

Enacting Relevant Basic Education to Bridge the Rural-Urban Inequality in Ghana; The Prospects and Approaches for Investigating Rural Educational Realities

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Abstract

This conceptual and literature reviews study tracks the nexus of rural geo-cultural context, community participation, relevant pedagogy, and educational outcomes. The study traverse and synthesis existing theories/ concepts and methods to rural educational research. To identify the current gaps in knowledge and the methodological prospects in studying rural educational context. This is to lay the basis for a future detailed qualitative study into the cultural and lived educational realities of rural communities in Ghana. To inform innovative strategies on how the state, local communities and schools can better collaborate to enact an excellent Basic Education to bridge the rural-urban educational and socio-economic inequalities in Ghana. This paper argues that the methodological approaches to rural educational research should be focused on the concepts of culture, place and students' lifeworlds. And the methods should be underpinned by qualitative strategies in tune with the Ghanaian oral traditional context. Ethnographic participant observation approaches which socialise researchers, researched schools and their host communities to co-create critical knowledge offer better prospects for rural education research the seek to reconstruct equitable, fair and quality education for all.

Keywords: Ghana, rural-urban inequality, basic education, community participation, relevant Pedagogy, educational outcomes.

Introduction

Ghana, a West African country is saddled with rural-urban socio-economic inequality due to poor outcomes in basic education, especially, in rural areas. About 60% of the population do not achieve success in basic education in terms of acquiring basic literacy, arithmetic and life skills evident in passing the national Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and transition to Senior High School (SHS). Two-thirds of this number comes from rural areas. About, 53% of the rural workforce has no basic education. The poor basic education outcomes in rural Ghana have created an intricate chain of problems of low productivity, high rural poverty, high rural-urban migration, widening rural-urban socio-economic inequality and, spillover effects of overcrowded cities and unemployment. This fallout has been blamed on the formal education system inherited from British colonial rule. The system does not properly link schooling to students' lifeworlds and community context. Research literature links the low educational outcomes among children of ethnic/rural background to the distance between home and school cultures (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Halsey, 2018; Lowe, et al, 2019). There is a focus on

community participation in education as it facilitates reciprocal school-community cultural immersion (Bishop, 2008; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Yolanda & Kreisel, 2018). This is crucial to leverage community knowledge to reconstruct school cultures (Moll et al. 1992) that meet individual, community and 21st-century learning needs. The literature on Ghanaian education highlights the prospects of community participation (Edzii, 2017; Essuman & Akyeanpong 2011). But, this is not being fully harnessed due to low rural community participation in education. Notwithstanding, rural communities are sites of rich cultural, environmental and local epistemologies and resourceful people (Anlimachie, 2016; Moll et al, 1992) thus potential catalysts for pursuing relevant learning outcomes in rural Basic Schools. Rural education in Ghana thus offers a virgin arena where research can make a lasting impact on equitable socio-economic development.

Background to Ghana Education Policy

Ghana's basic education system is made up of 2 years of Kindergarten, 6 years of Primary School and 3 years of Junior High School (JHS). About 8 million of the 30 million or 27% of the population are currently enrolled in Basic Schools (World Bank, 2018, p, 5). Basic education in Ghana is meant to equip students (age 4-13) with basic numeracy, literacy and life skills to facilitate the transition to Senior High School Education (SHS) and other private apprenticeship programs and not purposely for work certification. Ghana's education expenditure is currently about 7 % of GDP. Forty- three (43%) of this is expended on the basic education sub-sector (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2017).

Ghana's basic education policy framework is guided by her 1992 Republican Constitution which guaranteed all children with at least free basic education. In 1996, a comprehensive policy framework dubbed free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) was introduced to guide basic education delivery. The fCUBE aims at achieving universal access and improve access, equity and quality outcomes through a partnership with local communities, and national and international stakeholders (Anlimachie, 2015a, b). In 2003 Ghana's Education Strategic Plan (ESP), a comprehensive medium-term strategy covering 2003-2015 and 2010-2020 was introduced to advance the fCUBE goals. The ESP situates the fCUBE within the EFA goals to promote quality learning outcomes, equitable access and life-long learning opportunities for all (GoG, 2012; UNESCO, 2015). Ghana practices a unitary decentralize participatory system of governance. Hence, the policy-making process is expected to be underpinned by sufficient levels of consultations (Anlimachie, 2015b). The Government of Ghana (GoG) through the Ministry of Education (MoE) initiates the education policy. This may be followed by regional, national and, in some cases, district level consultations with stakeholders. Further inputs may be sought from the Parliamentary Special Committee on Education and further Cabinet inputs and approval (Anlimachie, 2015b). The MoE is responsible for the planning and delivery of education. This is done through its implementing agency- the Ghana Education Service (GES) through the GES national headquarters as well as its regional and district offices. This is to be supported by a partnership with the community, the home and the school. Hence, it adopts a decentralized implementation and management strategy by devolving the control of education decision-making to District Assemblies (local governments) and their District Education Offices (DEOs), the local communities, and the schools through School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) (Edzii, 2017).

