on children's journeys to school, children agency and persistence in completing school globally, and ends with the chapter summary.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for children's experience of their journey to school, their agency and persistence in completing school can be drawn from several theoretical perspectives. Among the theories reviewed, two key reflections were apparent. Firstly, the sense of place theory, as described by Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977), highlights how individuals perceive and experience their environment, providing a lens through which studies explore children's journey to school experiences. Additionally, the third-place theory, as conceptualized by Oldenburg (1989), emphasizes accessible public space between home and work that facilitates social connections and a sense of place and belonging.

This study is underpinned by the sense of place theory and the self-determination theory to explore learners' experiences of their journey to school and why they persist in completing school despite daily experiences. The sense of place theory and self-determination theory are closely linked, as a strong sense of place can fulfill the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are essential for an individual's well-being and personal growth. Again, the two theories marry in their shared focus on the human experience and the emotional and cognitive factors that influence an individual's connection to their surroundings and their overall well-being. By combining these two theoretical frameworks, the study can explore how an individual's sense of place and their motivation and psychological needs interact

to shape their experiences and perceptions. Here is a brief description of each of them:

### **The Sense of Place Theory**

The concept of sense of place draws on the work of prominent scholars in the twentieth century (for example, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph) who delve into the human experience of place and the emotional and cognitive bonds individuals form with their surroundings (Tuan, 1977; Relph, 1976). Relph (1976), explained sense of place to encapsulates the human connection to place and emotional attachment to meaningful or important places. He argues that sense of place considers the interplay between the physical characteristics of a location and the subjective experiences and interpretations of individuals within that space. According to Tuan (1977) factors such as historical significance, natural features, architectural design, and social interactions all shape how people perceive and attach meaning to a specific location.

Recent literature has expanded on the multifaceted nature of sense of place and the various factors that contribute to an individual's emotional and cognitive connection to a particular location. For example, Erfani (2022) argues that sense of place is not solely based on the physical characteristics of a place, but also on the social, cultural, and symbolic meanings that people ascribe to it. Haywood (2014) emphasize the role of personal and social identity in shaping one's sense of place, highlighting how individuals' sense of self and belonging can be intertwined with their attachment to a specific environment.

Additionally, some scholars have critiqued the traditional conceptualization of sense of place as being too static and have explored the dynamic and fluid nature of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011). Erfani (2022)

argue that sense of place should be understood as a multidimensional construct that encompasses both positive and negative emotions, as well as the ways in which places can shape individuals' personal and collective identities.

Another area of criticism and expansion in the literature is the role of technology and globalization in shaping sense of place. Some researchers have explored how digital technologies and virtual spaces can influence and even challenge traditional notions of place attachment (Hauge, 2007; Massey, 2005).

In the view of Stevens (2010) children's mobilities are said to be formed through the interaction between spaces of engagement and the travel mode choice across the sites of the home, public space, and school. Concerning this study, children's journey to school involves regular connections with places, and their relationship with these places can be favorable or unfavorable. For the purpose of this study, the sense of place theory provides an excellent theoretical context for exploring learners' experiences of the journey to school, especially, the areas relevant to this study are learners' experiences of natural features, architectural design, and social interactions. How learners perceive their interaction with this environment will be vital in this study. Thus, the sense of place theory provides a lens through which to explore children's place meaning and place attachment on their journey to school.

### **The Self Determination Theory**

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as elaborated by Deci and Ryan (1985) focuses on understanding the factors that motivate individuals and promote their psychological well-being. The theory proposes that human beings have inherent psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and meeting these needs leads to optimal functioning and personal growth. The

achievement of these essential demands promotes the best motivational traits, states of autonomous motivation, and intrinsic desires, which promote psychological well-being and beneficial engagement with the outside environment (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

This theory has been applied in different domains including education, work and health. This has been supported by scholars like Evans (2015). In the view of Evans, SDT is a comprehensive theory of motivation that explores the nature and origins of motivational quality, provides a solution to this problem. Similarly, SDT has been used to evaluate persistence and dropout in environments where it is also necessary for self-initiated and self-regulated behavior, such as in school settings (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 2002).

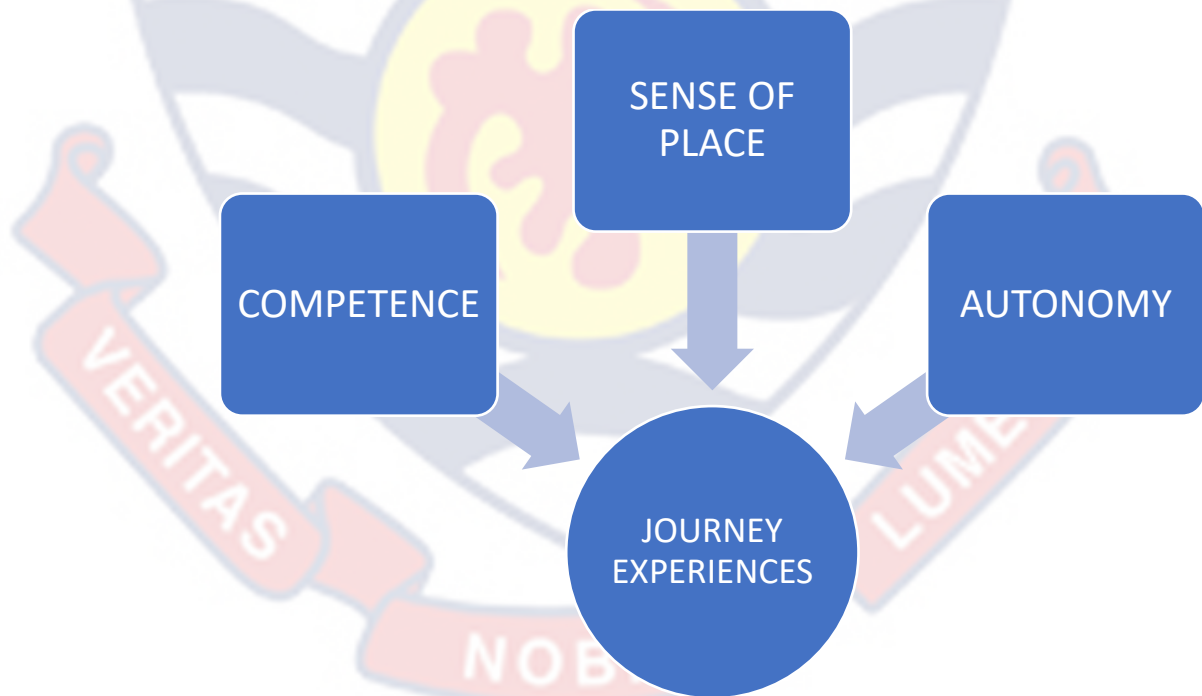
Notwithstanding, SDT has also gained some level of criticism, critics who argue that the theory may downplay other important factors such as social influences, cultural norms, and external rewards (Sheldon, 2011; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). They suggest that SDT's exclusive focus on autonomy may oversimplify the complexity of human motivation (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Admittedly, Deci and Ryan (2017) who happens to be the proponents discussed the limitations of the self-determination theory and suggested areas for further development

For the purpose of this study, the self-determination theory offers the best theoretical context for exploring how children exercise agency in navigating their journey to school, particularly the second component which is competence, that reflects the need to feel effective and capable in one's interactions with the environment. This involves mastering skills, developing a sense of mastery, and seeking opportunities to improve. When children perceive themselves as

competent, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated and engage in activities that challenge them to grow and develop their skills.

Again, this theory provides a lens to explore why learners persist in completing school despite their journey experiences. The theory proposes that students who have intrinsic motivation for learning and have developed autonomous regulatory styles are more likely to persist in their education, achieve education goals, grasp new concepts, and be well-adjusted. The self-determination theory is a critical framework for investigating how learners exercise agency in navigating their journey to school and why they persist in completing school despite their experiences on their journey to school.

### Conceptual Framework



*Figure 1: Journey to School Experiences Framework*

Source: Authors' Construct (2023).

This framework is grounded in the concept of sense of place and self-determination theory (SDT). The sense of place construct reflects how an

individual emotionally connects with and feels a sense of belonging to a particular physical environment or location. Self-determination theory posits that the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs - autonomy, competence, and relatedness - is essential for supporting an individual's intrinsic motivation and well-being.

In the context of a learner's journey to school, the framework proposes that the degree to which the learner's needs for autonomy and competence are met, as well as their sense of place along the journey, will influence their overall experience of the school commute

### **Variables and Relationships**

1. **Sense of Place:** The emotional connection and feelings of belonging the learner has along the route to school. A stronger sense of place is expected to enhance the positivity of the journey experience.
2. **Autonomy:** The extent to which the learner feels they have choice and self-direction in how they travel to school. Higher autonomy is expected to lead to more positive journey experiences.
3. **Competence:** The learner's perceived ability to navigate the journey to school effectively and safely. Higher competence is hypothesized to contribute to more positive journey experiences.
4. **Journey Experience:** The overall subjective experience the learner has on their commute to school, which can range from very positive to very negative.

The proposed framework suggests that fostering their sense of place along the route to school as well as nurturing learners' autonomy and competence, can contribute to more positive journey experiences. These positive experiences, in turn, are expected to promote greater engagement and persistence in schooling.

Specifically, when learners feel a sense of choice and self-direction in how they travel to school (autonomy), and believe they can navigate the journey effectively (competence), they are likely to have more positive experiences. Additionally, if learners develop an emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the physical environment along their route (sense of place), this can further enhance the positivity of their journey experience.

Understanding these relationships can inform interventions to support learners' educational journeys and ultimately, their educational attainment. By addressing the psychological needs and place-based experiences of learners, educators and policymakers can work to create more supportive and enriching journeys to school.

### **Conceptual review**

This section of the study addresses the various ways people have conceptualized the journey to school, children's independence and mobility, children walking to school, children's persistence in completing school, and the gaps in the conceptualization debates.

### **Children's independent mobility**

Children's independent mobility has been a subject of interest in children's geography studies in recent years; although its precise definition remains open to interpretation. Hillman et al. (1990) defined it as the ability to move freely to places outside the home while engaging in active transportation and outdoor play without adult supervision. However, more recent researchers like Loo and Lam (2014) and Riazi and Faulkner (2014) argue that both active and passive means of children traveling outside of the neighborhood without direct adult supervision should be included in the definition of children's

independent mobility. Mikkelsen and Christensen (2009) suggest that the concept itself needs more theoretical interpretations and should be expanded to include "invisible actors" like classmates, friends, pets, and animals. These factors should also be considered in conceptualizing children's independent mobility due to the emergence of technologies such as mobile phones, which have facilitated parents' ability to monitor their children's movements.

Some authors have suggested grouping children's independent mobility into different levels. Chaudhury et al. (2015) and Kytta et al. (2015) classified it as a set of mobility "licenses" that parents offer to their children and the actual movement patterns of children. Kytta et al. (2015) defined mobility licenses as authorizations for children to perform certain activities independently, such as crossing streets, going to school, using buses, riding bicycles on roads, and going out after dark without adult supervision. Actual mobility refers to the percentage of children who actively and independently commute to school and participate in autonomous weekend activities. Chaudhury et al. (2015) defined parental license as enabling children to engage in specific activities in the absence of an adult, while accompaniment status is granted to children traveling with parents, siblings, or peers. "True" independent mobility is when children travel without accompaniment. Understanding the variables that influence children's independent mobility is crucial for decision-making.

### **Factors affecting children independent mobility**

The decline of children's independent mobility has become a major concern for researchers, who have identified various factors that influence it (Kytta et al., 2015; Malone & Rudner, 2016). These factors include environmental factors such as climate, urban design, walkways, green spaces,

and travel time, as well as family characteristics like ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and parental employment. Policy frameworks and local government policies also play a role in shaping children's independent mobility (Kytta et al., 2015).

Parents' perceptions of risk and safety, as well as the nature of the street, are also important considerations (Shafik et al., 2021). Children's independent mobility is beneficial for their social, cognitive, and psychological growth, as well as promoting physical activity and spatial development (Riazi & Faulkner, 2018; Chaudhury et al., 2014). It also promotes socialization among children and allows them to make judgments about the physical environment (Romero, 2010).

Walking to school is an important way for children to learn to move independently, but understanding how it encourages neighborhood movement is crucial for understanding the broader spectrum of children's autonomous mobility (Romero, 2011). Overall, children's independent mobility is influenced by individual, environmental, and policy factors and its importance for children's development should be recognized

### **Walking to school**

Walking has traditionally been the primary means of transportation for children commuting to and from school, providing physical activity, cognitive stimulation, and emotional fulfillment (Romero, 2015). Multiple studies have demonstrated the numerous benefits associated with walking to school for children. For example, Mori et al. (2012) and Wilson et al. (2018) contend that walking is a crucial source of physical exercise for children that enhance their health and wellbeing. Furthermore, research by health experts has demonstrated

that walking to school daily can decrease the prevalence of childhood hypertension and obesity (Pizzaro et al., 2013). Additionally, Molijin (2022) found that individuals who engage in daily walking exercises have a reduced risk of developing future ailments.

In addition to the personal advantages, studies have also shown that walking to school provides societal benefits. Molijin (2022) found that when children walk to school, there is a reduction in air pollution, traffic congestion, and urban noise, as well as a mitigation of climate change. However, Alvarez-Pedreros et al. (2017) found that children who walk to school are also more likely to be exposed to pollution, which can impede the development of their cognitive capacities. Apart from the societal benefits, walking to school offers children an opportunity to experience and learn about their neighborhood and themselves (Romero, 2015). Furthermore, encouraging children to walk to school can affect the overall household travel patterns, the social networks of the community, and improve environmental sustainability (Romero, 2015).

According to McDonald (2007), the traditional method of walking to school has decreased considerably over time in the United States (US). The study showed that in 1969, 40% of children walked to school, whereas in 2001, only 12.9% did. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, less than half of the children who lived within a mile of school walked, compared to over 85% in the 1960s. This decline has increased driving to school, from 20% to 50% during the same period (McDonald, 2007). Similarly, Badri (2013) discovered a high rate of driving to school in the United Arab Emirates, while in New Zealand, motorbikes are frequently used to commute to school instead of walking (Mori et al., 2012). In contrast, Afoakwa and Koomson (2021) reported that 90% of

schoolchildren in Sub-Saharan Africa walk to school every day. Furthermore, in Ghana, Sofo et al. (2019) found that the majority of children in the three northern regions reported walking to school.

Romero (2011) laments the fact that children are not encouraged to walk to school due to the negative impact of cars, but several studies have identified the key factors that influence children's decision to walk to school. According to Rodriguez and Vogt (2009), McDonald (2007), and Khali (2013), environmental factors, access factors, demographics, and walking-related behaviors all play a role. Environmental factors, defined by Rodriguez and Vogt (2009) as the physical and social conditions that children consider favorable for walking to school, include distance from home to school, school location (urban, suburban, or rural), and the perceived need for safety infrastructure improvements along the walking route. Khali (2013) also notes that children's and parents' perceptions of safety, traffic, and strangers can influence the decision to walk to school. Distance to school was identified as the most critical factor affecting walking to school by Ito et al. (2017), suggesting that proximity to the school is a strong predictor of walking behavior. Again, Mehdizadeh et al. (2017) in supporting the distance as a barrier to children's walk to school added the walking time to school as a discouraging factor to children.

In areas perceived as hazardous by parents, children are more likely to be driven to and from school, but parents will only allow their children to walk if they perceive no threat to their safety (Khali, 2013). According to Ngidi et al. (2021), walking to school without adult escorting poses various risks, such as kidnapping, physical, verbal, and sexual assaults, crimes, bullying, and murder. These dangers are commonly reported in rural areas with bushy paths and

crowded urban areas with strangers. Despite these safety concerns, many countries recognize the health and environmental benefits of children walking to school. Therefore, there are increasing initiatives to encourage walking to school, especially in developing countries, to promote physical activity and combat childhood obesity (Mori et al., 2012).

For example, Japan has a well-established "walking to school practice" that began in 1953, where elementary and junior high school students walk to school daily instead of being driven or taking other forms of transportation. This practice is prevalent in most metropolitan regions, and students attend the schools designated by their municipal boards of education (Mori et al., 2012). Similarly, in the US, the Centers for Disease Control initiated the Kids Walk program (McDonald, 2007) to encourage children to walk to school. Several states have also implemented Safe Routes to School (SR2S) initiatives to promote walking to school by funding improvements close to schools. The current federal transportation law, SAFETEA-LU, has allocated over 600 million dollars for a nationwide Safe Routes to School initiative to make walking and biking to school a regular and safe activity. However, these programs assume that safety is the main obstacle to walking to school and do not consider other factors like family scheduling (Mori et al., 2012). Despite this, these programs and policies are crucial in reversing the trend of parents driving their children to school every day

As the preceding discussion indicates, current research is only beginning to reveal the variety of benefits that children derive from walking to school, as well as the trends of walking to school versus other modes of commuting. Nonetheless, there is a growing interest in understanding children's experiences

of their journey between home and school. This study aims to explore children's experiences of their journey between home and school.

### **The home to school journey experiences.**

The journey to school is an important aspect of a child's educational experience and has been the focus of many research studies. A significant study has acknowledged the need to comprehend children's experiences as they navigate the home to school journey (Ross, 2007; Weir, 2020). Children are the active actors of their surroundings, claims Ross (2007). Weir (2021) stated that in this sense, children's experiences have an impact on how they perceive, comprehend, negotiate, and feel about their daily lives as well as how they engage with their environment. Additionally, the children's understanding of their surroundings and their journey to school enhances their interactions with space and place in their immediate context (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012). Children have a higher likelihood of communicating their comprehension of the commute to school, though. In line with the scholars above, Bourke (2017) highlighted that children understand their movement in places in four dimensions; social, pragmatic, sensory, and imaginative. The social dimension describes their interactions with people, the sensory dimension is explained as the things they see, hear, smell, and touch, pragmatic is what they do, and imaginative is their knowledge about the unknown.

Loo and Lam (2015) explained that the journey to school involves traveling from home to school, and it includes the link between homes and schools as well as the activities that take place between home and school. The journey can take on a variety of spatial and social shapes, depending on several interconnected elements and influences present in the environment that children

inhabit, traverse, and interact with daily (Gristy, 2019; Stevens, 2010) characterized the journey to school as an event that involves change and connections, linking kids from their homes to their schools through and across their families, friends, communities, and places. According to the definition, the journey to school includes the link between homes and schools as well as the activities that take place between the home and the school. Thus, it is a transitional space outside of the family, the home, and the school (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012). Loo and Lam (2015) maintained that the journey to school is an important trip for children, especially in their early years. Hence, this journey offers them the opportunity to experience the natural environment and neighborhoods. However, these journeys can either be short or long hauls for travelers and can be joyful for some children and families while being a nightmare for others (Gristy, Whalley & Miller, 2018). Also, it can be a period of liberation, enjoyment, and creativity for some people when they can interact with friends and the public, a time of turmoil and loudness for others, and a time of isolation, control, rejection, and sadness for still others (Stevens, 2010).

