
Context Matters
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**Literacies for (A)bilities: Interrogating *Pedagogy*
Empowerment Nexus Framework in
School-Community Girls Clubs in Ghana**

**By: Alberta O. Akrong, PhD
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Abstract

Concepts like “empowerment”, “quality”, “access”, “girl-child”, and “inclusive” are regularly discussed in the field of educational research during the 21st century. The questions arise though as to whether these concepts are being implemented in the education system in Ghana where school children continue to study under trees or in sheds and dilapidated buildings in some parts of the country while the education ministry describes these spaces as “classrooms”? Extra-curricular activities can potentially supplement classroom instruction gaps in such cases. One laudable program is girls’ clubs where the training had been acknowledged to empower teenage girls in locations where the clubs operate in Ghana. The clubs teach 3Rs literacy, self-care, assertiveness, child rights, how to stand up to abusers, as well as communication, and digital and entrepreneurial skills. After-school activities, unfortunately, cannot be extended to most girls by the schools as well as local NGOs, which lack both human and financial resources. Thus, the purpose of this research study was to examine the extent to which the pedagogy offered by girls’ clubs empower girls to realize their aspirational self in Ghana. It is a qualitative case study, which employed purposive sampling, interviews and feminist methodology to frame the discussions, and analysis. Recommendations proposed include: stronger Ghana Education Services (GES) engagement with girls’ clubs in schools, communities, and among educational stakeholders.

Keywords: girls’ club, empowerment, feminist pedagogy, disability, social justice education, inclusion.

Bio

Dr. Alberta Akrong is an organizational learning and capacity building specialist with professional experience from the corporate and nonprofit sectors, and in teaching and research from academia. She consults on education, facilitates group training sessions and leadership workshops, and speaks at career events for students and young professionals. Dr. Akrong is a Sociologist and holds a PhD in Comparative International Development Education from the University of Toronto. She is also trained in social policy, entrepreneurship, human resource, international project management, mental health, public relations, and gender and diversity.

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Acronyms

CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
GES	Ghana Education Service
GEU	Girls Education Unit
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GHS	Ghana Health Services
GWD	Girls with Disabilities
ICT	Information Communication Technology
JHS	Junior High School
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoC	Ministry of Communication
MGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PI	Principal Investigator
PPAG	Planned Parenthood Association, Ghana
PWDs	People with Disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Convention
UNFPA	United Nations Family and Population Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children Education Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Education Cultural Organization
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
WHW	Women’s Health and Wealth
WUSC	World University Services of Canada

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Figure 1: Types of literacies taught in girls clubs

Figure 2: Processes and practices of girls clubs in Ghana

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Table 1: Characteristics of girls’ clubs studied

Table 2: Participants’ demographics

Executive Summary

Girls' education remains an important global agenda as indicated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 proposes education for all, to ensure equitable quality education, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities, while SDG 5 intends to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls (SDG Report, 2018). One channel to realize these goals, specifically for females, is through girls' clubs. These clubs can provide girls with the opportunities for informal learning, as well as discussing sensitive issues that are not addressed in the classroom. Although girls education projects have been implemented in Ghana over the last 20 years; girls' clubs have not been duly categorised as a project strategy despite being significant sites of learning for girls. Instead, studies and scholarly works have purported strategies that involve community engagement, advocacy for girls' education, governance and systems strengthening, gender training, curriculum development. Thus, to better understand the impact of girls' clubs in Ghana, this research project sought to deconstruct the concept of empowerment; explore the relationship between pedagogy and girls' empowerment through girls' clubs; and contribute to discussions and research on gender equality, non-formal, and girls' education, and empowerment in Ghana.

The research process

The study was conducted in four girls' clubs in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. Documents, texts, and artefacts on the clubs' operations, girls' empowerment, gender equality, literacy, and non-formal education were reviewed to examine the antecedents, and the current situation of girls' clubs. Interviews were also conducted with participants at selected clubs located across the region to gather information about their perspectives and experiences about the clubs. These interviews were conducted with teenage girls, facilitators, a parent, and an education officer. Their knowledge and lived experiences in view of their respective association with girls' clubs speak to the outcomes of the research that ultimately positioned their voices as very relevant to the study. Interview guides were redesigned and used to solicit participants' opinions about how the teaching and learning offered by girls' clubs engender girls' empowerment. The responses were audio recorded, transcribed, and then analysed to develop the report.

Synopsis of findings

The findings demonstrated that girls clubs' have several benefits for society besides empowering girls. Some advantages identified include the following:

1. They present opportunities for girls to seamlessly participate in the formal, non-formal, and informal education spaces.
2. They support the development of girls' socio-cognitive skills, which empower the girls to think critically and understand the world, as well as participate in broader societal matters.
3. They teach girls the benefits of education, which capacitate the girls to make informed choices and decisions to better their lives and stay in school.
4. The clubs equally support girls to improve their reading, writing, and communication skills, and boost their self-esteem and confidence to know their rights and responsibilities.
5. The clubs are change agents, changing peoples' attitudes about educating girls, especially in culturally entrenched communities in Ghana where girls are socially disadvantaged.
6. They serve as safe havens for girls who are experiencing abuse and domestic violence to seek support and build relationships with their peers at the clubs.

In-depth details of these benefits can be found in the results and discussion sections of this report.

Significance of the study

This study bridges the scholarly research gaps of the purpose of girls' clubs in Ghana. It identifies the connectedness between training, mentoring, literacy provision, social inclusion, and girls' empowerment. The study further presents the challenges in bringing non-formal education services to girls through the multiple cases examined and advocates for accessible and inclusive education for girls, including girls with disabilities. Similarly, the outcomes re-examine proposed policies on gender education in development and social interventions in Ghana. The study finally offered a robust framework to strengthen the operations and engagement processes of girls' clubs as part of the recommendations.

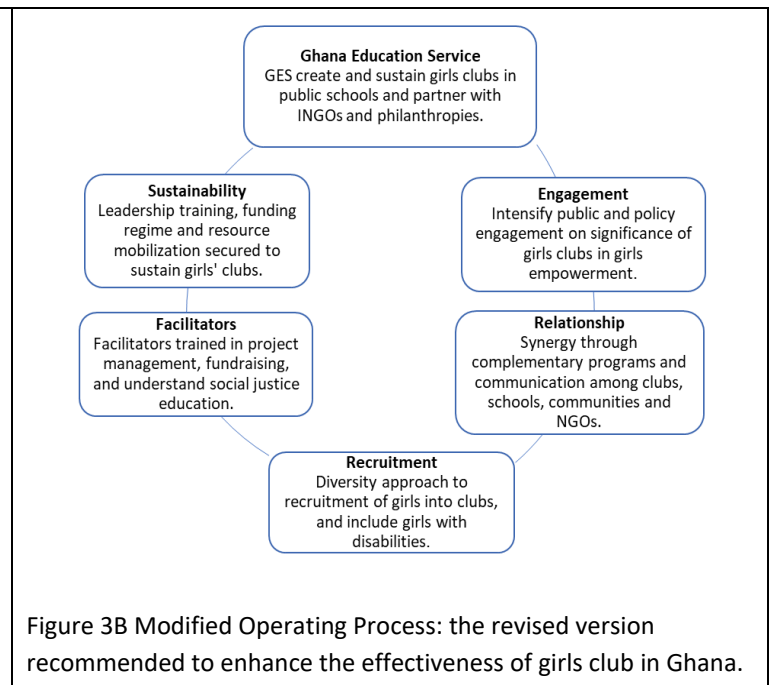
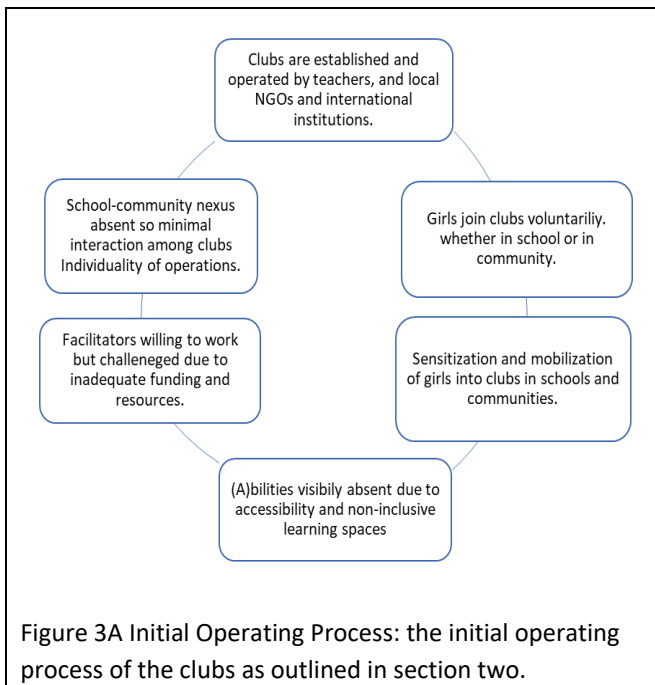
Recommendations

Key recommendations emerged from this study regarding the successful operation of girls' clubs in Ghana.