The final review of Ghana's basic education within the overall targets of the EFA goals showed that the country made some strides in achieving the MDG (2) / EFA goals on universal access and gender parity at the Primary School level. However, the country performed poorly on goal (6) which seeks to achieve quality education and excellent measurable learning outcomes. Also, growing rural-urban inequality in educational outcomes was identified as a major pitfall (UNESCO, 2015). The rural-urban inequality in education as a highlight by several country reports are summarized as follows:

- The population which has never attended school in rural Ghana is twice of that of urban Ghana that is, 33.1% for rural as against 14.2% for urban (PHC, 2012).
- About 10% of Basic school-aged children remain out of school, with rural areas having the largest share (UNESCO, 2015).
- Percentage of trained teachers in Basic Schools: rural and deprived districts (60%) as against 90% for urban and none deprived districts (ESPR, 2015)
- Basic School Net Attendance Ratio: rural 48% as against urban 55% (GHDS, 2014).
- Basic School Gender Parity Index: rural and deprived districts (0.93) as against (1.3) for urban and none deprived districts (ESPR, 2015).
- Basic School completion rate: rural/deprived districts (64%) as against (84%) for urban and none deprived districts. This means that about 36% of rural Basic School pupils- twice the number of that of urban (16%) who enter school dropout.
- The 2014 national Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results indicate that rural Basic School pupils are two times less able to achieve basic competencies in numeracy, literacy and life skills upon completion compare with their urban counterparts (ESPR, 2015).

Inadequate funding, weak monitoring and evaluation, insufficient relevant curriculum, inadequately trained and poor distribution of teachers, and low levels of community involvement were highlighted as the major obstacles to Ghana's realization of the overall EFA goals, especially those relating to quality and equity outcomes (Edzii, 2017; UNESCO, 2015, p.6).

The poor basic education outcomes outside urban concentrations have created a chain of problems of low productivity, high poverty, high rural-urban migration, high unemployment rate, widening rural-urban inequality, and general underdevelopment. Rural Ghana accounts for about 80% of Ghana's poverty incidence. Rural poverty increases with low educational attainments among households (GLSS7, 2018). Therefore in the latest efforts to improve quality, relevance, and equitable outcomes in basic education, new educational reforms, including competency-based curriculum is scheduled to fully take off in August 2019. Also, free education has been extended to in all public Senior High Schools to ensure the universal transition from Basic School to High School education, and equip students with the requisite basic employable skills. Hence, exploring the relationships among community, school and policy actors at the grassroots level is very crucial to inform policy and practice to facilitate the implementation of the new educational reforms in Ghana.

The Purpose of the Study

This conceptual paper explores the relationship between rural context, community participation, culturally responsive curriculum, and educational outcomes. As well as, synthesizing the existing theories/concepts and methodological approaches to rural educational research. This is to identify the gap in knowledge and to provide multifaceted insights into the methodological approaches that hold prospects for rural or indigenous educational research. This study thus seeks to lay the basis for future detailed contextualised empirical qualitative studies into the cultural and socially constructed educational realities of rural remote communities in Ghana. To informed policy and practice on the enactment of relevant Basic Education to improve students' learning outcomes and reduce rural-urban educational and socio-economic inequalities in Ghana. The key research questions that this paper seeks to explore are:

1. What are the links between rural geo-cultural context, participation in education, relevant pedagogy, and students' learning outcomes?
2. How does the rural geo-cultural context interact with nationalized educational approaches?
3. What methodological orientations holds better prospects for studying educational realities of rural-remote/ indigenous communities?

Literature Review

Rural Geographical Context and Educational Outcomes

In studying family-school connection in a rural setting in the USA, Semke and Sheridan (2012) found context, both geographical and the cultural relating to where child's home or school is located, is a significant determinant of educational outcomes. The term 'tyranny of distance and time' has been used in literature to describe the longer travelling time and remoteness of rural and remote social service delivery (Clark & Stevens 2008). Extensive research in Australia has shown that rurality is associated with lower levels of parents' expectations for their children's educational attainment, lower participation, and lower physical, socio-emotional and learning outcomes (Baxter, Hayes & Gray, 2011). Also, studies in America and Australia have also found that remoteness and longer travelling distance associated with rurality cause social, psychological and professional isolations among teachers (Clarke & Stevens, 2008; Miller, 2008). These limit the professional development (Clarke & Stevens, 2008).

However, Ankrah-Dove's (1982) rural challenge model and Guenther, Bat and Osborne's (2014) 'red dirt' perspective debunk the deficit mentality of rurality. But see the rural setting as an opportunity where educators can make lasting impacts due to the virgin challenges and prospects. Kupe and Glover (2004), in observing two children in a rural setting in Papua New Guinea posit that the rural environment offers a natural 'laboratory' of dynamic processes of learning which can be leveraged to improve learning. The rich and diverse indigenous languages, the cultural capacity of rural people to store and transmit knowledge, the strong social bond and the intergenerational assets of households are very crucial cultural capital that can be elicited to improve rural education (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Osborne, 2015). Such localities are seen as a repository of fund of knowledge that can be tapped to develop relevant pedagogy (Moll, et al, 1992, p. 133). Leveraging on these fund of knowledge will require education that makes a culture and a place fundamental pillars of learning and connects schooling to community context (Halsey, 2018; Prosser, 2010; Wallace & Boylan, 1999). Ghana's rural education context requires a deeper understanding of the ways in which rurality relates to household participation in education, school practices and students' learning outcomes to inform relevant educational practices.