Considerable research has shown that children are presented with a wide variety of activities on their everyday commute from home to school that supposedly provides learning chances, according to some researchers. For instance, Yatiman (2015) discovered that children's five senses are stimulated on the way to school and that this allows them to informally learn about their outdoor surroundings. Additionally, Weir (2021) discovered that as children embark on the journey to school, they can meet the psychological demands of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to some researchers, getting to school can help with increasing one's health and wellness (Stevens, 2010;

Pooley et al., 2005). They see it as the only opportunity for children to play or partake in other physical activities on the route to school, in Loo and Lam's opinion

Studies show that a variety of factors affect children's journey to school.

These include distance, mode of transportation, safety, and socioeconomic status. It is understood that is significantly influenced by the distance from home to school. Research has shown that the longer the distance, the more likely children are to be driven to school (McDonald, 2007). Hence, children are more likely to walk or ride a bike to school if they live close to the school (Davison et al., 2008). However, when children stay further away from the school, they tend to spend more on the journey to school (Lam & Loo, 2015).

Again, the mode of transportation used to get to school is another important factor. Children who are driven to school are less physically active and have lower levels of fitness (Mori et al., 2012). On the other hand, children who walk or cycle to school have higher levels of physical activity and better health outcomes (Molijin, 2022). The mode of transportation is also influenced by the distance from home to school, with children who live further away more likely to be driven to school.

Furthermore, safety is another important factor that affects the journey to school. Parents are more likely to drive their children to school if they perceive the journey to be unsafe, particularly if there are concerns about traffic or crime (Molijin, 2022). Children who feel unsafe on their journey to school are less likely to walk or cycle (Romero, 2011). Improving safety measures such as traffic calming measures and pedestrian crossings can encourage more children to walk or cycle to school (Romero, 2011).

Socioeconomic status has also been identified by authors as an important factor that influences children's journey to school. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to be driven to school and less likely to walk or cycle (Thomas, 2016). This may be due to a lack of resources or unsafe environments in lower-income areas. Efforts to promote active travel to school should consider the needs of disadvantaged communities to ensure that all children have access to safe and active travel options (Stevens, 2010).

In addition to the above factors, Stevens (2010) suggested other factors such as social exclusion, public space policies, household dynamics, and children's involvement in decision-making as playing a crucial role in determining how children get to school. The study explained that children's involvement in decisions relating to their journey to school is sometimes dependent on a range of complex factors, including family structure, gender, age, residential location, health, social culture, urban planning, and school culture, have an impact on kids' everyday decisions. This agrees with Morojele and Muthukrishna (2012) who found that family relationships have an impact on children's school trips. The study explained that choosing a school bus for a child who lives with a single parent or with no parents is more challenging than choosing a school bus for a child who lives with both parents.

Understanding these factors can help to promote active travel to school, increase physical activity, and improve health outcomes for children. However, looking at how children experience their journey to school, Loo and Lam (2015) highlight that children's independence in moving about and their access to educational opportunities have an impact. Children consider the experiences they have daily and act in ways that take on new meanings based on context,

Muhati-Nyakundi (2019) claims. These behaviors can have an impact on a child's physical and mental health. Their options for action and life characteristics are shaped by experiential encounters. As espoused by Muhati-Nyakundi (2019), Children's decision-making regarding mobility is greatly influenced by how journey experiences are conceptualized.

However, it is very important to understand how children exercise agency in their negotiation of the school journey, which seems to be missing in the reviewed studies of which this study aims to address.

### **Children's agency in independent mobility**

Children's agency on their journey to school is a topic of growing interest in educational research. The term "agency" refers to an individual's capacity to act and make choices, and it is increasingly recognized that children have agency and can make important decisions about their daily lives, including their journeys to school (Campbell et al., 2015). Studies attempted to develop an agreed definition for children's agency to capture the concept in their field. For instance, in the health literature, it was noted that children's agency be described in their capacities that are innate than abilities that can be learned. This shift in terminology may reflect the difference between agency as a learned skill, following the view from developmental psychology, and agency as a universal characteristic that applies to all children regardless of their developmental status, as seen in studies referring to children as health change agents and from the field of childhood studies (Grammarist, 2014). Considering the results of the investigation, it is possible to describe children's agency as their ability to make informed decisions, stand up for themselves, and actively consider how their social environments affect them and those around them

(Montreuil & Carnevale, 2016). According to this concept, speaking for oneself can be done in a variety of ways, including through speech and body language, and children's ability to exercise agency is not dependent on adults acting as agents of agency (Baker, 2013).

One important aspect of children's agency on their journey to school is the degree to which they are involved in planning and decision-making about how they get to school (Kullman and Palludan, 2011). In many cases, children are not simply passive recipients of transportation provided by parents or schools, but instead actively negotiate with adults and peers to determine their routes, modes of transportation, and schedules (Kullman and Palludan, 2011). This process of negotiation can help children develop valuable skills in communication, problem-solving, and collaboration (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Kullman and Palludan, 2011).

Research has shown that children's agency on their journey to school is influenced by a variety of factors, including their age, gender, socio-economic status, and cultural background (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2019). For example, younger children may have less autonomy in decision-making than older children, while girls may face more constraints on their mobility than boys (Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2013). Additionally, children from low-income or marginalized communities may have more limited transportation options, which can affect their agency and ability to make choices about their journey to school (Koomson et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, many children demonstrate remarkable resilience and creativity in navigating their journeys to school (Ross, 2007). They may use a variety of modes of transportation, including walking, biking,

public transportation, or rides from family or friends. They may also develop strategies to overcome obstacles such as unsafe roads, lack of sidewalks, or difficult weather conditions (Ross, 2007; Morojele, 2013; Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2013). Before delving into how children exercise agency in negotiating the independent journey to school, it is important to clarify the categories of agency in children's mobility.

### **Categories of children agencies on mobility**

Studies have acknowledged that children's agencies are expressed in different forms and therefore can be grouped into different categories (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Campbell et al., 2015). However, Ungruhe (2019) stated that the categorization of agencies is unnecessary. Inferred from his statement that agency is typically described as "thin," "restricted," "tactical," or "limited" is the notion that agency is a measurable property that young people like street children retain to a lesser degree than others. In contrast to "thick agency," which he defined as "having the liberty to act within a large range of options," "thin agency" denotes the judgments as well as routine activities that are completed within extremely constrained situations and are characterized by few feasible alternatives. While the tactical agency does not allow for strategic planning, it does allow children to act in situations where daily needs and survival are the immediate considerations. However, Campbell et al. (2015) challenge the inclination to interpret agency as a child's inherent capacity to take any kind of independent action. Therefore, it is important to pay more attention to how much access children have to the tools needed to act in ways that are consistent with the life they themselves would like to lead.

However, Bordonaro and Payne (2012) referred to the subversive potential and behaviours of young people as having "ambiguous agency". Children and adolescents, especially those who are affected by terrible life circumstances, may behave in ways that defy accepted social and cultural values and expectations of what is appropriate behaviour for minors in dealing with difficult situations.

Overall, the investigation of children's agency on the way to school is a crucial field of study that can aid in our understanding of how kids navigate their everyday lives and acquire critical abilities and competencies. We can encourage kids to take a more active role in their communities and nations by valuing and promoting their agency. It is generally assumed that children's experiences of their school trip and how they handle the difficult situation have an impact on their decision to persist or drop out. Hence, it is important to explore learners' persistence in completing school.

### **Learners' Persistence in School**

Persistence among learners has become a critical concept in current literature (Asire, 2015; Banks & Dohy, 2019; Ajiningtyasasih & Nugroho, 2020), given the high rate of school dropout globally, and with approximately 61 million children not enrolled in school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017). Persistence is consistently defined as the individual's willingness, time, and ability to overcome difficulties (Asire, 2015; Banks & Dohy, 2019; Ajiningtyasasih & Nugroho, 2020). It refers to the ability to keep going despite difficulties, resistance, failure, or discouragement. It is a key characteristic and driving force for success in all professions and academic disciplines. Asire (2015) describes learner persistence as continuing to enroll in a course or study

program until completion, and Banks and Dohy (2019) suggest that learners need persistence as it is a virtue that makes a person strong and is required to complete every course. Highly persistent learners succeed in completing every assigned task in the shortest possible time (Ajiningtyasasih & Nugroho, 2020).

Thus, learners need to develop persistence to achieve their academic goals, and the factors that contribute to a learner's persistence need to be understood. However, there has been a notable silence in the literature, requiring this present study to address this gap.

### **Factors affecting learner's persistence**

Researchers from all over the world have recognized the importance of student persistence in education. As a result, numerous attempts have been undertaken to pinpoint the elements that affect learner persistence. For instance, Geetha (2019) looked at the elements that affect distance learners' persistence. According to the study, the majority of the variables that affect students' persistence can be divided into four groups: intrinsic, institutional, motivational, and restricting variables. Learners' values and aptitudes are intrinsic factors. These unique traits have an impact on whether they decide to stay in a program or leave it. The support services that students receive from institutions make up the institutional factors. Once more, the balance between an individual's educational outcomes and costs determines motivational variables. They weigh the costs and advantages. The author claims that a person experiences financial difficulty when his or her educational costs begin to exceed his or her income to the point where it psychologically damages their motivation to study, self-esteem, and morale. Additionally, academic pressure causes mental suffering as a result of some anticipated study-related annoyance.

In other studies, it was established that individual characteristics also influence their persistence in school completion. Individual characteristics such as hard work, a positive attitude toward work, and independence, as demonstrated by Gebre (2008), aid in the achievement of academic goals. Also, students' background characteristics, such as the community of residence, influence their school persistence (Hudacs, 2020).

### **Impact of Journey to School Experiences on Children's Persistence in Completing School**

Research has shown that children's experiences on their journey to school play a crucial role in their desire to complete school. Children's experience of the distance they negotiate to school influences their persistence. For instance, children who experienced a long and difficult journey to school are more likely to have lower levels of academic achievement and motivation to learn (Browman et al., 2017). Similarly, children who experience a difficult journey to school are more likely to miss school and have lower academic achievement (Thomas, 2016). In contrast, some studies have found that journey to school experiences can positively affect children's persistence in completing school. Children who walked or cycled to school had better attendance rates and were more likely to complete their education than those who took the bus or were driven to school (Gristy, 2019).

In the next section, the study examines how the journey to school, children's agency in mobility, and learners' persistence has been empirically studied and the on-going empirical debate.

## **Empirical Review**

This section presents the key empirical studies on children's journey to school experiences, children's agency in the independent trip to school, and learners' persistence in education globally and the gaps that exist in the existing studies.

### **The home to school journey**

The study of children's journey from home to school has acquired acceptance in international literature. However, many of these studies have focused explicitly on the commute to school, both in terms of how it affects traffic and how it affects kids' independence and health. For example, Pooley et al. (2005) compared choices made concerning the journey to school in the past and as of 2004 to determine the effects of changes on children's mobility experiences in urban areas in England. The study discovered that since 1940, escorted travel by children to school has increased compared to walking alone. Egli et al.'s (2020) study in New Zealand investigated how children perceive and prefer their school travel. The study found that children prefer to walk to schools that are close to their homes and far from busy areas and traffic jams. In addition, Kim (2014) discovered in her Master's thesis that over fifty percent of schoolchildren at Mission Hill School in the United States are chauffeured to school by their parents, leaving fifteen percent of the children who walk to school every day. Her research also found that the distance to school and the age of the children are the two most important factors that influence parents to escort their children to school. In a similar vein, Stevens' (2010) study shed light on the health and environmental issues associated with children's home-to-school journey. According to the researcher, policymakers have ignored

environmental and health issues in children's travel, which can be heard at the micro level of society. Other studies in children's travel have demonstrated the higher need for active school travel to improve the health and wellbeing of children (Kontou et al., 2020; Fusco et al., 2013).

Based on the available literature, the empirical evidence on the journey to school experiences can be classified into different categories. Safety-related experiences, social relations, environmental-related experiences, health and hygiene, fun and enjoyable experiences, and psychological experiences have been identified as important categories in the research (Egli et al., 2020; Ngidi & Essack, 2022; Banerjee & Bahl, 2017; Fusco et al., 2013; Race et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). These categories are reviewed below:

### **Safety and security**

According to research, safety and security-related issues are major concerns for parents during their children's daily commute to school (Ross, 2007; Ipingbemi & Aiworo, 2013). Social dangers such as fear of assault or molestation and environmental dangers like traffic are the primary issues that parents express concern about (Ross, 2007). Studies have also highlighted specific areas that may pose a threat to children, such as bus shelters, car wash facilities, taxi ranks, abandoned buildings, and dense bushy areas (Ngidi & Essack, 2022; Banerjee & Bahl, 2017). These areas are characterized by garbage, homelessness, public intoxication, gang activity, drug dealing, and graffiti, which can threaten children's safety and alter parents' perceptions of their ward's safety (Banerjee & Bahl, 2017). Sadly, 69% of the children in Banerjee and Bahl's (2017) study reported feeling unsafe when walking to

school. Manjunath and Gangaboraiah (2020) in a similar vein espoused that children can have road accidents whether they are in the villages or the city.

Accidents mostly occur on local roads in populated regions, peaking on weekdays and occasionally coinciding with school trips (Ross, 2007). In Scotland, for example, there were 1,176 child pedestrian casualties in 2004, with 246 children killed or seriously injured while going to school due to poor driving habits, roadside trading, street parking, and poor road design (Ipingbemi & Aiworo, 2013). In responding to children's road safety, governments should prioritize the access needs of schoolchildren by enhancing driver education, building and maintaining sidewalks, and establishing transportation strategies that explicitly consider those demands (Ipingbemi & Aiworo, 2013). Providing transportation subsidies for children can also enhance access and avoid walking through dangerous paths (Ngidi & Essack, 2022).

Banerjee and Bahl (2017) found that children felt safer in the presence of informal and formal surveillance and a busy environment with more traffic than in a quiet and isolated residential street without traffic. However, their study also suggested that good maintenance and clean-up of the proximate environment would help address some safety issues in inner-city areas. The above literature reviewed confirms that children are exposed to safety issues on their journey to school. However, what this literature failed to report were what children do to stay safe amid these issues. Also, children's decision to stay in school until completion was not reported in the literature. Knowledge about these will help inform future decisions on children's independent journey to school.

In summary, safety issues such as social and environmental dangers are major concerns for parents during their children's daily commute to school. Specific areas like bus shelters, car wash facilities, taxi ranks, abandoned buildings, and dense bushy areas may pose a threat to children's safety. Governments should prioritize the access needs of schoolchildren by enhancing driver education, building and maintaining sidewalks, and establishing transportation strategies that explicitly consider those demands. Providing transportation subsidies and maintaining the proximate environment can also help address some safety issues.

### **Health and hygiene**

According to Stevens (2010), parents' decisions on how their children travel to school are often influenced by factors such as health and exercise, with regular physical activity being beneficial for children's overall wellbeing. Walking to school, in particular, is viewed by children as a way to keep their bodies fit and active, as found by Tetali (2016). Additionally, Pollard et al. (2020) found that when children walk to school in groups, they enjoy the activity more and are better able to convert their desire for good health and fitness into a pleasurable experience. Much of the literature relating to the health and hygiene of children on their journey to school seems to have been based on the benefits of the journey to their health with little attention on the adverse effect of the regular walk to school.

Research conducted in rural areas where walking is the primary mode of transportation to school has shown that children's cleanliness can be affected by their daily journey. In rural Ghana, Malawi, and South Africa, Porter et al. (2010) found that children arrive at school with soiled clothes and muddy shoes

due to walking through hazardous and mountainous terrain. Mahlaba (2014) similarly discovered that children from rural areas arrive at school sweaty and tired, which can negatively impact their focus during class. However, some children who arrive at school looking neat and tidy will stop at streams and rivers to clean their clothes and shoes before entering the school building. The above studies focused on children who walk through hazardous routes, specifically those without alternate routes. This makes it open for further investigation into children who have route options.

### **Enjoyable experiences**

According to various studies, children's daily journey from home to school provides them with ample opportunities to enjoy the natural world and have fun. Romero (2015) suggests that walking to school enables children to interact with nature, develop confidence in traveling alone, and have social encounters. Yatiman (2014) found that for some children, the home-to-school trip is the only way they can play with their peers, which is consistent with Gristy's (2019) assertion that children relish moving around their neighborhood with friends and relatives.

Wilson et al. (2019) discovered that the presence of flora and fauna during the home-to-school commute fosters positive emotional responses in children. Romero (2015) also notes that children engage in enjoyable interactions with plants, animals, and water features while walking to school. In Lesotho's rural communities, Morojele and Muthukrishna's (2012) study revealed that children can rehydrate on their way to school by stopping at streams and picking fruit along the way. Similarly, Porter et al. (2010) found

that children collect seasonal wild fruits and plants while traveling to and from school.

The topography and character of the roadways leading to school also provide amusing opportunities for children when necessary. Romero's study (2015) found that children enjoy their walk to school when they have the chance to interact with nature, recreational facilities, and retail settings on their route to school.

### **Social relations experiences**

Several studies have demonstrated that the journey from home to school presents an opportunity for social relationships and socialization, with interaction with peers and family being the most common (Fusco et al., 2013; Race et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). Fusco et al. (2013) found that Canadian children wished for more opportunities to interact with friends and family on the way to school. Wilson et al. (2019) also discovered that children's interest in traveling to school was stimulated by the possibility of interacting with others during the journey, particularly the comfort of people and traveling with friends and siblings.

Ross (2007) conducted an individual-level study that showed how children negotiate school journeys together, with older siblings taking responsibility for accompanying younger siblings. This led to the development of routines and opportunities for social and environmental engagements. Additionally, other children created their friendship networks and solidarity groups. Morojele and Muthukrishna (2012) found that children form heterosexual relationships to help navigate sometimes dangerous spaces, with girls in relationships sometimes being protected by their male partners.