- 1) The pedagogy of empowerment as a holistic rather than a bifurcated education process needs to be recognized in Ghana because school, community clubs, and the

home form an ecosystem of learning. The behaviour change to empower role of girls' clubs needs to be acknowledged and reinforced in this process.

- 2) Girl-centred and disability-friendly learning environments need to be promoted to ensure the clubs are inclusive, accessible, and conducive for learning to all girls.
- 3) Active participation of Ghana Education Service (GES), the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), and the Department of Social Welfare are required to support the work of girls' clubs. The agencies need to equip facilitators/educators with technical skills and training materials to help the clubs accomplish their girls' empowerment goals.
- 4) A praxis teaching and learning environment need to be created by girls' clubs that stimulates innovation and accommodates critical thinking to bring the girls into self-awareness. These skills will allow them to ask question and resolve issues that could negatively affect their well-being.
- 5) Sustainable means need to be found or created to keep funding and resources available to girls' clubs to support their leadership, activities, and projects.



**Literacies for (A) bilities': Interrogating *Pedagogy Empowerment*
NexusFramework in School-Community
Girls Clubs in Ghana**

*"The most important and often misunderstood concept
in the narrative for gender equality is
OPPORTUNITY"*

– Waje, Singer ONE Ambassador

1.0 Background of the Study

1.1 Introduction

Educating girls continues to be a challenge in Ghana despite the creation of the Girls Education Unit (GEU) by the Ghana Education Service (GES) to empower in and out of school girls through its educational projects and the introduction of the 2015 Gender Policy by the Ministry of Women and Gender to address women and gender issues at the policy level. The fundamental problem here is that some communities do not have any schools in their communities for children to attend, and even where they are available, they lack teachers, basic amenities and resources that could motivate girls to remain in school. Resultantly, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), at the basic level, particularly the Junior High School (JHS) continue to widen in the country. The gap is a result of late entry, repetition, and dropout and drop-in leading to large numbers of over-age children in basic schools (CAMFED, 2011). Moreover, varied social issues equally determine girls' school attendance. For example, a news report by CITI TV, a television station in Ghana in a broadcast in January 2021 reported a significant rise in teenage pregnancy during the 2020 school closure in the country due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Community members and parents of some of the pregnant girls interviewed across the country by CITI TV reporters attributed the phenomenon to increased parental negligence, teenagers' inquisitiveness to explore sex, weak parental discipline, influence by social media, incest, and lack of community interventions to empower girls. While abuse clearly violates the rights of victims, becoming pregnant as a schoolgirl may also deprive a girl from realizing her ambition. The question, however, is how can we achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of gender equality and respect for human dignity as a country if these challenges persist?

In view of the issues above, advocacy groups and civil society organizations (CSOs) do petition policy makers to mainstream gender into educational programs and social interventions to capture the perspectives of females, as well as the issues and challenges they experience in society. One of such intervention is clubs for girls where the programs are intended to support the learning, development, and empowerment journeys of teenage girls. But despite, the long history of girls' clubs in Ghana and studies expounding on their operations, and, to some extent their pedagogical practices, how girls' club literacy continues to educate and empower girls has not been holistically evaluated. It is this gap that this study seeks to address to complement the existing body of knowledge on girls' clubs in Ghana and more widely.

A girls' club is a group of girls that come together to learn about the rights of girls to teach others to respect the rights of children, develop their self-esteem and leadership skills, to have fun (Actionaid, 2018), and to sensitize members of their communities about the importance of girl-child education (Addae-Boahene et al., 2006). Girls' clubs have, therefore, emerged as platforms that develop programs at the grassroots level to raise awareness and sensitize communities about issues affecting girls and women (Camfed, 2011). So, whether clubs are situated in rural or urban areas, or are school or community based, the objective as previous studies have presented is to empower girls. Consequently, young girls participate in the clubs for different reasons and the clubs do focus on meeting their individual learning expectations. The clubs, thus, employ transformative learning practices and empowerment processes to develop self-confidence and assertiveness in the girls, discuss human rights issues, harness and build critical thinking skills, teach income generating skills, and strengthen the capacity of the patrons/facilitators and executives of the clubs to perform their duties (Actionaid, 2018; Addae-Bohene, et al., 2006; 4-H Ghana, 2017). Some of the clubs offer basic reading, writing, and numeracy classes for girls who have previously dropped out of school. The clubs can be found in schools and in local communities where girls voluntarily join to participate in the programs. Activities are planned by the facilitators from training guidebooks, which were either sourced or provided by organizations like UNICEF, Plan International, World University Services Canada (WUSC), United Nations Family and Population Agency (UNFPA), and others.

1.2 Problem statement

Girls' education projects have been implemented in Ghana over the last 20 years; yet girls' clubs have not been duly categorised as a project strategy despite being significant sites of learning for girls. Instead studies and scholarly works have purported strategies that

involve community engagement, advocacy on girls' education, governance and systems strengthening, gender training, curriculum development with very little mention of girls' clubs. It is an oversight and therefore an issue that needs to be addressed in programming for girls' education. Girls in Ghana, specifically school-age girls, participate in extra-curricular activities in girls' clubs, which critical educators, like Dewey (1938) and Freire (1984) have argued can enrich their leadership and communication skills as well as teach emotional intelligence and social awareness (Actionaid, 2018). Despite the positive outcomes of girls' clubs, inefficient management practices and a lack of resources inhibit clubs from extending their services to more girls. Yet, this should not happen because girls' participation and interaction in such clubs are fundamental to their transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), as the activities facilitate expression of agency and voice. Thus, this project sought to deconstruct the concept of empowerment; explore the relationship between pedagogy and girls' empowerment through girls' clubs; and contribute to discussions and research on gender equality, non-formal, and girls' education, and empowerment in Ghana.

1.3 Purpose of the study

Multiple activities need to take place for empowerment to materialize; therefore, transformation cannot be attributed to a single phenomenon. This study's findings highlight the attributes and impact of girls' clubs as behaviour change agents, guardians, custodians, and educators for girls. It also entreats GES, GEU, and educational entities to acknowledge the enormous contribution of girls' clubs to complementary education in Ghana, and to re-think their function as integral to the educational system. This study equally brought issues of abilities/ableism to the fore and advocated that provision be made in social policy development so that persons with disabilities (PWDs) can fully engage in educational social activities despite being their possible limitations.

1.4 Research objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Document the present situation of girls' clubs in Ghana.
2. Examine, critically, the curricular and pedagogical practices that engender girls' empowerment in the clubs.
3. Review policy documents, reports, articles, the media and the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

- on education planning, girls' clubs, disability, accessibility and inclusive education, gender empowerment, and curriculum.
4. Employ the findings to present recommendations to improve the programming of girls' clubs.

1.5 Research questions

The overarching question of this study was in what ways and to what extent do activities and programs offered by girls' clubs in Ghana improve socio-cognitive skills of girls' and lead to their empowerment? From this question, the following sub-questions were asked:

1. What is the current situation of girls' clubs in Ghana?
2. What ways have the present curricula and pedagogical practices within girls clubs led to girls' empowerment?
3. How inclusive are the programs? Are *all* girls involved in the programs?
4. To what extent do policy documents, United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on education planning, disability, accessibility and inclusive education, gender empowerment, and the curriculum speak to the specific girls' clubs studied in Ghana?
5. In what ways have epistemologies of social justice been part of the programs of girls' clubs in Ghana?

2.0 Framework

2.1 Framing the study

The theory employed in framing the research and to develop the analysis is discussed in section two.

2.2. Feminist pedagogy in theory and practice

Feminist pedagogy was the theory employed to frame the discussions. The theory is an ideological tool and a standpoint adopted by women to assert recognition, autonomy, and respect for their rights. This framework was employed because it draws a relationship between learning and women's empowerment, meaning it could thus help to deconstruct what it means to be empowered from the perspective of girls and facilitators involved in girls' clubs, as well as the other two women participants in this study.

Feminist pedagogy advocates for women's knowledge, ideas, and experiences to be centred within the knowledge production framework to situate female voices in the learning discourses. The theory for this purpose enables our understanding of the ontological and epistemological premises to know and to perceive the social world differently. It examines the ways in which girls' empowerment unfolds in practice and to further motivate girls to interrogate what is real and to know their realities. Besides, feminist pedagogy challenges marginalization, promotes inclusive classrooms, advocates for collective good, furthers discourses on ableism and PWDs to be integrated in social justice education.

The theory was specifically focused on girls' education to deconstruct the concept of empowerment and to explore the connection between literacy, pedagogy, and girls' empowerment from girls' clubs. The methodological process, as a result, was influenced by this feminist theoretical principle and subsequently informed the selection of documents, the interview structure, and the data collection process. The theory, again, served as an analytical tool that guided analysis of the data to successfully feature the voices of all the women participants in the discussion. With the theory in mind, the literature chosen and reviewed, the participants selected, and the interview questions developed were all female-centred which aligned with the principles of the feminist pedagogy, and the theoretical framework.