Social-cultural Context and Educational Outcomes

Social-cultural theories link children's cognitive, communicative development and learning styles to the cultures in which they are socialized (Kanu, 2006, p.120). Bronfenbrenner's (1994) ecological theory and Bourdieu habitus and capital conceptions argue that the child's social-cultural context significantly influences his/her learning through direct experiences within the family and wider community customs. Mpofu (2004) also argues that rural and tribal communities' keen sense of culture and place, driven by their desires for stronger social bonds, results in specific expectations of education and certain learning styles. Mpofu (2004) thus found that intelligence in the African socio-cultural context is socially defined and it is evident in one's capacity to develop and maintain social relationships including social responsibility, cooperativeness, and respectfulness. These differ from definitions of intelligence in post-colonial education systems which are more decontextualized and based on academic tasks that require students to demonstrate competencies in abstract communicative and arithmetic skills (Mpofu, 2004). Croker (2007, p. 240) also observes that in Tanzania children learn best through apprenticeship type of pedagogy, where children are guided by adult family members to take an active role in the learning process through direct participation in family work. This is in contrast with the current western style education in many African countries which focuses more on the instructional approaches delivered through rigidly centralized curricula (Croker, 2007). The contrast suggests that any education practices that fail to properly link the learner's home to the school are less likely to achieve relevant outcomes.

However, literature also points to some negative effects of cultures on education in rural settings. Cultural conservative nature of rural communities is often mentioned as a hindrance to community-school interaction (Clarke & Stevens, 2008). Also, the literature on Sub-Saharan Africa has revealed some culturally prescribed gender roles which often marginalize girls in education. These include child and forced marriages and practices that limit women role to housekeeping. For example, in some Africa cultures, children could be married before teenage (Tomasevski, 2005, p.4). In Ghana, rural girls are two times more likely to get into early marriage compared to urban girls (Male et al., 2016, p.3). Child marriage in Africa is linked to poverty, religion, illiteracy and historically developed negative practices such as female genital mutilation among some ethnic groups. Although legislation has criminalized some of these acts and coupled with public campaigns by governments and NGOs, some of these acts are still persist in some remote communities. Rural researchers assuming the role of critical ethnographers have a duty to bring to light some of these cultural practices which disadvantage the most voiceless in the society to chart the path for social justice (Madison, 2005). Overcoming the negative effect of culture on education would require that schools develop 'ethnographic imagination' (Hattam et al., 2009) of their host communities.

Rurality in Ghana and Educational Inequality

In the Ghanaian educational context, the terms 'rural' and 'urban' areas and, 'deprived' and 'non-deprived' districts are often used. In Ghana, communities with a population of less than five thousand (5000) people as rural. Based on this 49% of Ghana's population is rural and 170 out of the 254 districts/municipal/metropolitan administrative areas in Ghana are predominantly rural (GPHC, 2012). There is the largest concentration of rurality towards the north. In addition, The Ministry of Education (MoE) classifies districts administrative areas in Ghana into deprived and non-deprived using indicators such as students retention, the pass rate in the national test and the share of trained teachers in the public Basic Schools (ESPR, 2015). Administrative areas with a lower share (below average) of the indicators are classified as deprived. Based on this 75 out of the then 216 local administrative areas in Ghana were classified as deprived in 2015. Rural setting in Ghana is mostly characterized by main villages (which hosts Basic School) surrounded by other smaller settlements (cottages, hamlets and homesteads). They are connected to the main village by footpaths and sometimes feeder (red dirt) roads. Many children outside the main village walk several hours to school (Anlimachie, 2015; 2016). Agriculture is the main economic activity of rural Ghana employing 75% men and 58% women workforce (FAO, 2012).

Some studies including Anlimachie, (2019: 2016; 2015c) and Gaddah, Munro & Quartey, (2015), mostly quantitative, have linked the rural-urban gap in educational outcomes in Ghana to geographical distance/remoteness associated with rurality. Remoteness and longer travelling distance in rural communities in Ghana impact negatively on school enrolment, attendance and dropouts (Anlimachie, 2016; Gaddah, et. al. 2015). In studying rural-urban Basic Schools in Ghana, Anlimachie (2016) found that longer walking distance between pupils and schools is associated with lower attendance, high drop out and poor educational outcomes in rural BSs (Anlimachie, 2016). This is different from the cities where students have more school choices, and are nearer to schools and have access to means of transportation. Anlimachie, (2016) further links longer travelling distance in rural Ghana to poor quality supervision in rural Basic schools. Essuman & Acheampong (2011) and Edzii, (2017) also linked the educational inequality in Ghana to low community/parents participation in school, especially in rural Ghana. Another factor for the rural-urban gap in educational outcomes relates to access to quality teachers (Cobbold, 2006). In studying the attraction and retention of teachers in rural Ghana, Cobbold (2006) found that rural remoteness is the main factor for the high teacher turnover in rural basic schools in Ghana. This limits the numbers and the nurturing experience teachers in rural schools. The literature also links the poor educational outcomes in rural Ghana to socio-cultural

practices such as child marriage (including forced marriage) linked to culture, religion and poverty (Fentiman, Hall & Bundy; 1999, p. 346; Male, et al. p.3, 2016). In addition, a World Bank paper further identifies the challenges to improve educational outcomes in Ghana to include the problem to low quality adjusted learning years, poor accountability mechanisms, and poor infrastructure and instructional resources, and ineffective utilization of resources (World Bank, 2018). These challenges require further and deeper contextual understanding based on lived experiences from rural folks, including teachers and local government policy actors, to inform the delivery of quality basic education in Ghana.