### Environmental experiences

Numerous studies have highlighted the influence of both the built and natural environment on children's school commutes. For example, Stevens (2010) found that the physical structure of urban areas affects children's decisions on how they travel to school, especially in areas considered unsafe and unclean. Infrastructure that promotes walking, such as sidewalks, stop signs, shorter distances, and shortcuts, has been identified as crucial in improving children's journey to school (Wilson et al., 2019). Children have expressed a dislike for noisy and polluted areas (Egli et al., 2020). The lack of crossing guards, the presence of dogs, litter, and smoking were reported as the most significant obstacles on the way to school (Wilson et al., 2019). Conversely, children enjoy exploring natural and green spaces, such as grass and trees.

Concerns about weather and climate have also gained attention regarding school commutes. In Wright's study, over half of the parents surveyed cited weather and climate as significant factors in deciding whether their children should walk to school. Children's reactions to seasonal changes varied, with some expressing excitement about biking or walking to school during snowy or icy weather (Stevens, 2010). Children demonstrated awareness of risks by changing their behavior, such as dressing differently or being more vigilant of their surroundings when walking or cycling. However, Mahlaba (2016) found that rural children are uncomfortable when it rains as they have to take alternate routes to avoid crossing rivers, which can be hazardous due to the slippery paths and flowing streams (Porter et al., 2010). Consequently, the trip to school takes longer, and some children lose concentration in class whenever

they see signs of rainfall. Nevertheless, some children have developed strategies to manage weather changes. For example, Ross (2007) reported that "in bad weather, we run, in good weather, we walk along the tops of high walls like circus tightrope walkers." This suggests that children are aware of weather changes and know how to adapt to them.

### **Psychological experiences**

Research indicates that children's journey from home to school can have psychological implications, with the nature and terrain of the route to school inducing fear in children (Porter et al., 2010; Mahlaba, 2016). In some cases, children may encounter graveyards or potentially dangerous beings, causing intense anxiety and a sense of exposure (Porter et al., 2010; Mahlaba, 2016). Some children have been reported to drop out of school due to fear of encountering unknown spirits on their route to school (Porter et al., 2010).

In summary, the literature on the journey to school experiences suggests that multiple factors can influence this daily routine. Safety, social relations, environmental factors, health and hygiene, enjoyable experiences, and psychological factors all play important roles in shaping the commuting experience of children on their way to school. Despite these experiences, children can exercise agency in managing risks and developing a shared sense of urgency through relational processes (Porter et al., 2010; Mahlaba, 2016). Therefore, it is important to explore how children navigate their independent trips to school.

### **Children's Agency in an independent journey to school**

Research has shown that children actively shape their surroundings and influence their own lives and the lives of others as social actors and co-creators

of their own lives (Christensen, 2013; Ungruhe, 2019). They have agency, which allows them to overcome poverty, misery, and social exclusion (Ungruhe, 2019), and their actions have severe negative psychological and bodily impacts, shaping their chances for agency and affecting the characteristics of their lives (Muhati-Nyakundi, 2019).

Understanding children's capacity for independent thought and action in challenging social situations is crucial for developing strengths-based development policies and interventions that respect and build on the coping strategies created by children themselves (Skovdal & Daniel, 2012). Previous research has demonstrated various ways in which children exercise their agency, such as consent-giving and negotiation (Koomson et al., 2022) and mastering urban activities and time control practices (Kullman & Palludan, 2011). However, these have only been done in other fields with limited attention on their journey to school. The above indicates that children have the capacity and some level of authority in making and taking a certain decision that best interests them.

Moreover, studies have shown that children develop their support networks, primarily friendships, to remain safe in their local environments and that their assessments of risk are linked to their perceptions of their bodily capabilities and skill in avoiding serious accidents, which are developed through exploration and careful reflection (Christensen & Mikkelsen, 2008). Again, children exercise their agentic capacities in neighborhood movement by developing their support system of routines, practices, and norms for outdoor life (Wales et al., 2021).

However, most of the literature on children's agency in negotiating their journeys in their everyday lives has focused on their unsupervised journeys in their neighborhood for survival, with limited attention to their school journeys. Acknowledging children's ability to exercise agency is seen as a remedy for several issues related to the concepts and methods of specific child-focused academics and development agencies (Campbell et al., 2015). Previous studies have shown that children create their network of routines, practices, and norms for living outside, including specific protocols for gathering after school and being safe and secure while moving around and occupying steadily bigger parts of the neighborhood (Kullman & Palludan, 2011). Admittedly, Mayor and Asor (2002) study in urban areas in the USA, identified that children have to set up tactics such as running and hiding to evade criminals when passing high-crime regions. They also navigate their way to school by joining gender-based groups and engaging in heterosexual walking relationships (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012). Similarly, Muhati-Nyakundi, (2019) study on how OVC children exercise agency found that children exercised agency through negotiations, decision-making, and avoidance of real and latent risk which potentiated them with confidence, independence, and autonomy. Barker (2003) also found that children are actively involved in decisions regarding the type of car to board to school. In the case of a decision, it was found in other studies that, the route choice and the pace of walking to school are decided by the children themselves (Ross, 2007; Clark, Bent, & Gilliland, 2016; Race et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). According Dejaeghere (2018), children's capacity to take critical decisions for themselves has an association with their attainment of future aspirations through education.

However, there is a need to delve into children's persistence in completing school despite their varied experiences, particularly those who traverse difficult terrain and long distance walk to school, as it is assumed that the various ways in which children deal with difficult mobility situations are related to their decision to continue or discontinue schooling. This area remains limited in the literature, and this present study seeks to contribute to knowledge.

### **Children's persistence in completing school**

Children encounter several difficulties in completing their education in different nations as a result of various reasons. The experiences children have on the way to and from school are one of these influences, which can have a favorable or negative impact on their persistence in completing their education. This literature review examines research studies on children's persistence in completing school amid journey to school experiences.

Learners' persistence in school is widely acknowledged as a major driving force that helps them achieve both academic and personal goals. Research has identified various factors that influence children's persistence in completing school (Mughal, Aldridge & Monaghan, 2019). These factors can be categorized into individual-level factors, family-level factors, and structural or institutional factors. Individual-level factors include personal goals, academic desire, and personal motivation. Family-level factors include family background, socio-economic status, and educational level of the parents. Structural or institutional factors refer to societal and institutional programmes and policies that influence children's school enrollment and completion.

Evidence from the literature shows that social support from parents and the closest people in the community is a key factor in enhancing children's

persistence in non-formal schools (Mughal, Aldridge & Monaghan, 2019). Social support such as advice, encouragement, and helping them with their assignments motivate children in achieving their academic goals (Ajiningtyasasih & Nugroho, 2020). Institutional support such as financial aid and tutors also contribute to children's persistence in achieving their educational goals (Ajiningtyasasih & Nugroho, 2020; Gebre, 2008). Other strategies like home visits, quarterly evaluations, and parent training also contribute to maintaining students' persistence (Ajiningtyasasih & Nugroho, 2020). A similar report was found in a qualitative study by Motsa and Morojele (2018) on high aspirations despite challenging situations among vulnerable children in Swaziland. It was indicated that these children's dream can be achieved when they get the necessary support from their teachers and parents.

In recent studies on learners' persistence in online distance learning, personal aspirations, a sense of community, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and satisfaction with the programme have been identified as factors that encourage students to persevere through difficult academic experiences (Yang et al., 2017; Kuhns, 2013; Oliver, 2018). Furthermore, the lack of female role models, a lack of work opportunities, and cultural factors have been identified as some of the factors contributing to low rates of female school completion in rural areas (Muzingili & Muchinako, 2016).

Various studies have explored the reasons why children are motivated to attend school despite the challenges they face. Morojele (2013) found that one reason children are motivated to attend school is to avoid becoming circumcision initiators, which could negatively impact their social and economic status. Meanwhile, Morojele (2011) reported that girls in rural areas

are motivated to attend school because they aspire to change their subordinate status. Dungey and Ansell (2020) emphasized the importance of the aspiration for economic, religious, and physical survival in a community's ability to overcome obstacles. Komba (2013) identified several factors that affect children's dedication to schooling, including family conversations about education, parental beliefs and attitudes, and family values.

On the other hand, Porter et al. (2010) discovered that some children do not see distance to school as a barrier to their pursuit of quality education in Malawi. However, their decision to withdraw from school may be influenced by complex factors such as rape, exhaustion, punishment, and cost.

The above literature reviews provide insight into what influences learners' persistence in completing a program. However, most of these studies concentrated on the higher education levels, with little attention to the basic level. Basic education is the initial step in knowledge acquisition, which requires a concerted effort to ensure effective completion. Research on learners' persistence has exclusively focused on higher education or the non-traditional mode of education delivery. Also, learner persistence literature pays much attention to the academic preparedness of the learners, teaching and learning, and school-related factors that ensure learners' persistence. However, it is much more relevant to look at other individual factors that account for learner persistence, with some learners overcoming several difficulties to effectuate their academic goals.

The proceeding section provides a conclusion for this chapter as established from the literature reviewed.

## Conclusion

The chapter studied children's experiences during their journey to school, children's agency, and their persistence in completing school amid their experiences on their journey to school. As a result of this study, it was stated that to gain a better understanding of children's lives, it would be more pertinent to understand how their movement patterns relate to their lives holistically, the complexity of their movements, and the decisions they make as a result. In summary, the substantial research reviewed demonstrates the importance of children's journeys to school in enhancing their interaction with nature and developing their five senses. Walking in this journey benefits children's health and well-being.

In this review of literature, it has been demonstrated that literature on children's travel to school often focuses on transportation modes, children's comfort levels, and their experiences with the environment. Also, there is a strong emphasis in the literature on children's independent mobility, but limited consideration of how they exercise agency in the independent negotiation of their journeys. Studies that do consider walking to school typically focus on Western countries and urban settings. The studies are of the view that longer-distance commuters do so in motorized vehicles and are usually accompanied by their guardians. Limited literature exists, however, that explores the experiences of rural children walking to school in sub-Saharan Africa, which includes Ghana. Children's experiences on their journeys to school need to be reconceived as more than challenging encounters and exciting experiences. This study, therefore, fills a gap in the literature by giving a thorough insight into how children experience their walk to school and by demonstrating how they

exercise agency despite the difficulty of their walk and their decision to complete school. The journey to school experiences can significantly affect children's persistence in completing school. Although some studies have found a positive relationship between the journey to school experiences and education outcomes, others have found negative outcomes. Therefore, policymakers and educators should consider these factors in designing interventions to improve children's journey to school experiences and their persistence in completing school.



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methods employed to gather data to achieve the objectives of the study. The chapter commences with the research design, the population, sample, and sampling technique. Furthermore, the data collection instrument employed, data collection procedure and the process for data processing and analysis will be elaborated upon. Additionally, ethical considerations will be addressed in this chapter.

#### Research Design

This study aims to gain in-depth understanding of learners' subjective experiences, aligning it with the constructivist paradigm (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This paradigm enables the utilization of an interpretivist epistemology, which facilitates the interpretation of learners' unique realities (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). By embracing the constructivist paradigm, the research process will actively involve children and acknowledge their ability to construct their social environments.

The study utilised a qualitative, phenomenological case-study approach for data collection and analysis, which is ideally suited for studying human experiences in their natural contexts using a variety of data sources, and gathering methods that result in interpretation (Padilla-Daz, 2015). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), qualitative researchers seek to understand how people interpret their experiences, build their worlds, and make them meaningful. It is uncommon to conduct an unbiased analysis of human experiences using quantitative or established measurements.

Creswell & Creswell (2017) identified five qualitative research designs: phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narratives, and case studies. Creswell & Creswell (2017) assert that when studying an individual, researchers use narrative and phenomenological design; but, when examining a group or person's behavior in terms of sharing a culture, researchers use ethnography. The last method that researchers utilize to examine processes, activities, and events is case studies or grounded theory.

To understand how learners describe their experiences of the journey to school, how they exercise agency in navigating their journey, and why they persist in completing school despite the daily long-distance walking, a phenomenological case study approach is necessary. This method combines two qualitative research techniques to collect rich and meaningful data that delineate the personal narratives of the learners (Thomas, 2011; Yazan, 2015). A case study approach is particularly useful for exploring the unique experiences of individuals, while phenomenology seeks to understand the underlying structure and essence of a phenomenon (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The study focused on one public elementary school in Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem Municipality to thoroughly explore the experiences of learners' journey to school, their agencies in navigating the journey, and what influences their persistence in completing school despite walking to school experiences. The phenomenological approach is well-suited to this study as it aims to understand the lived experiences of humans (Alase, 2017). Participants were carefully chosen to ensure their experiences aligned with the phenomenon being studied.

While there are some weaknesses in the phenomenological study, including the need to understand philosophical presuppositions, difficulty finding appropriate participants, and the potential for personal assumptions to influence data interpretation, these issues are manageable with careful attention from the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Overall, the study's phenomenological case study approach will provide an in-depth understanding of pupils' experiences and their decision-making processes in completing their education despite facing significant challenges.

### **Study Area**

The research was carried out in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem (KEEA) Municipality, located in the central region of Ghana. KEEA is a political municipality created in 1988 as part of the decentralization programme in Ghana, consisting of four traditional municipal areas. The municipality shares boundaries with the Atlantic Ocean (Gulf of Guinea) on the south, Cape Coast Metropolis, on the east, Twifo-Hemang Lower Denkyira District on the north, and Wassa East District on the west. According to Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) report on 2021 population census, the municipality has a population of 166,017, with a majority living in rural areas, which is composed of 61,481 urban dwellers and 104,536 rural residents. There are only four main urban settlements in the municipality, with the remaining being rural. The effect it has on education is that a large number of children from remote rural areas have to travel long distances to reach schools located in central villages.

KEEA is primarily an agricultural community, with fisheries and agriculture predominating. Education is an essential tool for reducing poverty in the municipality, with an overall number of 299 schools under both public

and private ownership, catering from preschool up to tertiary level. The basic schools are clustered into eight (8) circuits. Four of the eight circuits are predominantly urban, with the remaining being rural. However, most basic schools, especially junior high schools, are located in larger communities, meaning children from remote areas have to commute to these communities for junior high school education. KEEA was chosen for the study because, as is clear from the GSS (2021) population census data that a sizable portion of the population consists of rural inhabitants. Again, the list of available schools in KEEA Municipality indicate that education stakeholders, such as teachers and students will have a long commute to reach their schools, providing suitable context for exploring the experiences of learners on their journey to school in a rural setting.

Ankaful Mental M/A Basic School, located in the KEEA municipality, was selected for the study. The school is located at the Ankaful Psychiatric hospital, with the closest town being approximately 4 kilometers away. The school serves communities that face social challenges such as unemployment and poverty. The school draws learners from neighbouring communities with less than 1000 residents, and the school population is less than 500. The school is in the Ntranoa administrative circuit under the Ghana Education Service. Four communities, namely, Ankaful, Tsikweikrom, Simmiw, and Ntranoa surround the school. Pupils from the neighboring communities walk approximately 5 km to school daily.

Furthermore, Ankaful Mental JHS is considered rural as per Ghana Statistical Service, where the community population is less than 5000. There seems to be no literature evidence on learners' experiences while journeying to

school on foot daily in the Municipality. Ankaful Mental M/A Basic School is an appropriate choice for this study due to its location, the socio-economic challenges faced by the surrounding communities, its classification as a rural school, and the lack of previous research on the experiences of the learners journey to school. The findings from this study can have significant implications for understanding and addressing the unique experiences by learners in similar contexts.

### **Population**

The study population was made up of learners from Ankaful Mental M/A Basic School in KEEA Municipality between the ages of 11 and 17 who were in JHS 1, JHS 2, and JHS 3. These participants were chosen because of their shared experiences of walking to school daily.

Again, these participants that is older learners in JHS were considered to have a thorough understanding of the phenomena, and experiences to share about their journeys to school compare to the younger primary learners. Further, they have the ability to express themselves clearly and thoughtfully, and the desire to engage the researcher in lengthy and in-depth conversations. Consequently, these learners were from three (3) communities namely, Simiw, Ntranoa and Nanko that are more than 5km away from the school.

### **Sampling Procedure**

The phenomenological qualitative study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of people's experiences related to a specific phenomenon. Instead of trying to generalize findings to a larger population, a smaller group of participants were chosen to facilitate a thorough investigation. Previous research by Mohajan (2018) suggests that a sample size of 5–25 participants is

suitable for phenomenological studies, and Alase (2017) also supports a range of 2–25 participants. Additionally, it is recommended to continue data collection until saturation, when no new analytical information emerges (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). In this study, data saturation was achieved after gathering information from 18 participants from the identified population. At this point, the researcher observed that no new relevant information was emerging, indicating that maximum insights into the phenomenon had been obtained.

To select participants who walk more than 6km to school, a purposive sampling technique was employed. This involved selecting learners who possess rich information about the phenomenon, allowing for the inclusion of individuals who shared a common experience while varying in their characteristics and individual perspectives. According to Taherdoost (2016), purposive sampling is valuable in capturing participants who possess rich information and meet the criteria of importance related to the phenomenon under investigation. By focusing on learners who walked long distances to and from school, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the problem being examined. Specifically, the study's participants were a homogenous sample of 18 learners made up of 10 boys and 8 girls who self-identified as learners who traveled more than 6km to school.