Thus, Shrewsbury (1987), in connecting feminist principles to learning, identified community, empowerment, and leadership as three concepts that are central to an emancipatory education and a classroom that facilitates transformation. Her concepts as observed were incorporated in the teaching and learning programs by the facilitators as drivers to empower the girls. Clearly, community bring together individuals to achieve a common goal. The community being referred to here is the girls who meet at the clubs' premises to learn and share ideas. In other words, the classroom is characterized as:

Persons connected in a net or relationships with people who care about each other's learning from a classroom that is seen as comprised of not *just* teachers and students. It should be a space where members respect each other's differences rather than fear them, and, a place to connect to our roots, utilize and develop all of our talents and abilities, to develop excellence (Shrewsbury, 1987, p,6).

This statement rationalizes the extent to which difference, representation, and diverse perspectives matter in learning communities, as they change the position of the subject in the power discourse to be the signifier, and to become the focus of the goal of

transformation. It implies that “feminist pedagogy guides our choice of classroom practices and provides criteria to evaluate specific educational strategies in terms of the desired course goals and outcomes” (Shrewsbury, 1987, p. 6). Thus, in order to achieve the goals of emancipation and empowerment, we must create liberatory classrooms (Freire: 1984; Freire & Macado, 1987; Godbee, 2018), which Galoozis and Pinto (2016) have argued can “situate students as critical thinkers, and are guided to learning not with modules of marketable skills, but through self-directed inquiry towards developing a tolerance for ambiguity” (p.161). In that case, representation, inclusion, and diversity must happen in doing social justice education because:

Social justice education is more than an intellectual activity. It engages students in a wide range of self-reflection, relationship building, reading, and writing because: students need to acquire accurate and complex information about issues, which the mainstream often ignore, simplify or distort (Goodman, 2011, p. 347-348).

In other words, creating space for exploration of self extends to acknowledging the vulnerability of other bodies because space is about representation. It is about giving and having a voice and being included (Stern, 2018) in the milieu. But girls’ clubs, while in theory are opened to interested young girls to join the clubs, the mobilization, and recruitment strategies (un) intentionally exclude girls with disabilities as discovered from this study. Yet, as much as spaces undeniably have the tendency to include and/or exclude, the interest of (PWDs) must be captured. The learning spaces need to be accommodating and physically accessible with minimal interruption, to facilitate PWDs’ participation.

The theory helped identify fundamental deficiencies in the external engagement process in girls’ clubs in Ghana and supported arguments that examine the situation of the clubs as postulated in the research objectives.

3.0 Literature review

To understand the formation and principles of girls’ clubs, we looked to previous literature to identify themes that characterize the history, operations, and constraints of the clubs. Section three presents a review of the literature.

3.1 Context and location of the research

Although girls' clubs can be found in every region in Ghana, this study was conducted in the Greater Accra region of the country. Ghana, a developing country in West Africa gained independence from British rule in 1957. Cocoa, gold, diamonds, and timber are main products exported to generate revenue for the nation. The country is made up of 16 regions with its people speaking a wide-range of languages. The country has many different cultures and multiple ethnic groups. English is the official language of Ghana and is also the language of instruction in schools. Some local languages are also taught in schools, and they include: Dagbani, Dagaare, Ewe, Ga, Nzema, and Twi. Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions are the main forms of religious beliefs of the people. A preliminary report on the 2021 Population and Household Census from the Ghana Statistical Services (GSS) put the current population at 30.8 million of which 51% of the people are female and 49% are males (Daily Graphic, September 23, 2021).

The society is mainly patriarchal, meaning culturally males are perceived as superior to females, which devalues women to be positioned as the "Other" (de Beauvoir, 1949) and therefore unequal to men. The notion unfortunately permeates into social interventions where women are denied participation in developmental programs, like literacy and skill training by their families, or are offered lesser or no access to resources by their partners and the community, as a way to restrict their well being. Thus, some parents in Ghana believe that the girl's place is the home, so she must always do housework and care for other family members. As a result, a girl's basic needs may not be met; she could be betrothed into an early marriage, or, in extreme cases, be trafficked for money to replenish the family's household resources (Addo, 2006; Amenyah, 2012; UNFPA, 2016). Such gender differentiation contributes to lower education levels among girls because their families can prevent them from attending school due to such excessive cultural norms. Girls' clubs tend to be supportive sources for education under these circumstances, as girls – in or out of school – are given an opportunity by the clubs to access the programs and participate in the activities to learn some life skills.

3.2 Sociological outlook of girls' clubs in Ghana

A training manual from Actionaid Ghana (2018), as well as an article on innovations of girls' clubs by Addae-Boahene et al. (2006) presented invaluable details and perspectives on the subject matter. Specific texts on girls' clubs are hard to find perhaps because of the incongruity between notions of feminism and general assessment of the socio-economic contribution of girls and women to the economy of Ghana. But pedagogies, such as non-formal spaces, offer skills for both schoolgirls and girls who dropout of school.

For example, in a study to determine the critical factors underlying sexual exploitation of schoolgirls in a rural community in the northern region by male teachers, participants cited girls' clubs as an intervention strategy with possibility "to empower girls to be assertive and to understand their rights" (Alolo, 2016, p.102).

Girls' clubs can be found across Ghana, and they are either locally established or internationally affiliated. They can be faith-based or secular in orientation; are found in schools or based in communities, and located in rural, urban, or peri-urban areas of the country. Impact (Ed), an NGO, for instance, had helped developed over 1,190 girls clubs and associations in schools. The organization has partnered with SISTA's Club by UNFPA, and is implemented through partners in six regions of Ghana. The number of clubs created was not recorded in the report. Women's Health to Wealth (WHW) a Kumasi-based NGO also run 34 girls' clubs in junior high schools in the Ashanti region (WHW Ghana, 2017). Over 200 girls' clubs have also been established in basic schools across the northern regions via the Uniterra Program (Addae-Boahene et al., 2006). Similarly, alumni associations, philanthropists, as well as organizations interested in empowering girls also create clubs in schools and communities in Ghana. The number of clubs is rising, because it is stimulating to work with girls who are excited to learn. Participation is voluntary. Membership is typically between 35 and 60 girls depending on the population of girls at each school (Addae-Boahene et al., 2006). Dani, a facilitator and a study participant stated that his club has over 400 girls and about 50 to 60 girls patronize the club daily.

Additional accounts of girls' clubs from the literature buttressed by informal conversation held by a child rights officer with the PI during the document gathering process indicated that girls' clubs are evolving. For example, in Kumasi, some clubs have metamorphosed into child rights clubs (Van Der Kroon, 2015), while others operate as boys' and girls' clubs where separate activities are held for girls. This is being done in TADM and the Girls and Boys Club of Ghana, which are both non-governmental organizations based in the Greater Accra region. Empirical research on girls' learning, however, focused on challenges to girls' education and empowering girls (Alhassan, 2015; Fant, 2008; Robert, 2014); factors influencing girls' access to education (Annin, 2009; Kyere-Boakye, 2009); and the role of NGOs in girl-child education (Huzeru, 2012), but not specifically on girls' clubs empowering girls as this research had set out to examine. Some clubs, which are exclusively for girls, like Achievers Ghana, Ghana Code Club, and Days for Girls Clubs do exist, nonetheless.

3.3 Literacy for empowerment in girls' clubs

Globally, and in Ghana, women have lower literacy levels than men. Cultural norms disproportionate girls to be irregular in, or late to school because girls assist with household chores, so families have difficulty letting go of their labour (Amenyah, 2012). Yet, problems pertaining to girls are human rights issues. Girls must experience justice, equality, safety and protection, freedom to associate and be free from abuse, and access to education regardless of their age, religion, culture, ability, or class. Thus, girls' clubs teach such consciousness as the studies indicated. For example, according to Actionaid (2018), they "enlighten girls about their responsibilities, provide guidance in achieving life goals, empower them with knowledge about child rights, and prepare them towards adulthood" (p.10). As adolescent girls with no educational attainment has declined from 18% in 1993 to 4% in 2014 (UNFPA, 2016), it is imperative for the Ghana Education Service (GES) to sustain initiatives like girls' clubs to support and empower girls to achieve their educational goals. The diagram below was developed from this review of the literature to illustrate the various literacies offered by the girls clubs, which, in diverse ways enable girls to learn what they hitherto do not know about their rights and society's responsibility towards their education and safety.