Students' Background and Educational Outcomes

Research literature findings on students' learning suggest that learners' backgrounds, including family and community support structures, socio-economic status (SES), language and learner's attitudes and abilities, account for the largest source of variation in learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; OECD, 2005). In studying language in classroom contexts in Ghana and Tanzania, Afitska et al. (2013) observed that teachers in Tanzania demonstrated richer pedagogies when using African language as a medium of instruction. In the case of Ghana, they found that urban private schools tend to have high intakes of students from better SES (urban middle-class parents tend to use English at home with their children) and from the different linguistic background (50 out of every 60 students in cities in Ghana come from the different linguistic background). Hence such children achieve better comprehension with English as a medium of instruction than in local language. They observe that the dilemma for second language user countries in Africa is how to strike a balance between ensuring that students benefit from learning a global language like English and the use of mother-tongue to lay the foundation for better learning among beginners. Ghana's 2007 Education Reforms reintroduced mother-tongue as a medium of instruction for pupils in the Kindergarten up to Grade 3 (Owu-Ewie, 2006). However, this is not being strictly implemented for lack of native language teachers, undeveloped local languages and lack of teaching and learning resources. As only 9 out of the 45 main languages (with about 250 dialects) in Ghana are officially government-sponsored written languages in which some teachers are trained to specialise. Many students are learning in local dialects which are foreign to them, defeating the essence of the policy (Owu-Ewie, 2006). Understanding the implications of the local language as against the national official language-English on learning among rural Basic School pupils is essential to inform relevant learning.

Another important background resource is parental/household involvement in education. Substantive literature points out that household involvement in school impacts positively on culturally responsive school practices and children learning as households are the repository of local epistemologies and rich practices (Bishop, 2008). Parents' participation in school improves students' academic performance, and enforcement of discipline and home-to-school transition (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In Ghana, Amponsah et.al (2018) found a significant positive relationship between parental involvement in education, higher expectations and students' achievement. Furthermore, Chowa, Masa and Tucker (2013) also established that parents' home-based involvement in learning is greater and associate positively with academic performance than school-based parental involvement. However, the literature suggests low parents' involvement in schools, especially in rural Ghana (Anlimachie, 2016). Also, the available studies do not offer a deeper explanation from a rural perspective. Hence, further understanding of the relationship between household involvements in children learning is needed to inform how the home and the school could better collaborate in rural remote geo-context to improve children learning.

Community Participation and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Like households, communities are sites of fund of knowledge that can be harness to create optimal learning experiences in school (Moll, et. al 1992). School-community bond achieved through community participation in school and school immersion in community affairs is therefore crucial for harnessing localised knowledge to improve learning (Yolanda, & Kreisel, 2018). Notwithstanding, a growing research literature suggests a gap between home and the school cultures (Osborne, 2015). This cultural discontinuity occurs when curriculum content and pedagogy run counter to students' home experiences such that what is learnt at school is not reinforced at home Ogbu (1991). And the inability of the school to holistically measure students' success and tailor teaching to students' funds of knowledge, instead of national tests (Unsworth, 2013). According to Bourdieu (1998), Teese and Polesel (2003), the school further reinforces this cultural gap into social stratification and inequality by relegating minority cultures. Hence, students from marginalized backgrounds have less intrinsic value to engage in optimal educational experiences. They thus miss out from the extrinsic value of education in terms of credentials that give opportunities for further education, employment and social mobility (Hattam, et. al, 2009).

Community participation in education has been advanced as the best means to close the gap between the home and the school. Community participation includes community involvement in education policy formulation: regarding the educational goals, the implementation of curriculum, recruiting and training of teachers and involvement in school management (Ankra-Dove, 1982; Barley & Beesley, 2007). Yolanda and Kreisel, (2018) argue that active social participation in school generates community-school collaboration that charts innovative paths in schools. To respond to cultural diversity and uphold the rights of all social groupings, especially indigenous experiences and local epistemologies in the learning process. Research findings suggest that community participation in school has positive impacts on educational outcomes (Leveque, 1993). Barley and Beasley (2007) study on the success in rural remote schools in the USA, found a strong relationship between community participation, high teacher retention, and high students' expectations as factors for academic success. Leveque (1993) in a case study of American Indian students in a culturally responsive California school found a stronger link between educational opportunities and students' achievement, and community/parent involvement in the design and implementation of school programs. Tikly and Barrett (2013), in studying education development in the Global South, posit that to reconstruct quality, relevant and equitable education requires the active participation of communities in the policy process. Such that the enactment process could strike a balance between learners' needs, community's values and national aspirations. Community participation thus promotes culturally responsive pedagogy that synergizes home-school cultures to create optimal and equal learning experiences for all. Papp (2016) found regular incorporation of culture into the school and in the classroom context are crucial to ethnic student's school success. Similarly, Bishop (2008) revealed that family participation, self-determination, cultural aspiration, extended family values, community livelihood, power-sharing, shared vision are fundamental pillars that drive ethnic students' academic success. Also, in a participant-observation study in Native-American classroom context, Ladson-Billings (1995) found interconnectedness between the school and the community improve culturally relevant pedagogy for academic success. Culturally responsive pedagogy thus thrives on culturally responsive school systems, culturally responsive teachers, culturally responsive curriculum and fundamental to these is community participation (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Although, Ghana's education policy text indicates a stronger commitment to community participation as a means of establishing stronger bonds between communities, the schools and the District Assemblies (local government units) and the DEOs in the delivery quality and relevant education. In practice, it appears symbolic and rhetoric than reality. Edzii (2017)