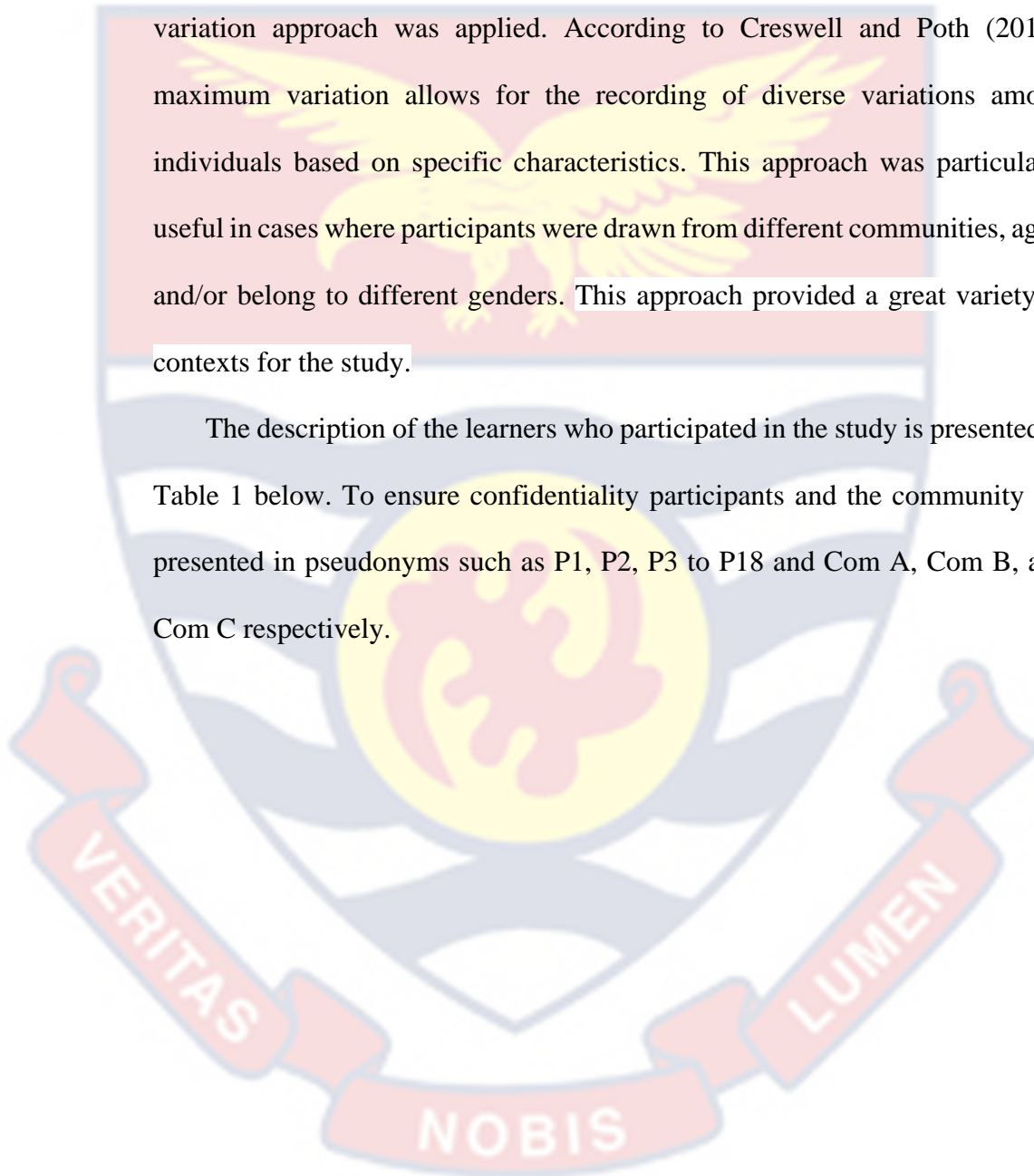
#### **Selection criteria**

**Inclusion criteria:** Out of four communities that access the school, three met the inclusion criteria, which includes those at a minimum of 3km and above and children who access the school from those areas who voluntarily presented themselves to participate in the study.

**Exclusion criteria:** Learners who expressed hesitation or reluctance to take part in the study were excluded from the study. The study did not include learners who stay in communities less than the 3km radius to the school.

To reduce the number of participants to a manageable 15 to 25, maximum variation approach was applied. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), maximum variation allows for the recording of diverse variations among individuals based on specific characteristics. This approach was particularly useful in cases where participants were drawn from different communities, ages, and/or belong to different genders. This approach provided a great variety of contexts for the study.

The description of the learners who participated in the study is presented in Table 1 below. To ensure confidentiality participants and the community are presented in pseudonyms such as P1, P2, P3 to P18 and Com A, Com B, and Com C respectively.



**Table 1: Description of participants**

Participant's ID	Age (years)	Gender	Years attended the school	Community	Distance from home to school	Average Time Spent on the Journey (HRS)
P1	15	Male	2	Com A	5km	1 hr. 30mins
P2	15	Male	1	Com A	5km	45 minutes
P3	14	Male	9	Com A	5km	40-50 minutes
P4	14	Male	2	Com A	5km	1 hour
P5	14	Male	8	Com A	5km	50 minutes
P6	13	Female	2	Com A	5km	45 minutes
P7	12	Female	5	Com A	5km	1 hour
P8	15	Female	9	Com B	5.5km	1 hour 30 minutes
P9	17	Female	3	Com B	5.5km	1 hour to 1 hour 30 minutes
P10	13	Female	8	Com A	5km	40 - 45 minutes
P11	12	Female	1	Com A	5km	40 minutes
P12	15	Male	2	Com A	5km	40 – 45 minutes
P13	15	Male	8	Com B	5.5km	1 hour 30 minutes
P14	16	Female	4	Com A	5km	50 minutes – 1 hour
P15	15	Female	4	Com B	5.5km	1 hour – 1 hour 30 minutes
P16	15	Male	2	Com C	6km	1 hour 30 minutes to 2 hours
P17	13	Male	2	Com C	6km	2 hrs.
P18	16	Male	2	Com C	6km	1 hour 30 minutes to 2 hours

### Data Collection Instrument

The research used semi-structured interviews as a means to collect qualitative data from participants. During these interviews, the researcher asked questions in person to elicit responses that addressed the study's objectives. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they are well-suited for capturing personal opinions and insights from individuals about specific situations or phenomena they have encountered (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). This approach aligns with the study's aim of understanding learners' perspectives on their experiences traveling to school (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility, allowing participants to share detailed experiences and facilitating the coding of data (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Additionally, this approach enables researchers to confirm, correct, or uncover new information about the research problem (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

The researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide based on relevant literature and the research questions guiding the study. The interview guide focused on gathering participants' demographic information, their experiences traveling to school, their exercise of agency during independent walks to school, and their decisions regarding persisting in completing junior high school despite the journey to school experiences. My thesis advisor helped me to improve and clarify the interview questions so that the respondents would comprehend them. The interview questions underwent a pilot test at Efutu M/A Junior High School in Cape Coast Metropolis, which helped refine the instrument before its use in the main data collection at Ankaful Mental M/A Junior High School. By piloting the instrument at Efutu M/A Junior High School outside KEEA Municipality but with a similar characteristics in terms of its rural setting, the researcher was more confident that the refined interview guide would effectively capture the intended goal when used with the target population at Ankaful Mental M/A Junior High School. Piloting the instrument in a different District helped establish transferability of the research findings.

In addition to the interviews, participants were involved in a unique drawing activity that offered them the creative freedom to vividly depict their daily journey to school. The semi-structured interviews were employed to allow respondents to explain their drawings, enabling additional information to be gathered from those who were hesitant to respond solely to interview questions. This approach of combining drawings and interviews facilitated participants in providing explanations for their drawings and enhanced the narrative accounts during the interviews. Drawings are particularly useful for individuals who find it challenging to communicate their experiences and emotions verbally (Horne,

Masley, & Allison-Love, 2017; Bergbom & Lepp, 2022). The drawing activity was exclusively used to gather data on how learners described their journeys to school.

Researchers interested in exploring children's experiences of place have utilized a combination of drawing activity and interviewing techniques to achieve their research objectives (Hart, 1979; Benson, 2009). This approach enables the representation of children's unique perspectives on their journey to school through visual and verbal means.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

An introductory letter from the Office of the Director, Institute for Educational Planning and Administration at the University of Cape Coast, as well as permission from the Municipal Education Director, was sent to the head teacher of Ankaful Mental M/A Basic School. The data collection process began after the acquisition of ethical clearance from the Institution Review Board (IRB) at the University of Cape Coast.

The fieldwork began on Tuesday, May 2, 2023, and ended on May 12, 2023. A letter of authorization and assistance from the Education Directorate (KEEA Municipality) and the Director of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration at the University of Cape Coast made it easier to enter the field and collect data successfully. This removed potential skepticism and unwillingness that could have been encountered when selecting the school and participants for the study. It also contributed to easing the difficulty that was associated with the data collection.

After the authorization letters were obtained, the researcher visited the school selected for the study to have an initial meeting with the head teacher.

The head teacher welcomed the visit with great interest because of the authorization letters and felt excessively pleased to be useful. The head teacher was very instrumental in finding learners who meet the criteria stated for achieving the research goals and also assisted in administering the consent letters to learners and collecting them after completion of the forms before actual data collection dates.

The in-person interviews were conducted at the school grounds in the assembly hall, which was not used at that time. This was to maintain confidentiality in the data collection. Participants were called one by one for the interview. The researcher conducted all the interviews with the same interview guides. This ensured some amount of exactness and control to avoid variations in the questions. The researcher used a voice recorder during the interviews to directly capture participants' responses and ensure an accurate record of the narrative accounts. The interviews followed a drawing activity, where participants were asked to creatively draw things that were of significance to them on their journey to and from school. They were provided with A3 paper, a pencil, and colored pencils for the drawing. To understand their drawings, follow up interviews were conducted with the semi-structured interview guide in person and recorded. The interviews lasted approximately 25–30 minutes for each. The researcher later performed manual transcription of the taped interviews.

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, the researcher implemented 4 accountability standards including credibility, dependability, transferability,

and confirmability. Trustworthiness are essential for the integrity and reliability of research (Creswell, 2013).

### **Credibility**

To establish the credibility of the research findings, the researcher employed several key strategies (Creswell, 2013). Through regular peer debriefing sessions with fellow researchers and subject matter experts, the researcher was able to explore alternative interpretations of the data and obtain valuable feedback on the emerging findings. Additionally, the researcher invited participants to review the interpretations and provide feedback, ensuring the findings accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. Finally, the researcher provided rich, detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and phenomena under study, allowing readers to assess the transferability of the findings to other similar settings.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied or generalized to other contexts, settings, populations, or situations (Creswell, 2013). Ensuring transferability helps researchers and decision-makers determine whether the findings from a specific study can be applied or adapted to different, but related, contexts. To establish transferability, the researcher employed several strategies. First, the researcher ensured diversity in the sample characteristics. The study included 18 participants, with 10 males and 8 females, representing three different communities. The participants also varied in terms of age and socioeconomic status. This heterogeneity in the sample increases the likelihood that the findings will be applicable to a broader population. Second, the researcher conducted a pilot test of the research

instrument in a school located in a different district, Efutu M/A Basic School in the Cape Coast Metropolis. This step helped the researcher assess the suitability of the instrument for use in a related, but distinct, context. By piloting the instrument in a setting outside the primary study site, the researcher could evaluate the transferability of the data collection procedures and instruments. Through these strategies, the researcher aimed to enhance the transferability of the study's findings, allowing for the potential application or adaptation of the results to other, similar contexts and populations.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

To ensure dependability, the researcher meticulously documented the entire research process, creating a clear audit trail. This documentation included comprehensive records of data collection, analysis, and decision-making. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted, allowing fellow researchers to review the process and provide feedback to enhance consistency and reliability.

Similarly, the researcher maintained objectivity and sought to minimize personal biases to enhance confirmability. A reflexive journal was kept to record thoughts, feelings, and potential biases throughout the study. Detailed descriptions of the data analysis procedures, including coding and theme development, were provided to demonstrate that findings were firmly rooted in the data. Member checking was also employed, inviting participants to review the interpretations and ensure that the findings accurately reflected their experiences.

### **Ethical considerations**

The following measures were taken to ensure that the ethics governing research were not violated: The Institutional Review Board of the University of

Cape Coast was first consulted for ethical approval. Appendix B of the study contains the ethical approval received by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. The researcher sought the respondents' consent and assured them of the strict confidentiality of their responses. They were also informed that their participation is voluntary and they can choose to withdraw from the study. Also, participants were notified that interviews would be audio recorded, saved to a password-protected computer to ensure confidentiality, and later transcribed for analysis and saved to the same password-protected computer. Finally, participants were assured that the interview data would only be accessible to the researcher and would be deleted after it had been transcribed. The researcher assured the participants that the recorded data will be stored in the cloud for at least 5 years, and the notes taken will be kept in a safe drawer under lock and where they can be retrieved easily by the researcher so that in case of any eventuality regarding the study, the data can serve as evidence. After 5 years, the data will be deleted from the cloud.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

Data analysis is a crucial step for researchers to transform raw data into a format that effectively communicates the findings of their study (Glesne, 2016). It serves the purpose of streamlining and simplifying the large volume of materials that need to be processed, enabling researchers to focus their efforts more efficiently (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

For this study, the data were analyzed thematically following the procedure outlined by Clarke and Braun (2013). The thematic analysis allows researchers to understand what participants consider important, how they categorize their

experiences and perceptions, what attitudes they hold, and how different categories are related to each other (Herzog, Handke, & Hitters, 2019). The six-stage analysis process proposed by Clarke and Braun (2013) was followed to conduct the data analysis.

The first stage involved familiarizing with the data. This included converting audio recordings into text by transcribing them verbatim. The transcripts were then read multiple times to grasp the main points and overall meanings. To ensure accuracy, the transcripts were checked against the original audio recordings.

Next, initial codes were generated. After a thorough reading and familiarization with the data, a list of ideas about the data's content and interesting aspects was created. Keywords and phrases related to the study's goals and research questions were highlighted and labeled as initial codes. The coding process was data-driven, without any pre-existing coding framework. The researcher examined the meaning of keywords and phrases and assigned labels accordingly. Coding was done manually and guided by the study objectives.

Once the initial codes were collated, the researcher searched for themes. Different codes were sorted into potential themes, and data extracts related to each theme were gathered. The identification of themes followed an inductive or bottom-up approach, where themes were strongly linked to the data itself. Codes were organized and refined until they crystallized around common themes. The themes and any emerging subthemes were used to create a thorough and detailed description of participants' shared experiences relevant to the study.

Finally, thematic components were further divided into themes and sub-themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences and the meanings derived from those experiences. It is important to note that the data from the drawing images were not reviewed separately; instead, it was included as described by the participants. The narratives that emerged during the sharing of the drawings formed the central pieces of the data. The findings obtained from the data analysis were aligned with the three main research questions of the study.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the research methodology utilized for this qualitative study, specifically employing a phenomenological case study design. The chapter also highlighted the details of the data collection process as well as the approach used in analyzing the data, which is the identification of themes from the responses of participants in the in-depth interview. Moving forward, the subsequent chapter will present the findings of the study, where they will be examined and evaluated.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings obtained from participants and provides an analysis and discussion of the themes that emerged from the study. The findings, analysis, and discussions are generally presented under the research questions that guided the study. However, to highlight the emerging issues, the researcher developed themes from the data under each research question.

#### Learners account of their experiences of the journey to school

This research question sought to explore learners' perceptions and accounts of their journey to school. The findings revealed six cardinal experiences that the learners recounted, namely, 1. Experiences related to time spent on the journey to school, 2. Safety concerns from potential dangers, 3. Effects of walking, 4. Environmental conditions and inconveniences; 5. Socialization and interaction with the natural environment, 6. Availability of route options and safe facilities. The six themes are subsequently elaborated upon. In the report, the unique as well as the nuanced voices of the participants were drawn upon to contextualise the actual experiences of the learners.

**Time spent on the journey to school:** The learners' reported experiences focused on the time they spent on their daily journey to school. The majority of participants interviewed mentioned that they spend more than 40 minutes commuting to and from school. Interestingly, the study also revealed that older children generally spent less time on their commute compared to younger children. Additionally, it was found that females were more vulnerable to longer travel times than males. For instance, a 14-year-old boy living approximately 5

kilometers away from the school mentioned in the interview that it takes him about an hour to reach school with a moderate walking pace. He expressed this as follows:

*“I spend like one hour then I will be in school” (P3, M, Com A)*

In comparison, a 13-year-old girl who has been attending the same school for about 5 years stated that it takes her over one hour and 30 minutes to reach school when she walks fast. She expressed her experience as follows:

*“It takes me about 1 hour 30 minutes to reach the school if I walk fast” (P7, F, Com A)*

The study revealed that the children's travel time to school lacks exactness, with a majority indicating that they spend a longer time reaching their schools. The data indicates that the duration of their journey may vary depending on the distance between their homes and the school, as well as individual characteristics. These findings align with the research of Mehdizadeh et al. (2017), who argue that the time children spend traveling to school significantly hinders their active commuting. The research also supports the conclusions of Loo and Lam (2015), who propose that children living far from school spend more time commuting, leading to a reluctance to walk to school regularly due to feeling fatigued. The next theme talked about was safety concerns about potential hazards.

#### **Safety concerns about potential hazards**

Several learners expressed their concerns about safety and potential hazards during their journey to school. They described various sections of the road that posed dangers to them, as well as encounters with reckless drivers. In relation to safety concerns on the route to school, a 12-year-old boy mentioned that

individuals with malicious intent sometimes conceal themselves in the bushes along the road, presenting a potential threat of abduction to children walking home from school after school hours. His statement was as follows:

*“Some criminals hide in the bush to kidnap children”* (P13, M, Com B).

Additionally, a 12-year-old girl, who passes a narrow and bushy road to school, mentioned a particularly troubling spot. She shared that there is a roadside joint where some gangsters smoke hard drugs, which creates fear among the children. Her account of the situation was as follows:

*“There is a joint on the roadside where some gangster smoke narcotics there”*

(P11, F, Com A).

In connection with reckless driving, some students shared their experiences of encountering drivers who drive irresponsibly. Certain sections of the Ghanaian routes are shared by both vehicles and pedestrians, leading to potential accidents and collisions. One student expressed this issue as follows:

*“we use the road with vehicles so if you are not careful it can knock”* (P7, F, Com A).

Moreover, another individual spoke about the reckless behavior of certain drivers, highlighting the need for caution when crossing the road. He recounted the situation as follows:

*“They drive so recklessly so if you are not careful they will hit you”* (P4, M, Com A).

Another participant (P5, M, Com A) also expressed dissatisfaction with the attitudes of some drivers, particularly concerning speeding cars. His concern was focused on how such speeding vehicles could potentially lead to accidents on the road.

The safety concerns were further highlighted during the drawing activity, where participants conveyed their emotions more passionately through images than through their voices. At least two of the pictures the researcher drew on exemplify the issue. Figure 1 displays a drawing created by a 15-year-old boy who has attended the school for approximately two years. His drawing depicts a poignant scene where his friend, walking to school, was tragically hit by a vehicle on their journey a year ago. The image effectively captures the gravity of the incident, evoking a strong sense of concern for road safety.