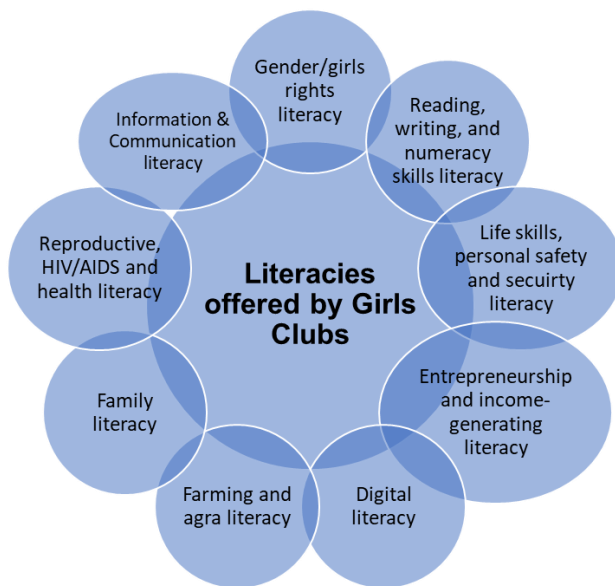


Figure 1. Types of literacies taught in girls clubs

The diagram depicts the types of training offered by girls' clubs in Ghana, which I have categorised as literacies because they constitute the basic pedagogy taught to girls by facilitators. The needs of a community, it was discovered, influence the orientation, activities selected, and type(s) of literacy training offered by the clubs (Jones, 2017; WHW Ghana, 2017). Partner NGOs and international donor agencies that work in girls' education and empowerment train facilitators - also known as patrons, or teachers. Facilitators used

subject specific manuals and guidebooks to teach and train the girls, while learning is imparted through a combination of literacies to engender empowerment. The clubs, thus, create spaces for community, for peer-to-peer interaction, mentoring and development of abilities as they assemble materials to blend different learning strategies to stimulate learner engagement.

3.4 Operational practices of girls' clubs

One of the objectives of the girls' clubs, the studies indicate, is to empower girls with knowledge and skills to think critically and be independent (Actionaid, 2018; Addae-Boohene et al, 2006; WHW Ghana, 2017; Plan International, n.d.). Subsequently, the organizations focus on teaching reproductive health; literacy that is reading, writing and numeracy; income generation skills - baking, sewing, and beads making; and digital literacy. Some well-known clubs include the following: the Safety Net Program by the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana (PPAG); the Child Rights clubs by Child Rights International; Girl Power clubs by Plan International; the Ghana Code Club, an independent local NGO; and the Read for Life club by Readwide Limited. Equally important are girls' clubs with a specific focus like Girls Code and Tech Girls Needs for example. They introduce girls to technology, train them to acquire digital skills, and teach them how to code. 4-H Ghana focus is social enterprise development, focused on farming and agro-processing. Other clubs teach basic reading, writing, and numeracy literacy. The working processes of the clubs are captured in the figure below.

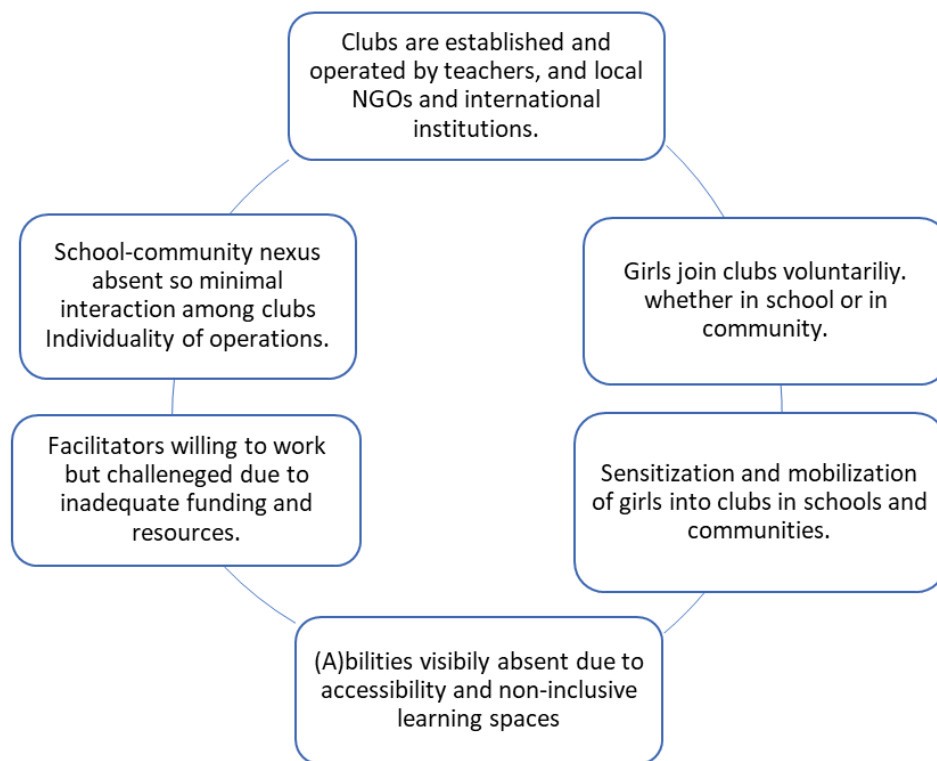


Figure 2: Processes and practices of girls' clubs in Ghana

The diagram was put together by synthesizing textual (not pictorial) information described in the studies by Camfed (2011), Actionaid (2018), WHW Ghana (2017), Addae-Boohene et al. (2006), and Plan International (n.d), and which were corroborated by conversations, and interviews with the participants. The documents cited how girls' clubs operate in Ghana. While the training manuals developed by Actionaid (2018) and Plan International (n.d) elaborated on the formation and management of girls' clubs, training of facilitators, and clubs-school-community relations', WHW's (2017) study described the sensitisation and recruitment processes of the clubs. Camfed (2011) and Addae-Boohene et al.'s (2006) studies highlighted challenges facing the clubs, such as inadequate funding to retain teacher-facilitators and poor communication between girls' clubs. The girls interviewed suggested that they would appreciate the participation of girls with disabilities (GWDs) in their clubs, as they would learn and experience how to relate with PWDs. The information was obtained from commissioned project documents on girls' education (Camfed 2011), adolescent health project (UNFPA, 2019; 2016), manuals designed and used by Actionaid (2008) and Plan International (n.d), to train girls clubs facilitators, an article by Addae-Boohene et al. (2006) advocating for innovation of girls' clubs, and a project report by Women's Health to Wealth Ghana (2017). Weakschool-

community relations and relegation in the recruitment of GWDs were observed as challenges in the process.

3.5 Ghana Education Service, NGOs, and girls' clubs

The studies illustrated that NGOs, like Actionaid, Care International, and Plan International in Ghana, create girls' clubs or work with girls through local partners, like Soronko Academy, H-4 Ghana, and Child Rights International to offer a wide range of literacy and empower interventions for girls in the country. But narrowing the gender education gap has proven to be a challenge in Ghana because cultures and attitudes are difficult to change. Again, NGOs judiciously avoid meddling in the cultural, political, and governmental affairs because they hold negative perceptions of each other's capacity in educational delivery (Eliasu, 2017). Such trepidation encumbers innovative educational activities for girls' clubs. Despite the challenges, the Girls Education Unit (GEU) had worked on projects linking NGOs and girls' clubs in the Greater Accra area but had tried much with similar projects in other regions. For example, Women's Health to Wealth (WHW) conducted visual and dental screenings and provided iron-folate supplements and reproductive advice in schools where they operate girls' clubs due to the ill health of the girls. They observed a 45% reduction in school absenteeism within the course of the program (time and duration not mentioned), as, according to the report, the NGO continues to give the folate supplement each school term. According to WHW (2017), when the organization realized that neither Ghana's Health Service nor Education Service was conducting health screenings, they began offering essential tests for visual, aural, and dental health, as well as testing for STIs and anaemia. Hundreds of girls have been screened through the clubs. The program was a sole initiative of WHW and not a partnership between WHW, GHS, and GES. WHW only sought clearance from GES to gain access to the schools and consent from the Ghana's Health Services (GHS) respectively. The permission was to make GHS aware of the program in case of any eventualities, as it was a medical intervention that might put human lives at risk.

In another development, the Ghana Library Authority and Book Aid International launched a STEM Study Hub project as part of the 2019 Year of Reading, which sought to help young people, especially female students, take up careers in STEM (GNA, 2019). There was no record in the studies that the organization partnered with or invited girls' clubs or GES to participate. However, considering the two projects were about literacy to advance the health and education of children, which include girls and were organized by reputable international NGOs, collaboration would have been a significant means to

promote the cause of girls. The cases indicate a few ways in which GES-GEU had lapsed on activities pertaining to girls' empowerment in Ghana.

4.0 Methodology

Section four discusses the processes that guided the research design and informed the data collection and analysis.