attributes the low community participation in education to community stakeholders' lack of understanding of their roles in the process and the weak capacity development for local stakeholders. Essuman and Acheampong (2011) study of community participation in education in rural Ghana, also linked the problem to structural relations. The study found that teachers feel more accountable to superiors at the top rather than their host communities. Similarly, Mohammed (2016) study of decentralization and participation in Ghana found that local participation in the decentralization process in Ghana is dominated by males, the educated few, the rich and influential with access to power at the centre. Women, the poor and the people from rural peripheries tend to be excluded. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the low rural participation in the education and decision-making process. And the role of the researchers to amplify rural voices and rally them to take up their rightful roles in the education process is thus crucial to Ghana. Also, there is a paucity of literature in Ghana on how the low rural educational outcomes related to the gap between home and school cultures. And how the benefits that accrue from community participation and culturally responsive pedagogy can be adequately harnessed for rural education improvement. Therefore an investigation that can bring a deeper understanding of how community-based curriculum (community participation in the design, implementation and monitoring) can enhance relevant outcomes is long overdue.

Theory and Methods

The study uses conceptual, theoretical and literature reviews to traverse and synthesis exiting theories/ concepts, and also identify the current gaps in knowledge on rural or indigenous educational research. To provide multifaceted insights into the prospects for detailed empirical future studies. The defined group for this paper is basic school students, their households, communities, schools and teachers in the rural context. The topic is educational outcomes in rural Basic Schools in Ghana. The research questions that are guiding the study include: What are the links between rural geo-cultural context, participation in education, relevant pedagogy, and educational outcomes? How does the rural geo-cultural context interact with nationalized education approaches? Lastly, what are the relevant methodological approaches for eliciting a deeper understanding of rural educational realities? The paper is conceptualized within rural and indigenous research methodologies that focus on concepts of place, culture and students' lifeworlds (Lowe, et al. 2019; Ankrach-Dove, 1982). At the broader level, the study is informed by Bourdieu's social/cultural theory. This is conceptually supported by rural-based ethnographic research approaches including; Moll and colleagues' (1997) 'funds of knowledge', Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally responsive pedagogy, and Ankrach-Dove's (1980) rural lens, and social justices approaches to education. In putting together this paper, three (3) literature searches were conducted using the University of South Australia, Adelaide online library database and google scholar. The first literature search was conducted using keywords such as rural remote education, culturally responsive pedagogy, community participation, indigenous students' educational outcomes. About 20 research literature were generated. The second search used keywords like rural educational research, indigenous methodologies, qualitative research. Sixteen(16) literature studies were generated. The third search which was done on google scholar using keywords including Ghana educational policy, Basic education, community involvement, educational outcomes. Another 25 literature studies were generated. The duplication of some of the literature in the three searches reduced the number to about Forty (45) which were reviewed by this paper. The salient research findings on the gaps in current knowledge and conceptual approaches to rural education studies that emerged from the reviews were summarized, discussed and synthesis into methodological approaches to guide future detailed empirical studies.

Central to Bourdieu theory is the interconnectedness of the concepts of habitus, social/cultural capital, fields and practice/action (Bourdieu, 1986, 1998). Bourdieu's habitus seeks explanations of the regularities of social behavior within a given social structure. According

to Bourdieu habitus, external cultural capital interacts with the individuals' internal dispositions to shape individuals' actions (Power, 1999). The external habitus includes the family, class, ethnicity, school, peers and their accumulated capital including values and norms that shape individual dispositions and actions. The internal dispositions including aptitudes, skills, beliefs, conduct that are inculcated into the individuals through the day-to-day immersion into the external habitus. Suggesting an intricate interconnection between society, the individual, and social practice. Bourdieu argues that primary habitus, that is, what the individual nurtured and inculcated in early years has a more lasting influence on learners than secondary habitus -what individual may be learned in later life. (Bourdieu, 1986; 1998; Power, 1999). Bourdieu's habitus has been criticized as being too simplistic and latently deterministic. However, Bourdieu recognizes the voluntary role of individuals with different dispositions to create and recreate habitus (Mills, 2008, Power, 1999). According to Mills (2008), Bourdieu's 'habitus reflects his effort to escape the mechanistic tendencies of Saussure's structuralism without relapsing into subjectivism' (p.4).

Bourdieu argues further that knowledge are organized into structure or clusters such as education and economics called fields. Fields are thus the intellectual arena in which knowledge or goods and services are produced, accumulated and circulated (Swartz, 1997). And that field also influences actions and practices. He thus asserts that human behavior/action/practice or ones' epistemological and ontological orientations are shaped by the external habitus, individual internal dispositions, and field of practice. Bourdieu theory to social research thus adopts a pragmatic stance of drawing a fine balance between determinism and possibilism, and subjectivism and positivism epistemological and ontological assumptions about human nature, social reality and knowledge (Mills, 2008). Bourdieu's (1998) concept of 'capital' also argues that each habitus is endowed with economic, cultural, social and symbolic capitals which are inculcated into the individuals or leverage upon by the habitus (society or school) for the individual and social advancement. And that capital is not equally distributed among and across social groupings. Thereby creating social stratifications in term of power, wealth, class, gender and ethnicity. Bourdieu (1989) work on cultural reproduction argues that:

The educational system . . . maintains the preexisting order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital... by a series of selection operations, the system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences in aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain preexisting social differences (Bourdieu 1998, p.20)

Hattam, et al. (2009) extrapolating from Bourdieu theory rally social researcher to focus on lifeworld contexts of schools or students. Lifeworld context is the most critical starting point to enact equitable learning experiences (Hattam, et al., 2009) The author thus argues that addressing educational inequalities begins with searching for and implementing 'pedagogies that link school-based learning to students' worlds in their communities'(p.304). Funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992;1997), culturally responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), Placed-based education (Wallace and Boylan 2009) and rural lens (Ankrah-Dove 1982) approaches that focus on culture and place to develop ethnographic imagination of educational stakeholders at grassroots level are thus very crucial methodological approaches to rural educational research.