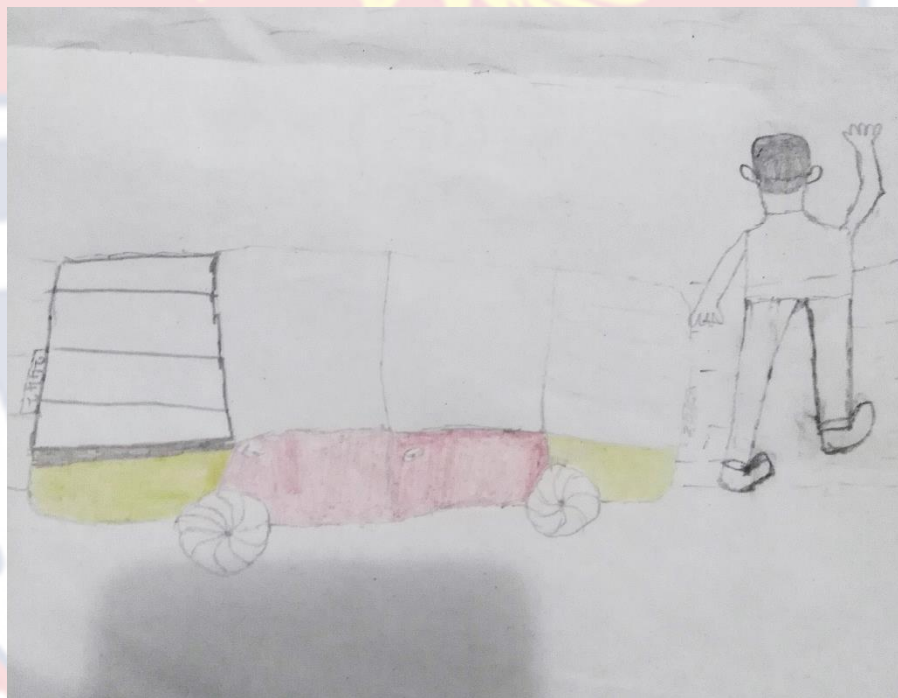
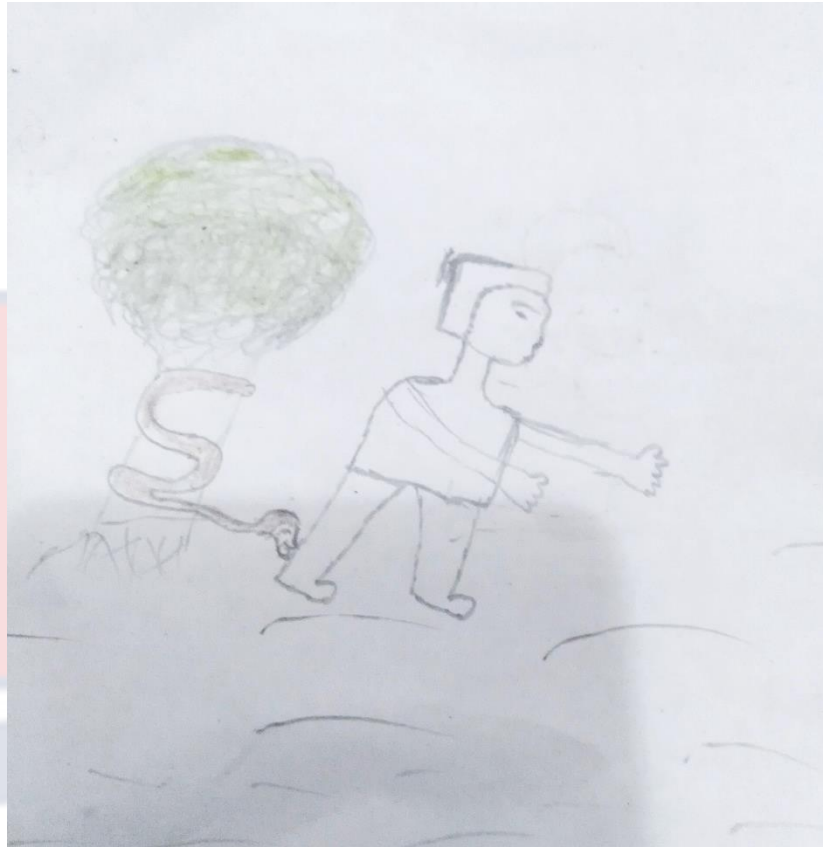


Fig. 2: A pupil knocked by a car on his journey to school (P12, M, Com A)

In his illustration, he expressed the following scene:

*“The picture is my friend who got hit by a car when crossing the road after school a year ago”*

In a separate yet equally significant scenario, another child depicted a picture of himself experiencing a snake bite.



*Fig. 3: Pupil bitten by snake on his journey to school.*

He explained it this way:

*“The picture is me, one day a snake bite me from the tree by the roadside”*

Regarding safety, the general picture painted by the learners was that there was one form of danger or the other. This shows that children might encounter heightened concerns about their well-being, leading to potential impacts on their comfort, confidence, and concentration in the classroom. These findings align with a prior study conducted by Manjunath and Gangaboraiah (2020), which emphasized that school-going children, whether in urban or rural settings, face the risk of traffic accidents during their commute to school.

Again, the results of this study support Ngidi and Essack's research (2022), which showed that children often go through situations that present dangers and cause them to feel anxious and fearful. The feeling of risk throughout their

journey is linked to these anxieties. Drawing from Bourke's (2017) framework on the four layers of children's neighborhood experiences, the current findings align with the imaginative experiences of children's mobility. In particular, children perceive the possibility of kidnapping and other dangerous situations along the way. Regarding reckless driving, the findings are similarly consistent with that of Ipingbemi and Aiworo (2013), whose research likewise highlighted the negative impacts of reckless driving, street parking, and unsuitable roadside designs on children's safety. Surprisingly, their analysis revealed a heartbreaking statistic: 15.1% of Nigerian kids have died as a result of such dangers. The collective data from this research makes it clear that traffic-related variables pose serious threats to children's safety generally and during active school transport. Children's ability to independently walk to school is hampered by busy roads, crossroads, reckless driving, bad roadside designs, and street parking.

Another issue that emerged in the safety-related experiences was the necessity of safety precautions. In the interviews, safety concerns were raised, and the importance of safety precautions was emphasized, especially by female learners. One young girl, who walks to school alone, expressed dissatisfaction with the condition of the route and the presence of dangerous animals, making it unsafe for walking. She suggested that the road should be regularly cleared and well-lit to ensure a safer early morning commute to school. Her exact comment was:

*"The route is not safe, so when you are walking, you can step on a scorpion or snake. They should clear it regularly and put lights there so that we can pass through early in the morning"* (P14, F, Com B).

Another girl mentioned that there are certain trees along the road that pose a risk and should be removed before any accidents occur. She explained it as follows:

*"When the wind blows, it looks like the trees are about to fall, so if they don't cut them down, it can kill someone"* (P15, F, Com B).

In another comparable scenario, a young girl expressed her strong discontent with the lack of safe places to seek refuge during her journey. Her complaint stemmed from the belief that the scarcity of houses along the way could leave travelers vulnerable to attacks by malicious individuals, without any means of assistance. She emphasized that having accessible residences was crucial for ensuring safety, as it would provide a sense of security and support, especially when faced with potential dangers.

This instance above highlights how children consistently prioritize their safety during their travels, as they wish to avoid any potential hazards. Understanding the locations of safe zones becomes crucial for them to ensure a secure journey to school. In line with earlier research, Ngidi and Essack (2022) made a case for the need to prioritise route planning where children commuting to school are at risk. This emphasizes the need to address the particular areas and settings that endanger children's safety. We can make sure that the proper steps are taken to protect the welfare of young students throughout their daily travel by incorporating this understanding into road design projects. The next major theme that emerged was the effects of walking.

### **The effects of walking to school**

Participants highlighted that walking has several effects on them which can be categorized into two forms: (1) its impact on their health and (2) its

influence on their punctuality for school. When considering the effects on their health, opinions varied among the learners. Some participants expressed that walking to school daily had positive effects on their health, as it provided them with the opportunity to stay fit and potentially prevent future health issues. On the other hand, some learners believed that walking to school negatively affected their health and punctuality. They reported feeling physically tired, which led to reduced attentiveness during lessons.

Regarding the positive experiences, an interesting perspective came from a boy who had to walk approximately 2 hours to school. He expressed his happiness about this routine, stating that the regular walk kept him physically fit and free from potential ailments. In his own words, he emphasized the benefits of walking by saying,

*"If you walk, you exercise your body, and you won't get sick"* (P17, M, Com C).

In support of this, another person also said:

*"it keep us active and healthy"*(P10, F, Com A).

The narratives above indicate that children acknowledge the health benefit of regular walking to school. They believe that walking is a form of exercise that can improve their health condition. In contrast, there were some negative comments about the daily walk to school. Some learners who have to walk a long distance to school complained of exhaustion and drowsiness. To explain this, one person stated that;

*"The distance is too long so I get tired along the way"* (P18, M, Com C).

In the context of the impact of walking on learners' health, a 12-year-old girl who spends approximately 45 minutes walking to school shared her experience:

*“I get hungry when walking to school”* (P6, F, Com A)

This finding supports the research conducted by Santoso, Maksum, and Pramono (2020), which emphasized that an individual's physical fitness and mental readiness play a crucial role in their capacity to handle academic workload effectively. Thus, when children have to walk a considerable distance to school, it can positively impact their fitness and activity levels. However, if the distance becomes too long, it may lead to fatigue and weakness. The findings of Mahlaba (2014) study resonate with the fatigue associated with the long-distance walk. According to the study, learners sleeping patterns get altered because they have to wake up early enough to begin their long journey walk to school. This disruption of their natural sleep pattern can have negative impact on their physical and mental wellbeing. The implications of the findings point to the importance of addressing the difficulties face by learners who walk long distance to school, in order to promote equitable and effective educational outcomes.

Apart from the physical effects of long-distance walking, some learners also mentioned its impact on punctuality and regularity at school. They explained that due to the extended travel time, they often arrive late, which subsequently affects their academic performance.

This shows that long walking distance has a noticeable impact on learners' punctuality and participation in school activities. The findings are consistent with other research on the effects of traveling a long distance to school on learners, including those by Dladla (2012) and Mahlaba (2014). According to Dladla's research on impoverished students who walk to school, their performance in class, participation in morning lessons, and overall school

cleaning are all impacted. According to Mahlaba's research on rural learners, children who travel from rural areas frequently miss the first period, which has a detrimental impact on their understanding, especially when a new topic is taught. The results of the present study are supported and strengthened by these earlier studies. The next theme that emerged in research question 1 was the environmental conditions and inconveniences.

### **Environmental conditions and inconveniences**

The interview shed light on the challenging environmental conditions that participants face while traveling to school. These difficulties encompass various situations, including weather changes, the nature of the routes they take, interactions with animals, and encountering unpleasant surroundings.

Regarding the challenges during weather changes, many students expressed their concerns about the difficulties they encounter, especially during rainy weather. One example was provided by a boy who crosses a wooden bridge on his way to school. He lamented that during the rainy season, the river swells, causing the bridge to become unstable and making crossing a nightmare for them. In his own words, he said:

*“There is a river there so when it rains it becomes full and the bridge on it moves from the river” (P16, M, Com C).*

Another equally impactful scenario was shared by a 12-year-old who recounted the problems caused by rainfall on the road they use to get to school. With passion in his voice, he described how the road becomes muddy and filled with stagnant water, which results in the unpleasant sounds of crying frogs. He stated:

*“When it rains the road becomes muddy and there is stagnant water that you hear frogs crying in it”*(P12, M, Com A ).

In addition to the adverse conditions on the road during the rainy season, Participant 14 highlighted another aspect that adds to the unpleasantness of the journey. He described how the route becomes infested with small organisms, making passage unappealing. In his words:

*“When it rains small animals like termites, ants and millipedes come to the road”.*

These accounts illustrate the significant challenges students face when dealing with unfavorable weather conditions during their journey to school. Children have challenges when they must walk to school after it has rained, according to the provided information. The flooding destroys the connecting bridges, and other sections of the road become muddy and treacherous, creating inconvenience for commuters, especially young children. Due to the difficulty of navigating these locations, this might cause delays along the trip.

The current study's findings are consistent with those of earlier studies by Wright (2019) and Mahlaba (2016), which shed light on the variety of experiences kids have in response to weather changes. In her research, Wright (2019) emphasized how children's reactions to various weather situations might vary. The finding that weather affects students' levels of classroom attentiveness, is very pertinent to the present research. Mahlaba (2016) also researched rural children who travel to school with an interest in how students are affected by weather change, especially during the wet season. His study found that students take a long time getting to school when it's raining. This finding aligns with the present research findings since the study also found that

rain affects students' ability to focus in the classroom. His study further discovered that when students saw raindrops, their focus levels in class fell. This finding is in line with the present study, which identified that environmental signals, particularly rainfall, affect students' levels of focus during academic tasks.

By recognizing the similarities between the present work and earlier studies by Wright (2019) and Mahlaba (2016), the research confirms the many ways in which children experience weather changes. The findings add to the body of knowledge in this area and emphasize the value of taking weather-related aspects into account in educational settings.

Concerning the nature of the routes they traverse, learners expressed concerns about the unfavorable conditions of the roads. Some mentioned passing through areas with dense vegetation, such as forests or thick undergrowth, while others described areas that were dirty, untidy, and marked by debris or waste. In one interview, a participant from a community with an unpaved road leading to the school shared her experience, stating:

*“We pass the bush road and get to school”* (P8, F, Com B)

With a strong sense of passion, one participant expressed his desire to avoid certain places during his journey to school. He particularly emphasized his wish to steer clear of the bushy and dusty areas, as they often make his dress dirty. However, he sadly acknowledged that he doesn't have any alternative options available to him. In his words:

*“I would like to avoid the bushy and the dusty area because it makes my dress dirty but I don't have any choice”* (P8, M, Com A).

The overall impression conveyed by the participants about the nature of the routes they traverse to get to school is far from encouraging, as evident from the tone of their voices. They express dissatisfaction and concern regarding various aspects of their journey, such as unfavorable weather conditions, challenging terrains, encounters with small organisms, dense vegetation, and dirty areas. These accounts highlight the difficulties and limitations they face daily while trying to reach their schools, painting a picture of the hardships endured by these learners in their pursuit of education. The results of this study agree with those of Porter et al.'s (2010) study of three African countries. Their research, which included information from Malawi, showed children had to cross cultivated land, shrubs, and locally made wooden bridges to get to school. The research carried out in Lesotho's rural areas by Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016), where children had to travel through congested and overgrown pathways to go to school, lends more credence to these findings. The commonalities between these earlier studies and the current study support the difficulties children encounter when getting to schools in such environments.

When observing children's interactions on their way to school, it becomes evident that many of them embrace these experiences with joy, particularly when they encounter animals. One participant expressed this sentiment, stating:

*“I see a lot of animals running”* (P15, F, Com B)

The encounters with animals not only bring joy but also offer tangible benefits to some children. Another participant shared how they and their friend take advantage of these encounters:

*“Sometimes me and my friend we kill some of the animals and take it to our parents to prepare food” (P16, B, Com C)*

In these interactions, children find excitement and opportunities to contribute to their families' meals, showcasing the positive aspects they experience during their journey to school. The results corroborate Yatiman's (2014) claims that children's exposure to and interaction with natural elements promotes healthy social, physical, and cognitive development. The findings of the present study are consistent with Yatiman's research, which suggests that interacting with natural components like animals has a variety of positive effects on children's development in all of these areas.

Regarding the environmental conditions, the issue of unpleasant ambience encounters on the journey to school emerged as a significant concern among the participants. They described situations where they found themselves in places with unsettling atmospheres, characterized by bad odors, scary surroundings, and dirtiness. This was particularly evident when participants were asked to describe the images in their drawings. One participant pointed to her drawing and expressed the unpleasant things she encounters on her way to school, stating:

*“I also see other things like dustbin, mud, garbage, dogs and dirty things” (P7, F, Com A)*

She explained that these unpleasant conditions are a result of deliberate activities carried out by people living in the surrounding areas.

In describing the extent of the menace, she added that the rotten rubbish emits a foul scent, and due to regular dumping by people, it has encroached upon some portion of the road. This is how she recounted the situation:

*"The rubbish produces a bad smell, and it's even spilling onto the road"*

Regarding the unsettling ambiance, some learners also mentioned the presence of graveyards adjacent to the walkways, which instilled fears such as such seeing ghost on their way home from school. An intriguing perspective was shared by two young boys who walk together to school. They revealed that they have to pass through a burial ground on their way to school, which they find very scary. Due to this fear, they wait until they see daylight before they begin their journey. This is how the participants recounted their experience:

*"We pass the cemetery, and it is very scary, so I wait until the day is bright before I can pass"* (P15 and P13).

Furthermore, some students raised concerns about the possibility of seeing ghosts when walking alone. These fears add to the already unsettling feelings they experience during their daily commute.

During an interview with a 13-year-old boy, he shared his experience of attending morning classes at school, which led him to set out around 4:30 am. Along the road, he claimed to have seen a tall man in a white dress whom he considered to be a ghost near the cemetery. To illustrate his account, he drew the tomb below:

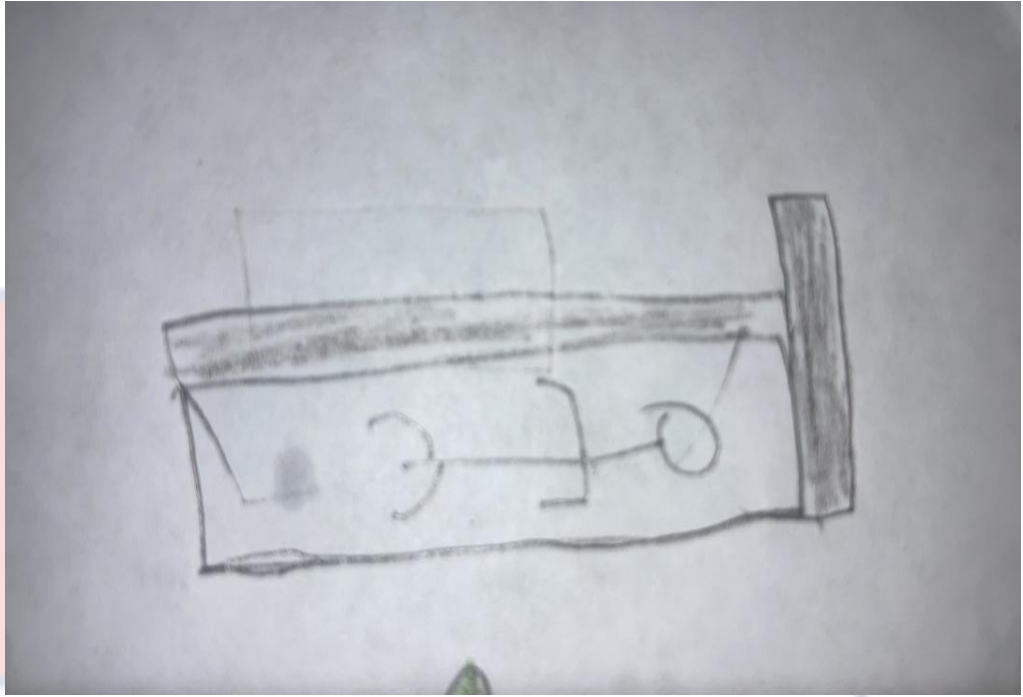


Fig. 4: Cemetery adjacent to the walkway to school (P15)

*“the picture here is a cemetery, it is behind the road”*

In another separate but equally significant scenario, another child depicted a picture of herself walking with a farmer through the cemetery. She explained that she has to wait for the farmers to accompany them to pass through the cemetery.