The study employed a qualitative research approach to collect the data (Creswell, 2011). Primary and secondary data were simultaneously gathered through one-on-one interviews while relevant documents on girls' clubs were analysed and the themes examined. The themes include: the characteristics of clubs; the ages of girls who patronized the clubs; the types of clubs (e.g. whether they are school or community based clubs); the educational background of clubs' facilitators; the activities and programs facilitated by the clubs; and the challenges experienced by the clubs. Policy documents, reports, articles, media news, and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) were equally reviewed. Details relevant to girls' education, girls' clubs, and girls' empowerment from these sources were then organized and analysed. While literature was sourced from institutions, books, and articles during the day, in-person interviews were conducted with participants after school, between 2pm and 6pm from Mondays to Fridays when respondents were available at the clubs and in the office.

4.1 Participant selection and data collection

Out of the official websites of seven girls' clubs, through purposive sampling, one school-based and three community-based clubs were identified to be the possible research sites for the study. The clubs were selected based on a criteria outlined by the PI that: the club should be an all-girls club, offer diverse activities, located in different locations across the region, have been operating between one to ten years, and be either a local or international NGO. These different characteristics of the clubs would allow for diverse perspectives on the challenges faced by the clubs, as well as their similarities and differences.

Subsequently, the PI visited each site to observe the day-to-day activities of the clubs, and recruit participants for the interview component of the study. Of the four clubs, three were local Ghanaian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the fourth was a chapter of a US-based development organization with a country office in Ghana that has interventions for girls in other regions in the country. The clubs were located in urban,

peri-urban, and rural areas, and targeted girls between nine and 19 years of age, who were either in or out of school, andabled or disabled. The clubs offered a range of programs such as health, self-care, girls' rights education, entrepreneurship training, and digital skills. A total of nine participants made up of three facilitators - two females and one male, four girls from the four clubs, a parent whose daughter attended one of the clubs, and an education officer from GES were selected and interviewed for this study. The participants were between the ages of 13 and 43 years of age. Theywere chosen based on their association, work, background, and experience with girls' clubs, brining first-hand insights to this investigation.

Observations of the clubs' learning spaces and activities also took place. In addition, artefacts pertaining to the clubs were collected and the PI had informal conversationswith the clubs' staffand the girlparticipants about the history and current situation of the clubs. Observational notes were takenand later analysed to corroborate the interviews.The interactions provided detailed information about the social determinants of the club's location, the ways in which location decision influenced operations and choice of services rendered, the demographics of girls who patronized the clubs, the clubs' challenges, andfuture plans of the clubs.

4.2 Ethics Process

Following approval from thePI's university, they set out to visit and observe theactivities at the four girls' clubs selected from the internet, the communities in which the clubs are located, and to recruit participants from the clubs to be interviewed. The research was conducted in the Greater Accra Region from February toApril 2020. Four different interview question guides were designed for the study (i.e. one for the girl participants; one for the club facilitators; one for the parents whose childrenpatronize the clubs; and one for the GES staff. The guides have been included in the appendix section of the paper.Interviews were semi-structured, allowing for guided dialogues to elicitresponses about practices and stories about the impact of the clubs on the lives of the various participants, memories of some unforgettable activities organized by the clubs tocapture their insights, observations, perspectives, and lived experienced (hooks, 2000).Nineinterviews were held in total. Eight were conducted at the girls' clubs' premises, and one at a GES premises. Each interview lasted between 18 and 65 minutes and was audio recorded. Participants' responses generated significant insights for the data analysis phase of the study.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality. During the informed consent process, the PI presented the purpose of the research to each participant, explained their rights in the process, and then verbally sought the consent of the participant. The interview proceeded after the participant granted verbal consent. Individual participants were again requested to indicate their language of preference for communication for the interview, which gave them voice and the power to choose. The interviews then followed in either English or Twi and were audio recorded. Observational notes were taken alongside the audio recordings and were used to crosscheck and compare assertions made by participants during their interviews. The conversations in Twi were translated first before each recording was transcribed, saved electronically, and assigned a file name. The folder was encrypted with a password to secure the data from being accessed by a third party. The transcripts were later printed for the coding process.

The data were coded using open coding (Creswell, 2011). Each transcript was read through three times for clarity and to identify categories. The coding process followed by making comparison, asking questions, and reflecting on the observation notes taken during the interviews. The categories were compared with the literature to identify emerging themes, and which were all referenced for analysis to make meaning.

5.0 Data analysis and findings

The findings from the literature, interviews, and related sources constituted the data that was analysed for this study. The sub-sections below describe the analysis process and the results.

5.1 Data analysis

The open coded method was used to code this study's data. This process was enacted by reading-through the transcribed interviews numerous times, which then prompted the researcher to ask additional questions about the data, gain further clarity, and identify various categories and make comparisons about preliminary themes emerging from the data (Gray, 2014). Reflections were also made on the notes taken during the interviews to further focus the analysis. The data was analysed with a feminist lens of empowerment and agency, as it is through such opportunities that females can express themselves and articulate their needs and concerns. These characteristics were exhibited during the interviews as the setting allowed the girls to express their sentiments and shared their

experiences of self-awareness and other skills acquired from the clubs. Their statements offered significant details for the study's findings, which were cited and analysed in the narrative.

The data analysis process also examined in-depth similarities and differences in the accounts of the different girls' clubs and the variability in perspectives between the girl and adult participants. The responses were then triangulated with the literature to identify patterns to explain the current situation of the clubs after which they were categorised alongside debates surrounding girls' education, literacy, and empowerment. The findings were subsequently interpreted to bring out the convergences and divergences within the studies and participants' views.

5.2 Results

The research question asked how girls' clubs empower girls and the extent to which their participation in the clubs and the clubs' pedagogies shape their experiences to engender empowerment. The data were categorized and analysed according to the structure of the interview questions. They included the following thematic areas: 1) the types of clubs; 2) the demographic details of participants; 3) the club's patronage; 4) the role of facilitators in the various clubs; 5) the curriculum used in the clubs and how they address issues of empowerment and disabilities; 6) the GES' and NGO's relationships with girls' clubs; and 7) the characteristics of successful, and unsuccessful clubs. The findings resulted in highlighting the clubs' day-to-day activities, as well as the actions, inactions, and struggles of girls' clubs. Responses from participants generated the qualitative results presented below.

5.2 (i) Types of girls' clubs

Four girls' clubs were visited for observations and to conduct interviews. Three of the four clubs were community-based, and one was school-based. All were located in the Greater Accra region. Characteristics and details of the clubs with pseudonyms of participants have been presented in the table below.

Table 1: Characteristics of girls' clubs studied

Club Name	Club Type	Location	Years	Activities	Participants from clubs	Curriculum
A	Community-based local NGO	Inner city neighbourhood	9	ICTs, digital literacy, creative writing, theatre arts training, and literacy and homework support.	Dani Abela	Designed in-house by founder with facilitators Sourced externally from NGO training programs with UNICEF, Plan International
B	School-based local NGO	Working class neighbourhood	2	Self-awareness, life skills, sexual and reproductive health	Nita Aram	Sourced from UNFPA and UNICEF Designed by invited resource persons.
C	Community-based local NGO	Upper class, lower class, & rural neighbourhoods	6	ICTs, coding, and digital skills training	Beti Esha	Designed in-house by founder with facilitators Resource persons in technology
D	Community-based internationally affiliated NGO	Middle and mixed class neighbourhoods	5	Reproductive health, entrepreneurship, income generation	Abha	Used training models from USA Designed skill training manuals by local resource people

The clubs' participants were only girls with girls between the ages of seven and 19 attending the clubs. Club Chad an entire program within its organization that was dedicated to teaching its participants digital literacy skills and coding. Club B has been in existence for only two years, so it was a relatively new, while Club A had been operating for almost a decade. The facilitators, Dani, Nita, and Beti, were facilitators in Clubs A, B, and C, respectively and participated in this study's interviews. In addition, Abela Aram, Esha, and Abha were teenage girls, who attended Clubs A, B, C and D, respectively, and also participated in interviews. Nita indicated that her club, Club B, emerged from a need to respond to the reproductive health enquiries from girls in her school. It initially provided information on hygiene and self-care to empower girls during puberty to know how to navigate their teenage years. She is focused on creating girls' clubs in schools in the community to extend the services to more school girls. Club A is located in the oldest and a religiously conservative inner-city community in Accra. Three of the clubs, A, B, and C, were after-school clubs, while Club D held day programs for girls in both schools and the

community. Clubs activities were diverse and focused on the following issues: life skills literacy, reproductive health, ICT and digital literacy, income generation, creative writing and theatre arts. While the school-based club met weekly at the school's premises, clubs A and C have fixed locations called a centre where girls walked in to enrol as members and participate in the activities. Two of the community-based clubs: C and D have branches in the northern regions of the country where they serve underprivileged girls in rural communities.

According to Dani, 40 to 50 girls patronize his club daily. A non-participant observation was done of the enrolment process at Club A. During this session, a father brought his 16-year-old daughter to the club to be enrolled in its program. I learned from Dani that he had visited the club earlier upon recommendation from another parent to find out how his daughter could benefit from the club's programs. The girl, from the observation, appeared to express an interest in learning about ICTs and theatre arts, illustrating that girls' clubs can serve as bridge-builders between the home, the school, and the community in educating the girl child.