Funds of knowledge refer to 'historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for households wellbeing' (Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez 1992, p. 133) that can be harnessed to design relevant pedagogy. In addition, culturally responsive pedagogy seeks for practices that use students' cultural background to create an optimal educational experience for minority/ethnic students to succeed in a multicultural and dominant formal school setting (Ladson-Billings, 1995), 2008). Prosser (2010) and (Wallace and Boylan 2009) view place-based education as 'connecting lives and learning' by examining local practices

and resources and how that can enhance curriculum and classroom practices. To link teaching and learning to community culture, resources and economy to make learning relevant to local needs (Wallace and Boylan 2009). Ankras-Dove's (1982) rural challenge model and Guenther, Bat and Osborne's (2014) 'red dirt' perspective to education, on the other hand, challenge the status quo of rural educational disadvantage. The rural lens rally policymakers and educators to become attuned to the concept of place and culture in designing and implementing educational policy, curriculum and pedagogies to ensure that education is relevant to local needs (Halsey, 2018; Wallace & Boylan, 2009) The rural lens also have critical and emancipatory function of empowering the rural folks whose voices are vaguely captured in national education policy discourse to demand their right in and through education (Clarke & Stevens, 2008). According to Madison (2005, p.5), 'critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a lived domain. Thus social justice and equity-driven frameworks to education also argue for approaches and strategies that enhance equity within and through education to facilitate fairness in social mobility. Justice and right-based theorists including Carnoy (1999), Hattam et al. (2009), Tomasevski (2006; 2005) argue that educational reforms and interventions must reach out to the most vulnerable groups such as the rural folks and uplift them from exclusion and poverty through at least equitable access to quality education. Winthrop, Barton, & McGivney (2018) in their leapfrogging educational inequality theory argue for a collaborative learning community that focuses on learners' curiosity to create critical learning that imbues students with 21st-century skills to address the twin challenges of growing global skills inequality and skills uncertainty. These rural-based and indigenous methodologies thus immerse schools into the cultural realities of students' households and community (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to negotiate better community-school collaboration (Winthrop, Barton, & McGivney 2018). This help stakeholders to cultivate 'ethnographic imagination' (Hattam, et al. p.310) to pursue relevant pedagogy (Hattam et. al, 2009).

Discussion of the Gaps and Prospects in Rural Education Research

In recent times, the complex and dynamic environment of teachers, school systems, curriculum structure and content and classroom contexts and their effects on different students' background and how they influence and relate with each learner and different type of learning, continue to shape educational research (OECD, 2005). The first broad conclusions from the literature on student learning has been that the most significant sources of variation of student learning are linked to the students' background. This includes family SES, community culture, aspirations, and students' experiences, attitudes and abilities (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; OECD, 2005). These factors are contextual and difficult to influence by policies in the short run. With the growing evidence of the relationship between a child's family and community background and learning outcomes, coupled with increasing multiculturalism, family/community role in education has become more necessary than ever. The challenge is how research can inform context-based interventions and practices to strengthen these relationships between the home, the community, the school and the state to ensure that learners' backgrounds and the school practices and the policy goals efficiently coalesce to meet the educational needs of the individuals, the community and the state. In Ghana, the high rural poverty requires a better understanding of how rural livelihood affects household involvement in education and, how education can contribute to rural socio-economic development. In terms of language, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the implications of local languages as against the national official language-English on learning outcomes among rural Basic School pupils. Also, studies that can bring an understanding to the relationship between school curriculum and students' home fund of knowledge and its effect on students learning is crucial in the context of rural Ghana which still maintains most of its traditional cultural values. In addition, the lower SES and the twin contextual factors of remoteness and longer travelling distance coupled with the lack of transportation system in rural Ghana require detail understanding on how specific interventions can mitigate their effects on household involvement in education and students' school

attendance and learning. Also how rural basic educational outcomes relate to the connection between home and school practices require an understanding.

The second broad conclusion in educational research is that quality teachers and teaching, and school environment and practices, can positively impact on students' learning. However, the focus has been on teachers' characteristics that are tangible and can be easily measured (OECD, 2005). The gap is in the other characteristics which are hard to measure but may have important impacts on the learning of students. In the context of rural Ghana, how teachers relate to their host communities to court community support and tap into community's fund of knowledge, and the role of local communities' in teachers' pre-service and in-service training programs need more investigation to inform teachers training programs. In addition, the extent to which governments can preserve the status quo by monopolizing the school's curriculum through standardized curricula, syllabuses and textbooks. And the need to maximize relevance through greater devolution of curriculum decisions to communities.. This is still a lingering debate in educational policy research. In the Ghanaian context, there is the need for deeper empirical evidence on how greater devolution of curriculum choice and implementation to local communities can improve relevance and students' learning outcomes. Therefore, an investigation that can bring an understanding of how community-based curriculum (community participation in the design, implementation and monitoring) can enhance curriculum content and implementation is long overdue.