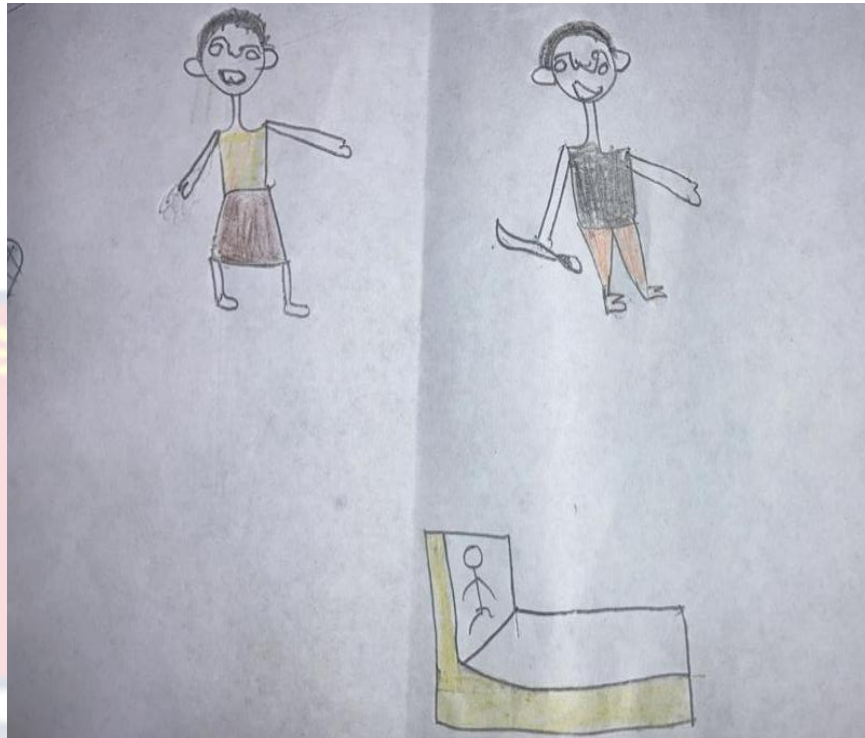


Fig 5: A pupil passing through the cemetery with a farmer

*“I drew the cemetery because that place is very scary when you pass there so I wait for the farmers to walk with them” (P13)*

Based on the excerpts, it is evident that they are dissatisfied with the current conditions along their route to school. However, they express the belief that the journey could become enjoyable for learners if improvements are made to the environmental issues present. The participants strongly feel that poor environmental conditions have a detrimental impact on their health. The results of the current study agree with those of previous research. Romero (2015) found that routes with appealing aesthetics motivate kids to walk to school. In a similar vein, Egli et al. (2020) discovered children of all ages appreciate pleasant environmental circumstances and like walking around areas with an upbeat feeling. These results support the findings of our study and highlight the significance of environmental aspects in children's walking experiences.

The results also parallel the findings of Wilson et al. (2018), who identified negative influences on children's journeys to school, such as the presence of dogs, smoke, and garbage. This suggests that unfavorable elements in the environment can impact children's willingness to walk. Additionally, our study confirms the findings of Porter et al. (2011), who highlighted that some children in villages pass through graveyards, resulting in a spiritual fear that may have psychological implications for them.

Bourke's (2017) investigation of children's experiences during their daily walks in their neighborhood focused on sensory encounters. This current study's findings align with Bourke's research, emphasizing that children engage in sensory experiences while exploring their surroundings. They observe and perceive things along the way, which contributes to their overall mobility experience. Moreover, our participants' expression of encountering scary routes corresponds to Bourke's identification of imaginative experiences in children's journeys.

The current study contributes to and validates other studies in this area, revealing new information about the importance of route aesthetics, environmental factors, and sensory experiences for children's mobility. The research shows that to encourage children to walk to school and improve their overall experience while commuting, it is important to develop comfortable and safe walking environments. The next major theme that emerged in the study was socialization and interaction with the natural environment.

### **Socializing and interaction with the natural environment**

Learners expressed that the journey to school provides an invaluable opportunity for socialization and interaction with the natural world. They

explained that the journey offers them the opportunity to interact with their classmates and form bonds with other people as they travel to and from school. An interesting perspective came from a young girl who enjoys an interactive walk with peers on the journey to school. She captured it this way:

*“I get the opportunity to chat with friends and play with them”* (P13, F, Com A)

A similar scenario was recounted by one young girl who walks approximately 45minutes to school. She indicated that they get the opportunity to discuss both their personal and academic matters on their journey to school.

In her own word she said this:

*“We get to talk about ourselves, discuss issues that happened in school and other stuff on our way to school”* (P8, F, Com B).

Another person also indicated that when they walk to school, they get ample time to converse, unlike when in a car. He expressed his pleasure by saying:

*“I also like walking together with my friends because we get time to talk on the way, we can't talk when we are in cars”* (P16, M, Com C).

It can be deduced from the voices of the participants that they enjoy their journey to school when they walk with their friends. These findings are consistent with those of Fusco et al.'s (2013) study, which found that kids had a significant desire for more opportunities to interact with peers on the way to school. Similar findings were made by Wilson et al. (2018), who discovered that children's propensity for active school travel was favorably affected by their capacity to interact with classmates when traveling. Additionally, Pollard et al.'s

(2020) research showed that group walking among kids helped them turn exercise into an enjoyable and liberating experience.

These consistent findings emphasize the value of social connection for children during their journey to school. In addition to being fun, going for a walk with friends provides an opportunity for peer learning, communication, and idea sharing. Children's social ties are strengthened, which promotes a sense of belonging. Additionally, group walking helps children feel more empowered and better about exercise.

Given these results, it is clear that encouraging children to walk with their friends can have a variety of positive effects. Promoting social engagement while traveling can improve kids' general well-being and social development, in addition to making the trip more enjoyable. This information emphasizes how crucial it is to design environments and policies that support and promote social engagement when children are traveling to and from school.

In connection with socialization, learner's interaction with the natural environment also received high mention in the interview. Particularly, it was interesting to note that the majority of girls expressed enthusiasm and contentment with their encounters with flora in their natural surroundings. One girl, who passes the main road on her way to school, vividly described her connection with nature while explaining the images in her drawing. She pointed to a beautiful flower in her drawing and stated:

*“The beautiful flower is on the road (pointing to a flower in her drawing) and it has a nice aroma so I like it any time I get to it is I plug some to smell”*

(P11, F, Com A)

In an equally significant context, one participant who sometimes passes the main road while returning home in the afternoon, expressed that the trees by the roadway provide them with shade from the sun, and when they are exhausted, the trees provide them with a place to relax. She shared her experience this way:

*“The trees on the road help us a lot when we are coming from school in the afternoon because we rest under it for fresh air then we continue our journey”* (P8, F, Com B)

The accounts of two enthusiastic boys who regularly use the bush road were particularly intriguing. They shared their experiences of how the vegetation along the roadside provides them with food when they feel hungry after a long day at school. They expressed their passion for fruit hunting in the forest, gathering food not only for themselves but also for their companions. One of the boys recounted his experience by saying:

*“We also search for pawpaw and oranges on the road when we are hungry”* (P16, M, Com C)

The above responses delineate a kind of exciting experience when children interact with the natural environment. Children find comfort when they engage with the natural environment. The results of this study are in line with other studies by Porter et al. (2010) and Morojele and Muthukrishna (2016), which support the idea that children actively look for fruit while commuting to school during the harvest season. Children also use wooded places as beneficial resources and recreational settings, according to Morojele and Muthukrishna's (2016) study in Lesotho.

These consistent results emphasize the importance of children interacting with their surroundings in the natural world. Children's adaptive behaviors and their

capacity to perceive and make use of available resources are highlighted by their ability to take advantage of fruit availability during particular seasons. A further indication of the value of natural settings in fostering children's cognitive and physical development is the use of wooded areas as play places. The results of this study are consistent with other studies, illuminating the consistent trends of children's involvement with their environment. Understanding these actions and how kids engage with their surroundings may help with educational and developmental interventions, highlighting the value of integrating nature-based activities and resources into children's everyday life. The next theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was the availability of route options and infrastructure.

#### **Availability of route options and safe facilities**

The availability of multiple routes and safe facilities received mention in the interview. Notably, learners who have a school within a walking distance of not more than one hour expressed concern about the availability of route options that would grant them the freedom to choose the one that suits their needs or preferences. One girl mentioned that she has two routes she can take to reach the school, and her choice depends on the time she wants to arrive. She described it as follows:

*"I have two ways to reach my school; you can either take the bush road or the main road. It is all about which one you like."* (P10, F, Com A)

On the negative side, one participant depicted the path leading to the school as narrow, lacking pavement, and enveloped by bushes. She expressed her concern in the following manner:

*“The route is narrow and unpaved surrounded with bushes”* (P15, F, Com B)

The route that children take to school is a matter of particular concern to them, especially regarding its condition and accessibility. This concern is clearly illustrated through their expressions during the interviews. The findings from this study throw light on a problem that emerged from previous research: the difficult situations children encounter on their route to school. Similar conclusions from some research have shown that children frequently travel hazardous routes regularly. For instance, a research by Morojele and Muthukrishna (2012) emphasized how children must cross rivers and travel over uneven terrain to go to school. Mahlaba's 2014 study added more evidence to these conclusions. Additionally, Gristy's (2019) study in rural regions sheds more light on the different paths' children must negotiate to access their schools.

With regard to the availability of safety facilities, participants expressed negative experiences concerning the absence of pedestrian pathways, which resulted in them feeling vulnerable to potential traffic accidents. The concern over the absence of pedestrian pathways, leaving a 17-year-old female learner vulnerable to potential traffic accidents, was exemplified in her statement. She commutes through a busy traffic zone to reach school every morning and expressed her worries about the unsafe situation. Her exact words were:

*“There is no sidewalk, so we use to get to the path of the cars which is dangerous because an accident can happen anytime”* (P9, F, Com C)

One participant highlighted that those who use the bush road feel a certain level of safety because they share the route with other people. The participant expressed this perspective by stating:

*“other human beings also pass on the road to their various places”* (P6, F, Com A).

Similarly, another participant concurred with the notion, mentioning that they frequently use the road together with farmers and the presence of farms along the route provides them with a sense of security. In case they encounter any potential threats on the way, they expressed the possibility of seeking help from the farmers, expressing it as follows:

*“Some people farm by the bush road so you can run to them for help”* (P2, M, Com A)

The participants emphasized the significance of route accessibility and safety infrastructure as key components during their school commutes. The results of this study are in line with those of Wilson et al.'s (2019) research, which also highlighted the significance of infrastructure in improving children's access to school. Wilson et al. found that both kids and parents understood the value of different infrastructure components, such as sidewalks, stop signs, shortcuts, and crossing guards, in enabling kids to travel safely and conveniently. These elements were shown to be significant enablers of children's access to educational opportunities.

### **Learners account of how they exercise agency on their journey to school**

The findings from research question 2 revealed five (5) responsible behaviours learners demonstrate during their journey to school. These include; 1. Route planning, 2. Time management, 3. Hygiene management, 4. Engaging in safety strategies, 5. Advocating for change in the neighbourhood. The first theme that emerged after the analysis of the data was route planning.

### Route planning

The participants on the whole demonstrated how they expressed agency through route planning. Some revealed that they actively make decisions about which route to take, given the availability of different options. Additionally, they mentioned making relational arrangements with others to coordinate their journey. When it came to decision-making regarding route choices, most participants expressed a preference for taking the short way, as it made walking easier and faster for them. For instance, one boy who goes together with his friend to school conveyed that despite the long journey they undertake daily, they sometimes opt for a shortcut that significantly eases their walk. He described it as follows:

*“There is a short way that we usually pass that makes the walk easier for us” (P13, P5, and P7)*

Furthermore, another participant highlighted how their exploratory walks led them to discover a shorter route to school. He shared his experience by stating:

*“My friends and I have discovered some short way that we usually pass when we are coming home from school” (P5, Com A)*

On the other hand, participants like P4 and P3 mentioned that they prefer passing the main road to school because they can receive assistance from vehicle drivers when they feel tired. One of them expressed this sentiment as follows:

*“I pass the main road; some drivers can help me” (P4, M, Com A)*

Based on the responses given by participants it is clear that having shorter alternative route facilitates a shorter time for children’s walk to school. The

findings of Clark, Bent, and Gilliland (2016) are consistent with the idea that shortcuts can be quite useful in shortening the travel time between home and school. Thus, adding shortcuts to planning procedures may be a useful approach for promoting active school transportation (AST). The majority of children want to get to school most quickly and comfortably as possible. The inclusion of shortcut choices in transportation planning can greatly reduce the overall travel distance necessary to go to school, as emphasized by Clark et al. (2016). The results provide planners and educators with helpful recommendations for developing strategies that encourage children to travel shorter distances and engage in more active modes of transportation.

In terms of learners' relational agreements for their journey to school, some participants shared that they coordinate with their peers on the timing and meeting location so they can walk together. Interestingly, this arrangement is more common among the girls than the boys. One girl explained during the interview that her house is quite far from her friends, so she starts her journey very early to meet them on the roadside, and then they walk to school together. In her own words, she stated:

*“I leave home sometimes around 6:30 am and come and stand at the roadside and wait for my friends so that we can walk together” (P9, F, Com A)*

Likewise, a boy from the same community shared a similar story about how he and his friends arrange to walk together to school. They have a specific time that they all agree upon to commence their journey. He expressed it as follows:

*“After leaving my house for school, is like my friends and I know the time to leave together so as soon I get to the road then I see them or they also see me” (P2, M, Com A).*

As the participants stated above, learners take decisions that benefit them through collective agreement and compliance. The identified agency from participants supports the findings of a study by Kullman and Palludan (2011) who found that children create their network of routines, practices, and norms for living outside, including specific protocols for gathering after school and being safe and secure while moving around and occupying steadily bigger parts of the neighborhood. This study highlights children's agency in outdoor activities, highlighting their active role in shaping experiences and creating protocols. Incorporating children's agencies in urban planning and policy-making can create child-friendly environments, supporting independent engagement and well-being. The next theme identified was time management.

### **Time management**

A crucial issue that emerged from the interviews was the participants' emphasis on time management. When asked about how they handle time during their journey, they unanimously expressed making conscious choices to prioritize important tasks and ensure timely completion. Some mentioned being mindful of time, while others emphasized setting their walking pace and adhering to commute routines. One particularly interesting perspective on time management came from a young girl who lives alone with her mother. She shared an exciting approach to waking up early and preparing for school on time. Her method involves setting an alarm on her mother's phone. She explained it as follows:

*“I usually set an alarm on my mother’s phone so that I can wake up early and prepare for school” (P8, F, Com B).*

Indeed, participants shared various strategies for effective time management during their journey to school. One boy emphasized the importance of going to bed early to avoid being late for school. He conveyed his approach as follows:

*“I sleep early at night so that I can wake up early the next morning” (P12, M, Com A).*

In response to the question about their departure time for school, one respondent mentioned:

*“I leave home around 7:00 am so by 7:45 am I will be in school” (P1, M, Com A).*

These accounts demonstrate the participants' deliberate attempts to efficiently manage their time, whether it is by making sure they get enough sleep or by keeping to a set plan for their school journey. The findings of this study corroborate with the findings of the research conducted by Kulman and Palludan (2011), which demonstrated that children's travel to school follows a rhythmic and predictable pattern. This implies that children adhere to specific schedules and routines when commuting to and from school. This rhythmic pattern reflects the adherence to specific schedules and routines, contributing to efficient and predictable school commuting. The findings from this study contribute to the body of knowledge on how children respect and apply time to their school travel.

In relation to children setting the pace on their journey to school, learners confirmed that they have autonomy in deciding how fast or slow they walk. One

participant expressed their intention to reach school early, which motivates them to walk at a faster pace. In his words:

*“Since we want to get to school early, we walk so that fast” (P2, M, Com A).*

In contrast, another participant highlighted their approach when walking home from school. With more time available, they prefer to walk slowly, allowing them to chat and play along the way. The participant explained:

*“When we are going home, that one we have more time so walk slowly so that we chat and play on the way” (P15, F, Com B).*

Furthermore, a participant highlighted how they maintain a close distance when walking to enhance safety and enjoy an interactive commute. They emphasized that all participants walk at a similar pace, ensuring that no one is left behind.

The participant shared:

*“No one walks faster than the other” ”(P17, M, Com C).*

The above excerpts clearly indicate that children take active decisions regarding their journey to school. They exercise agency in various aspects, including choosing their routes, deciding whether to take shortcuts or main roads, coordinating with peers to walk together, managing their time to avoid being late, and setting their walking pace based on their preferences and the time available. The present findings are in line with Ross's (2007) study, which found that children set their schedules and decide how quickly they go to school. Participants demonstrating how they decide which pace to go by when traveling to school confirm that they possess some agentive skills. This shows that when it comes to their everyday travel, children show a feeling of freedom and autonomy.

In addition to the learners' time management strategies, learners emphasized the importance of setting and adhering to commute routines when traveling to school as a group. One participant mentioned that if someone arrives after the agreed-upon time, they would have to walk alone or find another person to accompany them. This was expressed as follows:

*“If you come after the stated time then you have to come alone or with a different person” (P13, F, Com A)*

Supporting this idea, another participant shared that if they fail to arrive early, they understand that they would have to walk to school alone. He conveyed this sentiment as follows:

*“If I don't get there early then it means I have to walk alone” (P2, M, Com A)*

Furthermore, a participant shared their routine for meeting their friends to begin the group commute. They mentioned that they usually gather at 7:00 am, and from there, they commence their journey together. The participant stated:

*“I usually meet my friends at 7: 00 am then we start the journey” (P8, F, Com B).*

These accounts demonstrate how learners collaboratively organize their school commutes and maintain punctuality to ensure a smooth and enjoyable journey as a group. The next theme that emerged was learners' engagement of safety strategies.