During the interviews, the clubs' facilitators explained that there were various ways in which the programs' training curriculum was developed. In some cases, they were sourced externally, introduced by resource people or motivational speakers invited by the clubs for train purposes or to speak to the girls about life skills. In other cases, the facilitators and club owners jointly designed the curriculum internally. For example, the founders and the team of facilitators in clubs A and C designed the ICT, digital, and literacy skills manuals in-house. The facilitators mentioned that they sourced training materials from NGOs with some materials being given to them by international development organizations, like UNFPA, Plan International, UNICEF, and PPAG, when the facilitators participated in girls' empowerment trainer-of-trainee workshops. They, in turn, used the materials as pedagogical resources for the club participants. For instance, as Nita explained, *"I have a UNFPA model guidebook on reproductive health, and nutrition I use in training the girls"*.

The diversity and fluidity of the pedagogy allowed the training to be structured and unstructured, as well as self-directed and guided at the same time. Facilitators taught, delivered training, and offered guidance to the participants. However, subject-matter professionals were occasionally invited to deliver training, give inspirational talks, and facilitate empowerment workshops for the girls. As Dani explained, *"We invite the resource persons to further motivate the girls to change their internalized cultural perceptions about the limitations of being a girl, and to aspire to be ambitious"*.

The patronage of the girls in all the four clubs can be attributed to the libertarian nature of the pedagogy, as this characteristic motivates the girls to remain in the clubs. One principle of feminist pedagogy, as Shrewsbury (1987) stated, “is a re-imaging of the classroom as a community of learners where there is both autonomy of self and mutuality with others... and empowerment is only possible when there is a sense of mutuality” (p.10). The learning spaces studied are symbolic of this principle. Abela, one of the girls stated: *“We choose the things we want to learn. I am interested in creative writing and theatre arts so I write short plays and stories then show them to our facilitator for him to guide me.”*

The findings did illustrate that there are girls’ clubs in Ghana, and they have a demonstrated presence in schools and in communities where they operate or are located. The clubs are transformative spaces that motivate girls to aspire for a better future. The clubs have an awareness of their social responsibility in fostering education for girls’ empowerment.

5.2(ii) Demographics of respondents

A total of nine individuals, one male and eight females between the ages of 13 and 43 years participated in the interviews. Their demographic information is outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Participants’ demographics

No.	Sex	Age	Education	Marital Status	No of Children	No of Siblings	No of Girls Siblings	Occupation
1	Male	35	Diploma	Married	4	N/A	N/A	Facilitator
2	Female	23	University	Single	0	N/A	N/A	Facilitator
3	Female	35	University	Single	0	N/A	N/A	Facilitator
4	Female	29	University	Single	3	N/A	N/A	Education Officer
5	Female	43	Vocational	Married	3	N/A	N/A	Businesswoman
6	Female	16	SHS	Child	N/A	1	0	Student
7	Female	16	SHS	Child	N/A	9	6	Student
8	Female	13	JHS	Child	N/A	3	2	Student
9	Female	14	Primary	Child	N/A	4	0	Student

As illustrated by the table, two respondents were adults and married with children; three were single adults; and four were teenagers. Also, three of the participants were club

facilitator, one was a parent and businesswoman whose child attended one of the clubs, and the other participant was an education officer. The final four participants were basic and secondary school level girls who attended the different clubs.

The three facilitators had worked with their clubs for three, four, and nine years, respectively. Two of the facilitators had volunteered with their clubs prior to being hired. The third facilitator was the club's founder, who doubled as a facilitator. All three facilitators had university level education, with two having been trained in ICTs and one a trained teacher with an MBA degree in marketing. The facilitators were passionate about empowering girls. Dani, for example, explained that they do the work because they perceive "education is an equalizer." Nita stated: "The girls come to seek advice. They are adolescents who need guidance and someone to talk to about their issues. I am their listening ear."

5.2(iii) Participation in the girls' clubs

All three facilitators Dani, Nita, and Beti claimed that the girls join the clubs voluntarily and participation proceeds after their registration is completed. The registration process encompasses the facilitators first having a brief conversation with any girl who expresses interest in joining the club to assess their motivation for enrolling. After this conversation, the facilitators seek parental consent from the interested participant's parent or guardian before enrolment is finalized. This process, as the facilitators explained, is to prevent absenteeism and to allow the parents to assess the progress of the child's during her mentorship in the club. In addition, each of the four girls interviewed also explained that they assess themselves to identify knowledge and skills they may want to acquire to be better empowered as young girls. They then chose to enrol in various clubs that offered activities that could support them in achieving these goals.

Once enrolling in these clubs, all four girls expressed appreciation for their clubs. For example, Abela joined her club six years prior to this study, and she explained during her interview that she came to the centre daily except on Sundays. She reiterated: "It's a safe place. I can do a lot of learning, like coding and my homework, rather than stay at home. We decide what we wanted to learn and then go for it. The facilitators provide guidance when we have a problem." Abha had been with her club for four years. According to her, she enjoys the company of the other girls, as they all live in the community and come together at a specified location for training and to share stories and friendship. Aram stays after school to participate in her school-based club. She has been with her club for two

years and is very happy with the self-care lessons offered by 'Auntie', the nickname she uses to refer to Nita, her club's facilitator.

Each of the four clubs undertake activities that support the socio-cognitive development of girls to be self-aware, know their rights, and be assertive to foster empowerment. Equally visible was a clear and growing interest for the girls to be engaged in diverse training like entrepreneurship, acquisition of income generating skills, as well as skills related to digital literacy. The girls did report wanting to develop their abilities to use new technologies, like flying drones to do reporting and taking pictures, but this type of training could not be provided. The facilitators reported having the capabilities to assist girls to acquire the skills but currently lack the resources - funds and learning materials to introduce expensive programs.

5.2(iv) Participants' perspectives on empowerment

All nine participants interviewed (i.e. the facilitators, the parent, the education officer, and the girls) demonstrated, overall, an in-depth understanding of empowerment, when asked. They also were able to articulate concrete descriptions of the concept that illustrated their comprehension. For example, the views of the adult participants about the concept emanated from their life experiences as females in the education sector, whilst the girls' notions of the concept were influenced by their association with the clubs and being teenagers, who are exploring life in general. The education officer had equally observed the extent to which teaching, learning, and activities in and beyond the classroom can transform girls, so she spoke from her experience as an educator. The parent in this case had teenage children and her parental responsibilities did inform her views about empowerment, as, at the time of this study, she was raising her children to be assertive, so they could confidently navigate life's challenges in the future. The facilitators designed and used empowerment exercises through the literacy, ICTs, income-generating processes in their day-to-day training of the girls. Their thoughts and experiences happened from being change agents, who were facilitating empowerment among teenage girls.

A few of the responses from the participants in relation to the question of what empowerment is, and, subsequently, what the concept meant to them are as follows: Beti, one of the facilitators, explained that empowerment is *"Trying to give authority to someone to make that person feel they belong and encouraged him or her to know that they can reach their goals."* For Nita, another facilitator, she explained that it was *"To give the right information to people to stand up for themselves."* While Abela explained it as:

“Moving from your comfort zone to engage in community activities.” Esha added that *“Empowerment is supporting people financially so they can build on the resources to help their careers.”* Petra, the parent, simply stated that the concept is *“About encouraging your daughter not to be afraid to try and take up challenges.”* Empowerment to the education officer was related to *“Creating and reinforcing programs in schools that teach both boys and girls to better understand the concepts of gender, equality, and empowerment because empowerment needs to be understood before it can be demonstrated.”* The concept, from the perspective of Dani, one of the facilitator, however was that empowerment was about *“empowering self, family and community. Empowering a woman is not only for her to become rich but rather how beneficial she is to herself, her family, and community is what I consider as empowerment.”* Participants’ responses noticeably reflect the feminist principles of voice, agency, leadership and community.

5.2(v)NGOs and Ghana Education Service’s Partnership within school-community

Participants described school-community clubs’ relations to be disappointing, as some teachers and community members alleged that they were unconvinced about the clubs. While the community clubs extend services to schools, the school clubs remain within the schools’ premises. In their attempt to forge a school-community relationship however, two facilitators from the community girls’ clubs complained that some teachers in schools without girls’ clubs do express hostility towards them when invited by the principals to hold activities, motivational talks, and to introduce the clubs, at the schools. As Dani, one of the club’s facilitator explained, *“We are perceived as intruders by the teachers although we were officially invited. Surprisingly the attitudes of the teachers do not inhibit the girls from participating in the activities.”* Petra, one of the parents, however, stated that she was *“happy my daughter attends the girls club in her school. I have seen a lot of changes in her. She is maturing and now speaks like an adult (smiling).”*

Advisedly, the GES-GEU should create awareness among (public) school teachers that the objectives of empowerment are to attract as many girls as possible into what can be called the net of change, so the girls can be exposed to the pathways of change if females are to be emancipated. To ensure this happens, learning should not be limited to the classroom but should equally be offered informally if the education system is to achieve its goals of empowering girls. A question about the GES’ relationship with the clubs was answered with headshaking and chuckles from individual facilitators. As Dani explained, *“Madam, please don’t ask about the GES. They had never visited our club during the nine years of our existence but the district office is not far from here.”* Similarly, Beti also recollected that *“Our organization was invited once to facilitate a GES-Ministry of Communication*

(MoC) two-day digital literacy training for girls from different public schools in a library facility, but the GES never visited our club.” Beti’s club, Club C did receive the invite and the club’s girls did participate in the program. Beti lauded it as a good experience for her and the girls and wished GES/MoC could sustain the program.