Also, educational policy literature on Ghana indicates a gap between policy and practice; and among policymakers, practitioners and community stakeholders. Also, there are further gaps between home and schools' practices; and between the intended (national goal), the implemented and the attained goal (Edzii, 2017). This requires a fine grain analysis of how geopolitical context interacts with the grassroots context in nationalized education approaches and decision-making process (Taylor, 1997). Also, there is the need for a deeper study on the reasons behind the low rural participation and the marginalization in the decision-making process at national and local government levels notwithstanding the expanded scope of democratic participation. Also, how the hierarchical relations within the basic education structure affect rural participation need to be understood (Essuman & Acheampong, 2011). Thus understanding these gaps will bring a better perspective on how the home, the community, the school and the state could better collaborate to enact relevant basic education system in Ghana. Hence, understanding the educational process as an endless interchange of ideas, knowledge, expectations, resources and responsibility that socializes the home, the community, the school and the state is crucial to reconstruct relevant education.

Methodologically, Bourdieu socio-cultural theory, funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992;1997), cultural responsive pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), Placed-based education (Wallace and Boylan 2009) and the rural lens (Ankrah-Dove 1982) and social justice/rights-based (Tomasevski, 2006) approaches highlight the significant of students lifeworlds, school and community geo-cultural contexts, community involvement, and collaborative school cultures in children learning. Further, Bourdieu primary habitus conception further highlights the significance of the Basic Education sub-sector in the entire education system. This justifies the need for an intense focus on Basic education sub-sector as the social and economic returns and its opportunity cost relating to reducing social inequalities is high. Also, Bourdieu conception on secondary habitus and the external versus internal habitus debate further suggest the significance of school cultures in the learning process. Bourdieu theory thus offers meta-theory for rural or indigenous methodologies to educational research that can help researcher negotiate collaborative innovative strategies and practices that merge the home/community, the school, and the state to generatively create a favourable and enduring learning environment for equitable learning experiences. This highlight the significance of grassroots collaborative ethnographic

qualitative approaches of fund of knowledge, place-based education, culturally responsive pedagogy, social equity to educational research and practice (Bryman, 2012; Creswell and Clark, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). These approaches use qualitative ethnographic approaches. To connect learners' lifeworld's and community context to make learning practical, permanent and relevant (Moll et al. 1992).

Bourdieu conception about fields of knowledge and practice/actions draws a fine line balance between determinism and voluntarism, and subjectivism and objectivism. Suggesting that the methodological approach to social research is dynamic and marries multiples ontological and epistemological assumptions and approaches (Bray, 2012). Due to the fact that human behavior or the social world is very fluid and the social researcher positionality cannot totally be divorced from the social world or the habitus he or she is studying, notwithstanding the quest for objectivism. Therefore, rural-based approaches use qualitative ethnographic approaches where researcher reflective position interact with the insider's view of subjects' lived experiences in a real-life cultural context to co-create knowledge through interpretation and construction and synthesizing of social meanings (Bryman, 2012; Creswell and Clark, 2011). The qualitative research paradigm gives adequate voice and light to rural folks whose experiences are vaguely captured in educational policy and practice. This is also in tune with the African oral tradition context where knowledge and ideas are received and transmitted orally from one generation to the other. In the nutshell, the methodological conceptualization of approaching rural-based educational study as captured in (Appendix 1) is informed by social-cultural theories that focus on the concept of place and culture. Approaches that combine ethnographic households, community and school-based participant observation investigations to elicit community knowledge to create collaborative school cultures and critical pedagogy to promote equitable and relevant learning experiences (Hattam, et al, 2009; Moll et al. 1992;1997). This paper thus argues that coalescing the home, the community, the school, and the state to enact the relevant basic education system in Ghana would require grassroots methodological approaches. Such approaches must hinge on collaborative participant observations of community/households and schools. This can elicit deeper and critical indigenous or traditional epistemologies in real life context to inform relevant school practices. Such approaches must venture into less-traverse arenas such as rural remote educational experiences. To bring out the undiscovered wealth of knowledge and experiences that can enhance rural education delivery and outcomes to leapfrog social inequalities (Winthrop et al., 2018). In addition to rallying the rural folks to take up their rightful roles in society (Madison, 2004).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has identified the gaps and prospects in rural educational research. In the process, it has highlighted the effect of the poor basic educational outcomes in rural areas on socio-economic inequality and development trajectory in Ghana. The paper identified strong links between rural geo-cultural context, participation in education, school practices, and educational outcomes. The challenge in rural educational research is how to make these relationships intelligible by offering deeper and contextualize explanations from an amalgam of voices of local and national stakeholders. This is crucial to understand how the home, the community, the school and the state could better collaborate to improve education. At the national level, constructivist and interpretive pragmatic approach to education policy research offers the opportunity to understand: how political and social issues are framed, and problems are constructed (agenda setting); how preferred options are decided upon (formulation); how programs or services are managed or delivered (implementation); and how evidence is gathered to feed into an on-going program to ensure success (monitoring and evaluation). But more importantly at the grassroots level, there is the need for ethnographic collaborative participant observation approach to rural education. Where a researcher and a study school immerse themselves into community and households settings. To document fund of knowledge and

integrate local content into the school curriculum, pedagogy and classroom context. This is crucial to reconstruct relevant and equitable pedagogy to improve learning outcomes in rural Basic Schools. This study, thus laid a strong basis for more deeper ethnographically informed studies into rural remote communities to inform the enactment of relevant Basic Education in Ghana. The study, therefore, recommends the following as a guide to rural-based education research that seeks innovative cultures to bring rural-urban educational gap:

- Education policy enactment process must proceed on the understanding that the educational process is an endless interchange of ideas, knowledge, expectations, resources and responsibility that socializes the home, the community, the school and the state.
- Rural-based educational research should debunk the deficit purview and adopt more pragmatic or transformational approaches. In order to identify the rich cultural capital and indigenous epistemologies which can be harnessed to improve children learning.
- Community participation in the decision-making process and parents involvement in school are fundamental to reconstruct productive and generative school culture and practices that facilitate improved and equitable learning experiences and outcomes.
- Learners' cultural capital or lifeworld contexts and schools geo-cultural setting should be the most crucial focus of any study or policy that seeks for innovative practices to promote learning.
- Broadening the school cultures in terms of the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment content and processes to capture the lifeworld and curiosity of students from minority background is the genesis of creating fair and just educational experiences and society.
- Grassroots or rural-based educational policy research should focus on the twin concepts of culture and place on one hand, and student's lifeworlds and curiosity on the other hand.
- Methodological approaches to rural education should be underpinned by strong collaborative participants observation approaches. Such approaches must bring researchers, community and school together, immerse the local schools into communities' cultures to elicit critical socially constructed knowledge. To create collaborative school cultures that make schools arena for transformation and social justice rather than a reproduction of social inequality.

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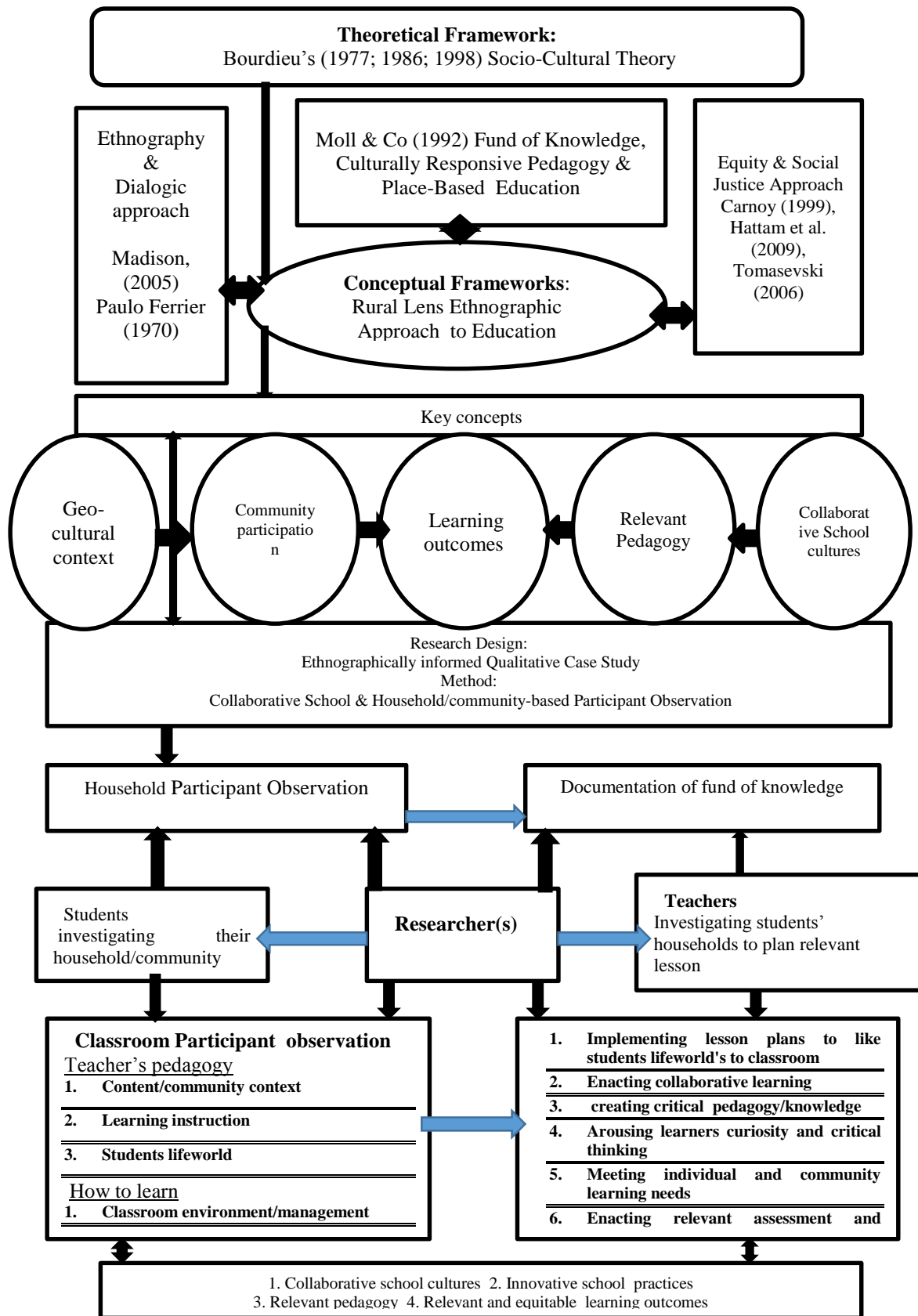
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Appendix 1.



Appendix A: Methodological Approach: Ethnographic Participant Observation Collaborative Learning Cultures

Source: Author; Construction