### **Engagement of safety strategies**

A prevailing perspective among the interviewees was their adeptness at employing safety strategies during their journey to school. Learners demonstrated a keen awareness of ensuring safe travel by adopting

precautionary measures. They expressed their ability to identify and mitigate potential risks along the way, particularly by avoiding hazardous zones.

For instance, one participant who takes a high-traffic route to school mentioned that he steers clear of traffic dangers by opting for an alternative route predominantly used by pedestrians. He conveyed this reasoning as follows:

*“The cars can cause accident anytime so I don’t pass the main road in the morning when cars are many passing” (P4)*

Similarly, another participant who passes through areas known for criminal activities shared their approach to ensure safety:

*“Anytime I get to that area I run to avoid any attack on my way” (P6.)*

One participant shared a harrowing experience of managing to escape from strangers on their way home after school. The incident involved criminals on a motorbike chasing them and their friends. To evade the threat, they decided not to take the direct route. Instead, they quickly navigated through the surrounding bushes to find their way home safely while paying close attention to the path when traversing through dense bush to avoid any possible danger. Despite the frightening situation, the participant and their friends stuck together as a group, running in a straight line to ensure they could keep an eye on each other for mutual support and security. The participant described the event as follows:

*There was one time that some criminals were on a motorbike chasing me and my friends and we run away. Because there were bushes around so we did not go straight, we passed through the bushes and find our way home. At that time we were a group so we run together in a straight line so that we will be checking on each other (P11, M, Com A).*

These accounts showcase the learners' proactive efforts to safeguard themselves on their journey to school by making informed choices and avoiding potential dangers.

These findings agree with Schloepe et al. (2014), who argue that when children are allowed to roam independently, they develop traffic and safety skills and increase their knowledge about their surroundings. Their findings seems to support the idea that promoting children independent movement have greater benefits on them. On the otherhand the findings from further Mayor and Asor (2002) in urban areas in the USA, indicate that children have to put up strategies such as running and hiding to avoid gangsters when passing high crime zones. Similarly, children learned simple strategies by changing their routes and steps to school (Race et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). This indicates that there are significant barriers and challenges to children independent movement in certain situations.

Finally, Shafik et al. (2021) argued that children struggle to find opportunities to be safe. This disagrees with the findings of the present study, which found that children demonstrate a surprising level of capabilities when it comes to ensuring their own safety.

Some learners also demonstrated the use of confident and concise communication methods to prevent or mitigate potential threats. This is exemplified by one participant who walks to school with a friend or sometimes alone. She shared that whenever she passes the bush road and senses a potential danger, she proactively shouts for help from nearby people, especially those who farm along the road. In her account, she described how she successfully

managed to escape a threat while on her way home from school one afternoon.

She narrated the incident as follows:

*“Some criminals chased me one day when I was going home, so I started shouting and one farmer heard me and quickly came out from the bush with a cutlass to rescue me” (P15, F, Com C)*

In a similar vein, another participant shared their belief that speaking loudly acts as a deterrent to potential criminals. This participant asserted that by talking in a louder voice, they signal the presence of many people approaching, making it less likely for bad individuals to cause harm to them. Their perspective was conveyed as follows:

*“We always talk in a louder voice so that when bad people are coming they will know that many people are also coming so they can’t cause any harm to us” (P10 & P15)*

Furthermore, another participant from a different community expressed that they also adopt a similar strategy to ensure their safety on the way. When they reach a bush area, they intentionally engage in loud conversation as they pass through. They believe that this vocal presence discourages potential wrongdoers from lingering on the road. The participant explained:

*“When we get to the bush area we talk loudly then pass there because there can be bad people there so when they hear our voice they will leave the road” (P17, M, Com C).*

These examples show how learners use assertive communication strategies to foster a sense of security throughout their school commute, deterring possible threats and ensuring a safer trip. The next theme that came up was hygiene management.

## Hygiene management

Concerns regarding hygiene were widespread among the learners, and they acknowledged the importance of maintaining good hygiene to lead a healthy lifestyle. Given the challenging nature of their routes, participants shared various strategies they employ to ensure cleanliness before reaching the classroom. One participant explained that since they pass through bushes during their journey, they take specific measures to keep their shoes clean. They shared that upon reaching the main road, they remove their shoes and place them inside their bags. Then, they put on their shoes to ensure they enter the classroom with clean footwear. The participant expressed this practice as follows:

*“We pass through the bushes so, we put our shoes in our bags when we get to the main road then we wear” ”(P17, M, Com C).*

Similarly, another participant mentioned an essential hygiene practice they follow on their way to school. They emphasized lifting their dress to prevent weeds and dirt from getting into it while walking. This ensures that they arrive at school with their clothes clean and free from debris. The participant's approach was conveyed as follows:

*‘You have to lift your dress so that the weeds will not get into it’ (P18, F, Com B).*

Also, another participant supported the practice mentioned by Participant 18. They added that to maintain good hygiene, they remove their shoes and wear a rubber bag on their feet until they reach the next village where they can find water to wash their feet. Only then do they put on their shoes again. This approach helps them keep their feet clean and free from dirt during their journey. The participant explained this strategy as follows:

*“you have to remove your shoes and wear a rubber bag until we reach the next village and find water to wash our feet before we can wear our shoes”* (P10).

These indicate that learners have the capacity to take decisions that ensures their personal hygiene. These findings corroborate with Mahlaba (2014) whose research found that rural children who walk through filthy routes to school stop at the nearby streams to clean their clothes and shoes to stay hygienic when they get to school.

Similar to the aforementioned strategies, some learners also indicated that they devise several ways to manage weather changes when coming to school. When asked about how they deal with rainfall during their commute to school, one person responded:

*“I try to hide under some tree”* (P17, M, Com C)

Also, another person also indicated:

*“I hide under plantain leaves* (P10)

This finding corroborates with that of Romero (2015) who also found that children hide beneath the tree canopy that served as an umbrella during bad weather. The findings from the present study add to the existing literature on how children manage weather change.

### **Advocating for change**

Concerns were raised by most participants about the necessity for changes in their neighborhood and school transport arrangements. Many expressed dissatisfactions with their daily walk to school and advocated for the implementation of certain strategies, such as the walking bus system, where children walking to school would be under the supervision of elderly

individuals. In the interview, seven individuals specifically expressed their desire for a supervised commute. One participant voiced their sentiment as follows:

*“I will be happy when we walk in a group then maybe an elderly person joins us or supervises us in the morning and after school” (P4).*

Similarly, another participant emphasized the value of walking with an older person, recognizing that it would contribute to their safety during the journey. She stated:

*“Walking with an old person will keep us safe” (P15)*

The excerpts above illustrate that not all learners are at ease with their independent school travel. They now realize that having a commuting companion will ensure their safety on the road.

Furthermore, several participants expressed a strong demand for improved infrastructure to enhance their safety during their school commute. One participant specifically suggested the need for a traffic light, which could help regulate vehicular movement and facilitate safer crossings. They stated:

*“I think they should bring a traffic light” (P11)*

Similarly, another participant emphasized the importance of having a designated path exclusively for pedestrians. This would separate pedestrians from vehicles, reducing the risk of accidents and ensuring a safer journey for the learners. The participant recommended:

*“They should provide a path for only pedestrians so that we will not be involved in any car accident” (P7)*

The participant's firsthand experience speaks to the very real dangers that children face when navigating busy roads on their way to school. Providing

dedicated pedestrian paths seems like a common-sense solution that could go a long way towards protecting this vulnerable population. Banerjee and Bahl (2017) research lends further credence to this perspective, highlighting the documented benefits of safety infrastructure in reducing accident rates among school-aged pedestrians. Moreover, the findings resonate with the "engineering" category outlined in the safe routes to school framework described by Dumbaugh and Frank (2009). This suggests that the study's conclusions are grounded in established best practices for promoting active and secure school transportation. As the study continues to explore this issue, the study will make sure to situate the analysis firmly within this relevant body of scholarly work.

Overall, it is believe the data gathered from the participant interviews, combined with the supporting literature, make a compelling case for the importance of prioritizing pedestrian safety in the design of school commuting infrastructure. This is a crucial issue that deserves serious attention from policymakers and urban planners. The present study is committed to exploring it further and amplifying the voices of those, like the participant, who have firsthand experience of the challenges involved.

### **Learners account on why they persist in completing school amid the journey to school experiences.**

In providing answers to the research question, four (4) distinct but related themes emerged from the interview, they were; 1. Academic achievement and success, 2. Parental guidance and support, 3. Professional aspirations and future goals, and 4. Education as means to change life situations. Their comments

revealed a range of feelings on these factors. These are hereafter elaborated upon.

### **Academic achievement and success**

The desire for academic achievement and success was a prominent theme throughout the interviews. The majority of the participants expressed a deep aspiration to attain their academic goals, despite the challenges they face during their journey to school. Education held immense value for them, as they saw it as the key to unlocking a promising future and achieving their dreams. One participant succinctly captured this perspective:

*“I see education as the only way for becoming what you want to be in the future” (P3)*

Moreover, another participant emphasized the critical role of education in securing better job opportunities with higher salaries. They asserted that in this world, education is the pathway to obtaining a well-paying job. Without education, one's chances of landing a better job are limited. They also mentioned the consequences faced by those who dropped out of school in their community, noting that some ended up as teenage parents or involved in criminal activities.

The participant expressed this viewpoint as follows:

*“In this world education is the only way to get a better job with a good salary so if you don't go to school you will not get a better job to do. Those who dropped out in my community have been teenage parents and criminals” (P6)*

Furthermore, another participant highlighted the immense importance of education in the world today. They expressed that education is everything in the current global context. Attending school is seen as the gateway to achieving

one's aspirations and ambitions. With the rapidly changing world, where technology plays a central role, education becomes crucial in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate and succeed in this evolving landscape. The participant eloquently put it as follows:

*“I see education as everything in the world right now. If you don't go to school cannot do things you want to do. Now that the world is changing, everything is technology so if you don't school you will not get that knowledge to do things” (P9)*

These statements reflect the learners' deep understanding of the value of education and their determination to overcome obstacles in pursuit of academic excellence and a brighter future. They view education as the key to transforming their lives and breaking the cycle of challenges faced in their communities. This supports the idea of Singh (2011), who opines that learners are encouraged to persevere and carry on their academic goals when they accept both the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of education. These findings partially corroborate those of Dost and Froerer (2021) and Ngutuku (2022). In Ngutuku (2022), participants indicated that education is a means to their future survival. Thus, education will help them get food to eat. In line with Ngutuku, Dost, and Froerer described education as a way of becoming someone different in the future.

Another way learners demonstrated their determination to achieve academic goals was through their strong desire for success. Several participants expressed a genuine desire to complete their education, driven by the belief that it would open doors to success in their academic journey. One participant highlighted the positive impact of effective teaching on their academic

performance, expressing confidence in their ability to excel due to the quality of instruction they receive. He stated:

*“They teach well so I can pass well” (P16, M, Com C)*

Moreover, this same participant emphasized the importance of excelling academically as it would provide them with better opportunities for further education. They expressed their desire to perform well, which would enable them to access a higher level of education, stating:

*“I want to pass well so that I can get better SHS”*

Similarly, another participant shared their ambition to not only complete their education but also excel in order to secure admission into a tertiary institution. Their aspirations revolved around achieving academic excellence, which they believed would pave the way for pursuing higher education. He said:

*“I want to complete and pass well so that I can go to tertiary school” (P11).*

These statements highlight the students' steadfast dedication to their academic endeavors and acknowledgement of the transformational potential of achievement in influencing their future academic goals. Relating this to Deci and Ryan (1985) theory of self-determination, people are inherently motivated to achieve their needs rather than being controlled by external factors. Again, this is consistent with Hudacs (2020) who emphasizes that children's academic readiness has a significant influence on their persistence in completing their education. The next theme was institutional and social support.

### **Institutional and social support**

Learners described the support they get from the institution and their close relatives as the motivation factor for their persistence in school despite their

experiences of the journey to school. Many participants cited the encouragement and backing from their family and friends as the driving force that keeps them coming to school, with a determination not to disappoint them. One participant shared how their family provides essential learning materials, ensuring they have everything needed for their academic success, which helps them overcome the hurdles of the school commute. He stated:

*“They always support me with any learning material that can help my studies in school” (P8)*

Furthermore, the participant highlighted that their family's expectations of academic excellence fuel their determination to perform well in exams. They expressed:

*“They always expect me to get the first position in any exams in my class”*

Additionally, some learners indicated that their motivation is bolstered by the positive school culture and the excellent rapport between teachers and students. The discipline instilled by teachers creates a conducive learning environment, which contributes to their eagerness to attend school. One participant specifically praised the teachers for their effective teaching methods and their ability to instill discipline in the students, remarking:

*“the teachers teach well and instill discipline in their students” (P4)*

Based on the above expressions, it is believed that a learning environment that is conducive and provides support to students encourages learner persistence. Learners prefer to complete school where they can get assistance and relate well with their teachers. Also, schools that instill good conduct in their students have the propensity to retain them till completion. These results are consistent with those of earlier research (Mughal, Aldridge, & Monaghan,

2019; Ajiningtyasasih & Nugroho, 2020), which identified institutional and relatives support as a driving force behind children's school persistence. Gabre (2008) discovered that giving students financial support helped them stay in their studies and avoid dropping out. Furthermore, the findings support the study by Motsa and Morojele (2018) whose study among vulnerable children who see education as way to their better future life. They found that, these children aspirations relied on the support from teachers and parents. The next emerging theme was professional aspirations and future goals.

### **Professional aspirations and future goals**

Learners' aspiration to achieve their dream professions served as a powerful motivation for their persistence in school, despite the challenges they face during their journey. Many participants shared their strong desire to complete their education to pursue their dream careers. One participant, for instance, expressed their ambition to become an artist and recognized that attending school is the essential path to realizing this goal. As stated:

*“I want to be an artist and I see that going to school is the only way I can become that” (P11, M, Com A)*

Supporting this sentiment, another participant echoed a similar perspective, acknowledging that education is the key to achieving their future goals. Their understanding of the significance of education in reaching their aspirations spurred them to persist in their schooling. She shared:

*“I see that going to school is the only way I can achieve my future goals” (P15)*

One may infer from the aforementioned extracts that children's determination to finish a job depends on the likelihood that the effort will be successful. The

findings tie in strongly with the self-determination theory by Ryan and Deci (1987) which suggests that students who are intrinsically motivated develop self-regulatory styles to accomplish their goals.

Indeed, the desire for good jobs served as a strong driving force behind the participants' persistence in school, despite the challenges they encounter during their journey. They recognize that education equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure jobs that offer financial stability and support for both themselves and their families. One participant succinctly expressed this perspective, emphasizing the goal of obtaining a better job with a good salary:

*“get a better job with a good salary” (P5)*

Moreover, another participant in the interview provided additional support for the idea that completing school successfully opens the door to a successful life. They highlighted the benefits of completing their education, which include the ability to secure a good job that will enable them to take care of their family.

One participant stated:

*“I can get a good job to do in the future and take care of my family” (P16, F, Com C)*

The responses above indicate that learners' determination to the attainment of a particular goal drives them to persist in completing school. When they see that such a set goal can be achieved with their effort, they give their best no matter the surrounding circumstances. The last major theme was education as a means to change life situations.

### Education as a means to change life situations

The participants expressed genuine interest in education and showed deep appreciation for the opportunities it brings to transform their individual lives and the community as a whole. Many of them hailed from small communities where school dropouts and teenage pregnancies are prevalent, and they articulated their determination to pursue their education and successfully complete it. They see education as a means to avoid the pitfalls that some members of their community have experienced, such as becoming teenage parents or getting involved in criminal activities. One participant specifically highlighted their desire to steer clear of such paths and forge a different future for themselves:

*“Those who dropped out in my community have been teenage parents and criminals. So, I don’t want to end up like them” (P5)*

Similarly, another participant echoed the sentiment, expressing their goal of completing school to alleviate any burden on their parents. By acquiring an education and becoming self-reliant, they aim to be a source of support rather than a dependency:

*“When I am able to complete school I will not be a burden to parents”  
(P15)*

For some individuals, the idea of not completing school is viewed as a failure and wasteful of both time and financial resources. They firmly believe that successfully finishing their education will open doors to better employment opportunities in the future. Despite the difficulties they face while getting to school, they are resolute in their determination not to give up. One participant

conveyed this sentiment, emphasizing the significance of completing their education:

*“if I fail to complete this school then all my effort has been wasted”*

(P13)

This viewpoint highlights the learners' recognition of the value of education and the investment they have made in their academic journey. They understand that achieving their educational goals is pivotal in securing a brighter future and a pathway to attaining better opportunities. The challenges they encounter on their way to school do not deter them from persevering because they acknowledge that giving up would mean letting go of the potential for personal growth and success that education offers. Instead, they remain steadfast in their pursuit of completing school and maximizing the benefits it can bring to their lives. In contrast, the study by Abedin et al. (2016) found that female students require accessible and secure transportation options in order to continue their schooling. Without affordable and safe means of getting to and from school, female students are at risk of dropping out or missing classes, which can undermine their educational attainment and future opportunities. However, a study of girls' aspirations in education showed that girls demonstrate agentic capabilities in achieving their educational goals (Dejaeghere, 2018). The findings of this study contribute to the research by Dungey and Ansell (2020), which discovered that education ensures learners' economic, physical, and moral survival.

Generally, the learners in this study recognise the transformative power of education and are determined to overcome the challenges they face to reap the benefits it can provide for their future.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Overview

This chapter is dedicated to reporting on the summary of the study, concluding remarks and recommendations. Whereas, the first component summarises the study overall, conclusions and the recommendations for policy, practice and further studies were reported lastly.

#### Summary

Recent studies have established that children's experiences during their journey to school pose significant challenges to school attendance, participation, and completion. This recognition is well-established in the study's background, which served as the foundation for the research. To address the three research questions guiding the study, a qualitative phenomenological case study design was adopted. This design involved utilizing drawing activities and semi-structured interview guides to explore the accounts of 18 learners who walk to school in a rural Junior High School within the KEEA Municipality. The primary objectives were to explore how these students navigate their journey to school, how they exercise agency during this process, and why they persist in completing their education. The study's findings were derived through thematic analysis approach.

#### Key findings

Based on the obtained and analysed data from the participants, the researcher described and interpreted how learners described their experiences of the journey to school, how they exercise agency in navigating the journey, and why they persist in completing school amid the journey experiences.