Similarly, NGO partnership relationship with clubs was weakened after the completion of projects. As Dani mentioned, *“An international NGO occasionally invites our club to their functions but that’s all. There is no written contract between our organizations in terms of partnership.”* The literature reviewed on this issue mentioned that international NGOs, like Actionaid, Plan International, and Care International conduct various advocacy interventions on girls’ education and empowerment and partner with local NGOs, like Child Rights International, to form girls’ and child rights clubs across the country. Yet, facilitators from the clubs that participated in this study reported that they have not partnered with any of the above organization, although these organizations seem to be well resourced and extend their resources to the local NGOs they partner and work with. The clubs need funds to operate and deliver their programs. The managers of the girls’ clubs therefore expressed the need to partner with such resource-endowed organizations to access the sub-grants they extend to local partners for programming.

5.2(vi) Disability, (a) bilities, and inclusion

Although the facilitators claimed the clubs were inclusive and welcome girls with disabilities (GWDs), PWDs were noticeably absent from the clubs that were visited. The facilitators could not readily identify reasons for their absence, but I observed structural issues might have been one of the challenges. Club A for instance, is located on the second-floor of high rise building that does not have an elevator, meaning the club’s space is only accessible by stairs. Another club had a placed rows of desks with computers for training in their space, but this arrangement did not offer adequate room for someone using a mobility device to navigate. Despite these observations, Edita, the education officer reiterated, that: *“The GES curriculum talks about how PWDs and GWD are included in educational activities. Rather, parents don’t want their children to participate in the programs for fear of been hurt or been bullied by their peers.”* The response from Dani, one of the club’s facilitators, however confirmed the reservations of clubs on the subject. He explained that: *“This club is inclusive, but GWDs do not see the need to come to learn. We had a girl who is developmentally challenged but she stopped coming. We also had a volunteer who is disabled but did not want to come any more.”* The question is: why did the individuals stop? And does recruitment play a role in their absence, or the space is not disability-friendly?

As much as the literature has elaborated on girls' education, the significance of girls' clubs in girls' empowerment, and the contribution of NGOs in improving girls' school retention rates, issues of disability and accessibility were negligible in the studies. Also, while the girls interviewed were open to having GWDs also attend their clubs, facilitators' preparedness to work with GWDs was uncertain because: they seem not to have been intentional in signing up GWDs into the clubs. For example, as Beti, one of the facilitators said, *"Inclusive? Yes, we are. PWDs are welcome if they want to learn technology."* Her response was unconvincing and not surprising in that, as much as social justice education advocates for inclusion of different bodies in the learning spaces, the practice has been quite tenuous in epistemologies in Ghana through my experience as a classroom teacher and observations I have made in various school environments. But feminist pedagogy advocates for social justice in the education of all females. It is the reason this study sought to understand and advocate for inclusion, diversity, and accessibility in education in Ghana - to reflect not just in words but also in deeds.

5.2(vii) Funding and resources

The society, and parents recognize the girls' clubs as learning hubs, training centres, safe havens, and digital-tech training spaces. But while they continue to be forward thinking and purposeful, resource mobilization appears to be a fundamental challenge for the clubs in Ghana. The facilitators and the girls cited insufficient funding and a lack of resources to hinder their interventions and inhibit them from broadening their base to accommodate more girls. Participants verbally listed the resource needs of their clubs, which include the following: a: space to operate; computers for digital literacy; means of transportation; materials to boost reading and writing literacy; funds to finance the day-to-day programs and operational needs; and remuneration for resource persons. A major grantor for Club A was wrapping up at the time of our interviews. Nita's school-based club was yet to source external project funds, leading them to be resource-constrained although they did receive occasional in-kind and cash gifts from well wishers to support their club. Esha also stated, *"We have only two laptops for our mobile ICT training program to teach girls in our villages clubs in the northern regions. I wish we had enough because more girls have joined the club. They do take turns to learn from the screen which isn't the best though."* Abela explained that their *"club embarked on a community outreach during the COVID-19 school closures to assist children with reading, and to recruit girls to join the club. The patronage increased weekly, but our materials were insufficient, and the children did not want to share during lesson time so they fight over who should hold the material. My club do not have money to print more materials, so we try to calm them down when they fight. I feel*

sad when they fight.”Parents and the girls do not pay fees for their children to participate in the clubs, because the clubs do not charge fees for their services. This situation requires the clubs to explore and obtain external funding to sustain their programs.

5.2(viii) **Successful and unsuccessful clubs**

All nine participants (i.e. the facilitators, the girls, the education officer, and the parent) were asked to characterise what made a successful and an unsuccessful club. The objective of the inquiry was to assess the following: a) the current situation of the girls’ clubs from the voices of both owners and club beneficiaries and b) the extent to which girls’ empowerment is attributed to the accomplishment of a club or otherwise.

According to Esha: *“A successful club is where so much is done with little resource to bring out the creativity of the girls.”* Nita added, that, *“A mark of our success implies that the club should have a vision, see to it that the girls are on the right course, and create room for improvement but in a way that you are changing mind-sets and perceptions.”* Dani’s response was that the

Programs and resources available to a girls’ club should not be considered as success rather, a successful club must have the ability to survive and be sustainable despite challenges with organizations, partners, the community, schools, and parents. The girls must also be able to show what they had learned and communities should look at the growth and achievement rather than the appearance and behaviour of the child. A successful club should be results-oriented; show results of the impact of their work, which is the outcome of the program, and that, should reflect in the children (girls) because donors want to see lessons learnt and best stories. Success should not be transactional; it should not be about the size of the organization and the amount of funding and number of partnerships. Successful clubs should allow girls to have the freedom to choose and to direct their learning.

Four of the participants, Nita, Dani, and Beti, and one of the girls, Abela, considered unsuccessful clubs as organizations with money but without impactful interventions. Dani added, *“Girls clubs that are focused change strategy to meet the learning demands of the girls. The girls want to learn things beyond just homework support and reading so girls clubs need to adopt strategies to sustain their interests otherwise they would stop patronizing the club and that will result in the closure of that club.”* The statements imply that insufficient programs and absence of a strategy had, in the past, forced some clubs

to involuntarily shut down, regardless of their access to resources. The participants' points clearly demonstrate that successful clubs are those actively working to socio-cognitively empower girls. In other words, non-strategic clubs failed to innovate and become unattractive to the girls. For that reason, they then become unable to draw patronage, which concurs with Dani's statement.

It was noted that clubs anticipate the demands of the job market and are building the capacity and nurturing the professional interests of the girls through their micro and major projects. This implies the multi-layered characteristics of their work as a strategy to sustain the interventions. Also, Clubs A and C had developed a sustainability strategy whereby girls who exhibit leadership skills are mentored to become facilitators through a trainer-of-learners' approach.

The distinction by the participants between a successful, and unsuccessful club significantly posits successful girls' clubs as ones not merely with quality pedagogy but equally imperative are the strategies of engagement and sustainability to remain relevant.

6.0 Conclusion and recommendations

Access to basic education should be taken seriously in the development process in Ghana because education advances the cause of humanity, keeps girls in school, motivates and empowers them to accomplish their ambitions to be assets to society, facilitates achieving gender equality, and takes people out of poverty. The findings of the study supported the development of some recommendations that could work towards advancing girls' clubs in Ghana.

6.1 Proposed recommendations

Six key recommendations for girls' clubs in Ghana emerged from this study. They are outlined in detail below:

- 1) Processes/practices of girls' clubs need to be modified for coordination activities, the recruitment of girls, relationship building, and engagement processes with education partners to advance girls' clubs in Ghana. Findings from previous studies, interviews with the study participants, the PI's field notes collectively helped to build a model (see figure 3 below) to suggest how the operating processes can be modified.

Figure 3A depicts the initial operating process of the clubs as outlined earlier in section two. Figure 3B is the revised version been recommended to enhance the effectiveness of girls club in Ghana. Figure 3B is therefore a modification of Figure 3A and which has been placed side-by-side to demonstrate the differences.

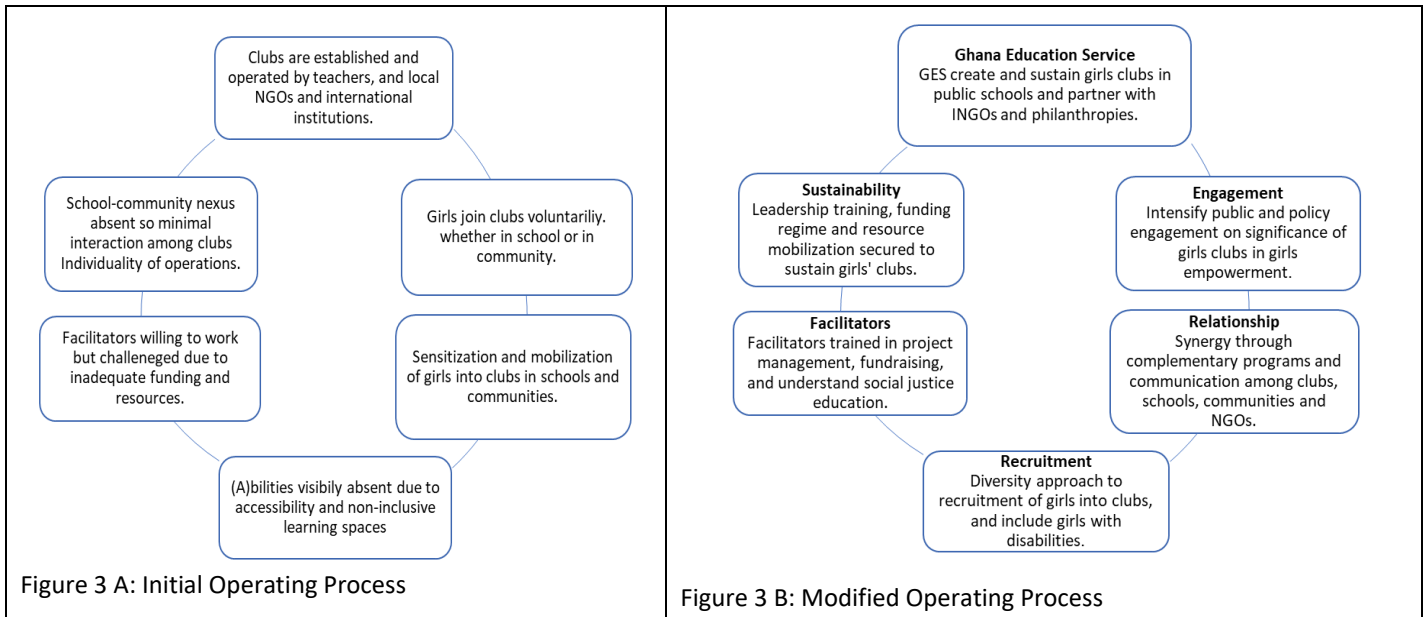


Figure 3: Modified processes and practices for girls' clubs

2) The pedagogy of empowerment as a holistic rather than a bifurcated education process needs to be recognized in Ghana because school, community clubs, and the home form an ecosystem of learning. The behaviour change to empower the role of girls' clubs needs to be acknowledged and reinforced in this process.

3) Girl-centred and disability-friendly learning environments need to be promoted to ensure the clubs are inclusive, accessible, and conducive for learning to all girls.

4) Active participation of Ghana Education Service (GES), the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP), and the Department of Social Welfare are required to support the work of girls' clubs. The agencies need to equip facilitators/educators with technical skills and training materials to help the clubs accomplish their girls' empowerment goals.

5) A praxis teaching and learning environment need to be created by girls' clubs that stimulates innovation and accommodates critical thinking to bring the girls into self-awareness. These skills will allow them to ask questions and resolve issues that could negatively affect their well-being.

6) Sustainable means need to be found or created to keep the flow of funding and resources available to girls' clubs to support their leadership, activities, and projects.

6.2 Challenges

The study's intention to capture the lived experiences of GWDs to determine how different (a)ilities engage with the pedagogy was not achieved because there were no GWDs at the clubs visited to be interviewed. Parents are yet to understand gender equality and the essence of girls' clubs in girls' empowerment, so some parents continue to overburden their girls with house chores. This practice hold back girls from joining both the school, and community clubs. Furthermore, most public schools do not have girls clubs. The clubs were inactive in schools where the clubs were once created. Sadly, a large number of girls in Ghana attend public schools. They become vulnerable to abuse and delinquency where parental supervision is minimal. Unfortunately, some lack the knowledge to perceive abuses, know their rights and the confidence to challenge the perpetrators. They eventually become victims of rape, molestation, teenage pregnancy and school dropouts. Also, having to project girls clubs nationally using a relatively smaller participant sample size - 9 from one region of Ghana was a challenge as one had to keep to the boundaries of the participants' responses yet expand the arguments on broader national level for policy considerations. A major interruption to this project was the unscheduled and unannounced interruption in electrical power supply across Ghana from somewhere 2019 to date. The process did destroyed computers, and external hard drive which caused the loss of information and reports prepared for the project which consequently interrupt delivery schedules.

6.3 Limitations

There were various limitations and challenge that emerged when conducting this study. First, it was difficult to locate school-based girls' clubs as well as clubs that were solely for girls for this study's sample. This challenge could be due to an array of factors, such as because the clubs not having an internet presence, not being active in this study's research location, or not focusing solely on girls. For example, many local NGOs in Ghana are simultaneously involved in numerous interventions, like agriculture, girls/women's empowerment, sanitation, literacy; therefore, they work with a mixed target of beneficiaries rather than just girls. They may also organize a book reading or a once-off activity within their program milieu that is for girls in their community and label the gathering as its "girls clubs". The arrangements obviously take away exclusive gender-specific learning opportunities for girls in that, girls' clubs are girl-centred spaces for girl teenagers to learn about themselves and the challenges of growing up as girls in a particular context.

6.4 Way forward - policy development and future research

The government of Ghana talks about education of the girl-child as critical to a country's development and has subsequently created the GEU within the GES to facilitate girls' education to bridge the gender equality gap. The gap can be narrowed through the development and implementation of robust policy strategies by the government which include the following:

- GES-GEU to revisit its policy on girls' clubs to reactivate clubs and form clubs in all public schools where they are currently absent across the country.
- Comparative study needs to be conducted on the differences between school-based and community-based girls' clubs in Ghana to examine the extent to which the two different types of clubs impact girls' empowerment. Findings can be used to inform policy planning for girls' clubs moving forward.
- STEM vacation boot camps for JHS and SHS schoolgirls should be increased at a national level to increase interest in the applied sciences and develop digital and technology skills for girls to produce tech protégées, and scientists.
- Incentives need to be developed and sustained to encourage female (and male) teachers to become facilitators of girls' clubs to reinforce female teacher role models in the school system at a national level.

Conclusion

The Girls' Clubs in Girls' Empowerment study revealed that there are opportunities for girls' clubs in Ghana, as the clubs can make important contributions to the basic and non-formal education of girls from a socio-learning perspective. The pedagogy is diverse, organized, and complements teaching instruction and learning and skills offered by the formal education sector. While clubs consider girls empowerment to be the responsibility of the entire society, and are developing girls cognitively, socially, and intellectually despite their meagre resources, their effort to include girls with disabilities in the programs is a challenge. One of the laws of UNCRC calls for children to be educated, taught about rights, and to have the freedom to associate. It seems the laws are just cited in the school curriculum in Ghana with little explanation to generate conversations to deepen the knowledge and understanding of girls about the rights. The girls' clubs, on the other hand, expatiate on the laws in detail through skits and drama they organize in their programs to convey the messages. Education policies in Ghana must work, as some are ad hoc, short-lived, and happened to be projects rather than long-term programs. The GEU-GES needs to actively intensify the formation and/or the activation of girls clubs and supervision of the clubs in schools while they also lobby for donor resources, support, and stakeholder capacity building to ensure efficiency of the clubs. It must be noted: that an empowered girl is a knowledgeable girl, and a knowledgeable girl is an asset to society and so the purpose for the existence of girls' clubs must be sustained. Girls cannot wait to learn in this fast-paced world where information and knowledge happened to be the new currency. They must therefore be given every opportunity to learn.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Interview guide for girls

Appendix 2: Interview guide for facilitators

Appendix 3: Interview guide for parents

Appendix 4: Interview guide for GES staff

Appendix 5: Consent form for participants

Consent Form for Participants

My name is We are from MCU and are conducting a study on Girls Clubs and girls' empowerment in Ghana. We would like to ask you a few questions to capture your perception, experiences and knowledge specifically about your club, and Girls Clubs in Ghana in general. The interview will be between 10-15 minutes. The conversation is strictly confidential so your name would not appear in any document because pseudonyms would be used when preparing the report. You however have the right to withdraw from the conversation at any point if you no longer want to continue with the interview. Please append your initials to the Consent Form if you wish to be interviewed to indicate that you have agreed to speak to us.

Thank you very much.

Interviewee Initials:.....

Club/Location.....

Interviewer Name and date.....