The research question one revealed that learners' experiences during their journey to school are influenced by the time spent, safety concerns, physical effects of walking, environmental conditions, and the availability of safe facilities like pedestrian crossings and public transportation. Socialization and interaction with the natural environment also contribute positively to their experiences. Overall, these factors significantly impact the quality of the learners' commute.

Research question two reveals that learners demonstrate agency in their home-to-school journey by planning routes, using effective time management, implementing safety strategies, maintaining good hygiene, and advocating for changes in their neighborhoods. They take control of their schedule, make informed decisions, and prioritize safety, demonstrating their awareness of potential dangers. Additionally, they advocate for improvements in their neighborhoods, such as pedestrian crossings and improved street lighting, to enhance the safety and convenience of their commute.

The study found that learners' persistence in school is influenced by their strong desire for academic success, the role of institutional and social support systems, their aspirations, and their perception of education as a transformative tool. These factors contribute to their determination to persist and succeed in their studies, as well as their belief that education can lead to fulfilling careers and improved life circumstances.

### **Conclusions**

The present study concludes that learners' journeys to school are characterized by complex experiences, requiring them to showcase their capacities in navigating the journey to school to achieve their education goals.

These goals are influenced by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In connection with findings for each research questions, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Learners' journey to school is marked with a multiplicity of experiences with the negative outweighing the positives significantly.
2. Learners possess decision-making abilities, take responsibility, prioritize their well-being, and contribute to improving their education.
3. The study highlights that learners' persistence in completing school are rooted in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation derived from their educational experiences.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are put forth for policy, practice, and further research: The first component presents the recommendations for policy, followed by recommendations for practice and ends with suggestions for further studies.

#### **Recommendations for policy**

1. In connection with the conclusion that the journey to school for learners is marked by intricate experiences wherein negative encounters outweigh the positive ones significantly, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and the Municipal Assembly ensure that learners can access their schools with ease without any difficulties and that roads leading to schools are safe and maintained regularly such as designating safe routes and pathways.
2. Regarding the conclusion drawn that children have the capacity to make decisions, take responsibility, prioritize well-being, and contribute to the

betterment of their education, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and the Municipal Assembly adopt the safe route to school policy that will create a secure environment for learners to walk to school.

3. Based on the conclusion that learner's persistence in completing school are rooted in both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation they get from education, it is recommended that implementing alternative transport systems could enhance students' access to education. Additionally, learners' punctuality, regularity and achievement should be recognized and rewarded.

#### **Recommendations for practice**

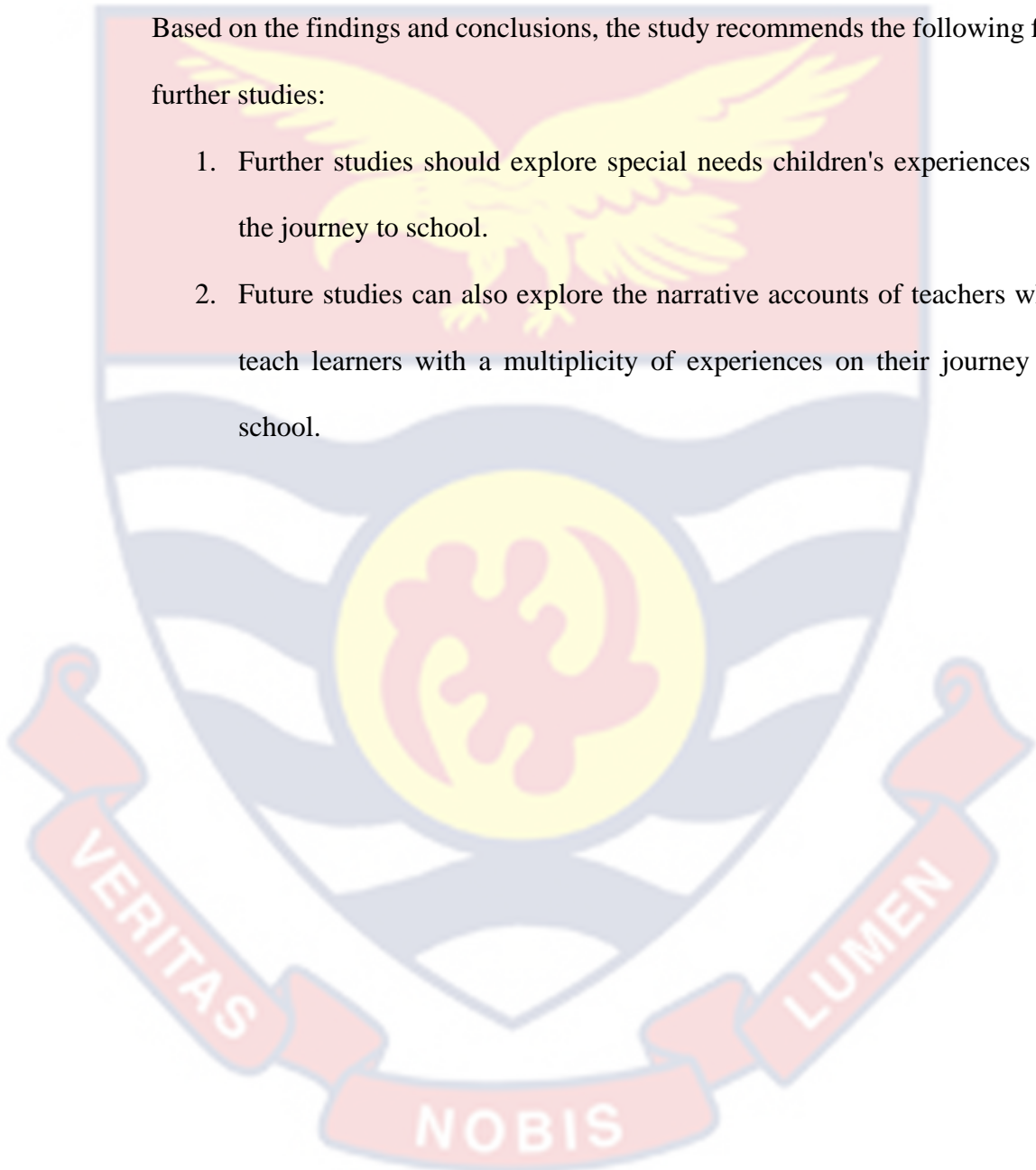
1. Based on the conclusion that children's journeys to school are characterized by a multiplicity of experiences where some learners use inconvenient roads, it is recommended that stakeholders such as the Municipal Assembly, Community members, and Parents help improve road and path conditions through regular maintenance and repair to ensure safe and comfortable journeys for the learners.
2. Based on the conclusion that learners have the capacity to make decisions, take responsibility, prioritize well-being, and contribute to the betterment of their education, it is recommended that learners be engaged in the decision-making process regarding the travel route, timing, and destination by their parents, community members and school authorities'.
3. In connection with the conclusion that learner's persistence in completing school is rooted in both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

they get from education, it is recommended that stakeholders strengthen student support services such as financial and social support that can reduce the factors that contribute to school dropout rates.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends the following for further studies:

1. Further studies should explore special needs children's experiences of the journey to school.
2. Future studies can also explore the narrative accounts of teachers who teach learners with a multiplicity of experiences on their journey to school.



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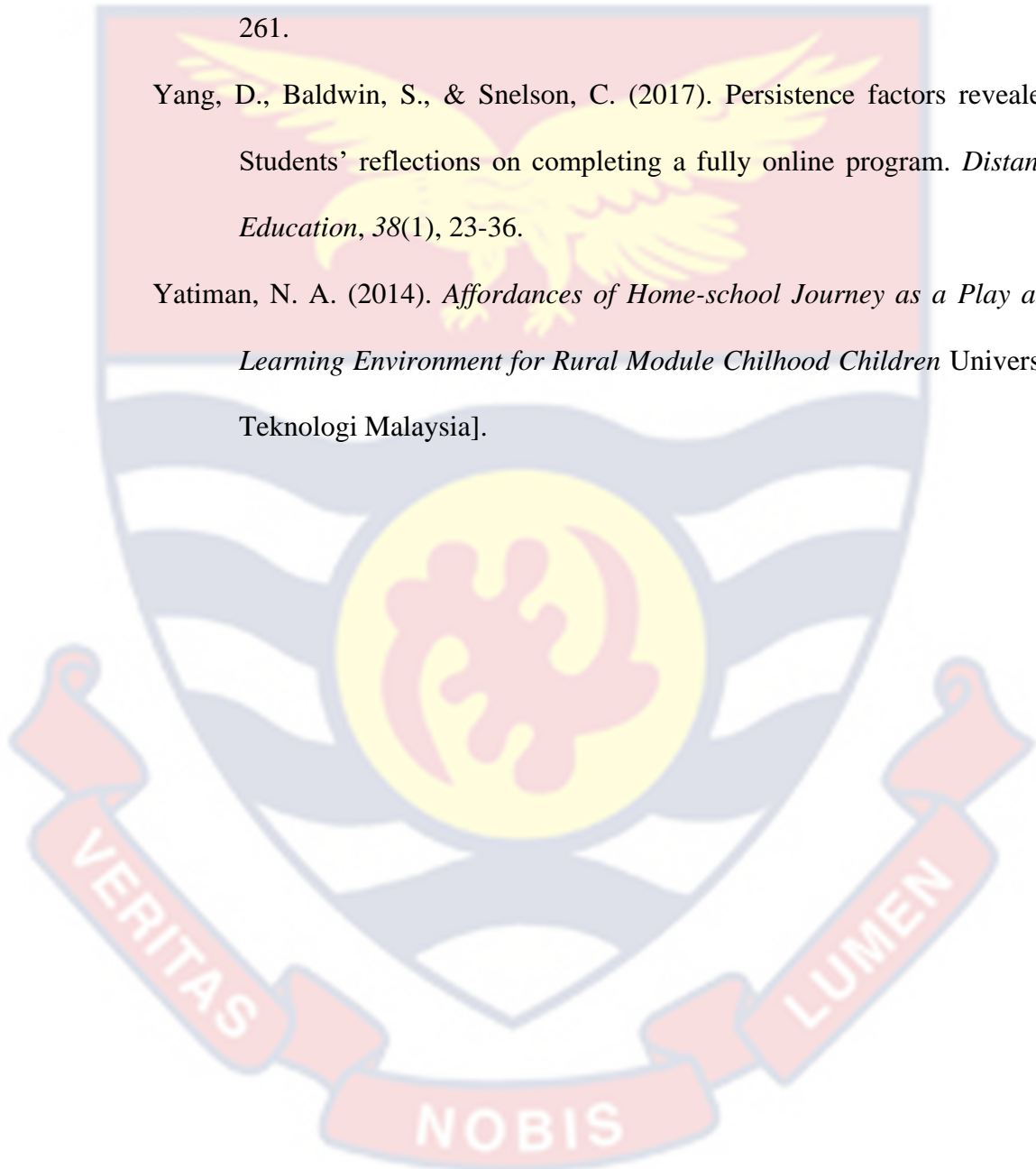
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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD SECRETARIAT

TEL: 0558093143 / 0508878309

E-MAIL: irb@ucc.edu.gh

OUR REF: IRB/C3/Vol.1/0119

YOUR REF:

OMB NO: 0990-0279

IORG #: IORG0011497

19<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2023

Mr Augustine Ayisi Mensah  
 Institute of Educational Planning and Administration  
 University of Cape Coast

Dear Mr Mensah,

**ETHICAL CLEARANCE – ID (UCCIRB/CES/2022/174)**

The University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board (UCCIRB) has granted Provisional Approval for the implementation of your research on **Journey to School: Experiences of Learners in Public Junior High Schools in Komenda- Eguafo- Abriem Municipality**. This approval is valid from 19<sup>th</sup> April 2023 to 18<sup>th</sup> April 2024. You may apply for a renewal subject to the submission of all the required documents that will be prescribed by the UCCIRB.

Please note that any modification to the project must be submitted to the UCCIRB for review and approval before its implementation. You are required to submit a periodic review of the protocol to the Board and a final full review to the UCCIRB on completion of the research. The UCCIRB may observe or cause to be observed procedures and records of the research during and after implementation.

You are also required to report all serious adverse events related to this study to the UCCIRB within seven days verbally and fourteen days in writing.

Always quote the protocol identification number in all future correspondence with us in relation to this protocol.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kofi F. Amuquandoh'.

Kofi F. Amuquandoh  
 Ag. Administrator

ADMINISTRATOR  
 INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
 UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

## Appendix B: Introductory Letter



Institute for Educational Planning  
and Administration at University of  
Cape Coast, Ghana.



University of Cape Coast  
Ghana.



**unesco**

Centre  
Under the auspices  
of UNESCO

Our Ref.: IEPA-UNESCO /I.2/VOL.2/0015

16<sup>th</sup> February, 2023.

Ghana Education Office  
Komenda -Edina Eguafu Abirem District  
Komenda.

Dear Sir/Madam,

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION — AUGUSTINE AYISI MENSAH (EO/EPP/20/0004)**

The bearer of this letter **Mr. Augustine Ayisi Mensah (EO/AHP/19/0007)** is a M.Phil. Student studying at the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) at the University of Cape Coast.

He requires some information from you/your outfit for the purpose of writing his thesis titled: **“Journey to school experiences of learners in public basic schools in Komenda – Edina-Eguafu Abriem Municipality.”** as a requirement for his M.Phil. Programme.

Kindly give the necessary assistance that Mr. Augustine Ayisi Mensah requires to enable him gather the information he needs.

While anticipating your co-operation, we thank you for any help that you may be able to give him.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Francis Ansah  
**HEAD, ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES**  
For: DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL (ACADEMIC PROGS. & PROFESSIONAL DEV'T

CC: Director-General, IEPA  
Augustine Ayisi Mensah



Address.

CC 145-9167, Cape Coast  
Ghana, 00233



Phone.

+233 3320-91478  
+233 03321-30571



Email & Web.

[iepa@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:iepa@ucc.edu.gh)  
[www.iepa.ucc.edu.gh](http://www.iepa.ucc.edu.gh)



## Appendix C: Permission Letter from Ghana Education Service

## GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

In case of reply the  
Number and date of this  
letter should be quoted

E-mail-keea\_edu@yahoo.com

Our Ref.: GES/CR/KEEA/UCC/VOL.III/39

Your Ref: .....



Municipal Education Office  
Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem Mun.  
P. O. Box 13  
Elmina

24<sup>th</sup> February, 2023

DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL  
(ACADEMIC PROGS. & PROFESSIONAL DEV'T)  
IEPA – UNESCO CENTRE  
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
CAPE COAST

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION:**  
**MR. AUGUSTINE AYISI MENSAH (EO/EPP/20/0004)**

Your office letter Reference No. IEPA – UNESCO/1.2/VOL.2/0015 and dated 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2023 on the above subject-matter is received and acknowledged.

Management after careful consideration of the chosen academic topic "*Journey to School Experiences of Learners in Public Basic Schools in Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem Municipality*" which Mr. Augustine Ayisi Mensah wishes to write on as a project, **permission is granted** to him to undertake the said exercise.

However, Management wishes to advise the student on the following:

- That his interaction(s) with the teachers and students during the exercise period should in no way disrupt any academic activities of the school.

Further to this, Management requires that a **brief summary written feedback** on the research is made available to this office to help address identified lapses.

We wish the researcher a successful academic exercise.

.....  
JUSTINE I. APAWU (MRS.)  
MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR OF EDUC.  
KEEA – ELMINA

cc:- Mr. Augustin Ayisi Mensah  
IEPA, UCC  
Cape Coast

- The Headmistress  
Ankaful Mental JHS  
Ankaful

## Appendix D: Interview Guide for Learners

### LEARNERS EXPERIENCES OF THE JOURNEY TO SCHOOL IN KOMENDA-EDINA-EGUAFO-ABREM MUNICIPALITY

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LEARNERS IN PUBLIC BASIC SCHOOL

This interview guide is designed to explore learners' experiences of their journey to school in Public Junior High schools in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem Municipality.

Your responses will contribute greatly towards the achievement of this objective and shall be used only for this study.

Your utmost privacy and confidentiality of information provided as a respondent is highly assured and respected

#### SECTION A: PART ONE

##### Demographic data

1. What is the gender of the learner?
2. What is the age of the learner?
3. How long have you attended this school?
4. What grade (form) are you in?

#### SECTION B: PART ONE

##### Learners experience of the journey to school at Ankaful M/A JHS

##### Drawing activity

1. Draw a diagram that shows your journey to school.

#### PART TWO: Description of diagram/places

1. Please can you explain your school journey drawing to me?
2. What do these diagrams mean to you?
3. How long does it take to reach your school?
4. What is the nature of your route to school?

**PART TWO: SECTION C**

1. Tell me about your journey to school
2. What do you see or feel on your journey to school?
3. So, what do you like or dislike about your school journey?
4. What place would like to avoid on your journey to school?
5. What place do you feel is ideal on the journey to school?
6. Is there anything good or bad about your daily walk to school? tell me about it
7. Is there anything that makes your walk to school unsafe for you? If so, can you tell me these things?
8. What would you need to change to make walking to school safe as possible for you?

**SECTION D****Children's Agency on their Journey to School at Ankaful M/A JHS**

1. When do you begin your journey to school?
2. Who accompanies you to school?
3. Do you usually want to be accompanied to school? Why
4. What do you usually do on your way to school?
5. How important is it for you to arrive at school on time? What do you do to make sure you arrive on time?
6. Do you notice any changes in your surroundings during different seasons (rainy and dry) when walking to school? How does it affect your journey to school?
7. How do you manage these changes?
8. How do you feel when you meet strangers on your way to school?
9. a. Have you encountered any challenges on your way to school? If yes, how did you deal with it?  
9b. please tell me, how is it helpful?
10. What do you do to stay safe while traveling to school?
11. Is there anything you do that makes your walk to school easier for you? If yes, what are they?

**SECTION E****Learners' persistence in completing school amid their experiences on the journey to school at Ankaful M/A JHS.**

1. What made you decide to attend this school despite your school experiences?
  2. How do you feel about your decision to go to this school?
  3. Tell me how your walking to school experiences influence your decision to persist in completing school
  4. What do you think is most influential in your decision to go to school?
  5. How has your daily walk to school affected your decision to attend this school?
  6. Tell me, is there any day you thought of dropping out? If yes, why?
  7. Tell me what inspires you to continue this school.
  8. Can you tell me any form of support you get from either your parents or friends when going to school?
  9. What do you think will help you complete this school successfully?
- Is there anything else I did not ask you would like to add to this interview?
- Thank you for your participation in this interview. You helped me better understand your journey experiences as a student who walks to this school and I appreciate your contribution to this study.