

**TOWARDS A BETTER GHANA? UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Adwoa Frimpomaa-Afrane  
Master's Thesis  
Development Education and International Cooperation Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy  
University of Jyväskylä  
Spring 2023

**UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ**

Faculty Humanities and Social Sciences	Department Social Sciences and Philosophy
Author Adwoa Frimpomaa-Afrane	
Title TOWARDS A BETTER GHANA? UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION	
Subject Development, Education and International Cooperation	Degree submitted for: Master of Social Science
Month and year May, 2023	Number of pages 67
Supervisor Tiina Kontinen	
<h2>Abstract</h2> <p>This thesis aims to explore the concept of “Youth development” in the Ghanaian context, with emphases on identifying the factors that foster and hinder youth development in the country especially from the perspectives of students in higher education institutions. Based on previous research the concept of youth development is defined as a process geared at preparing young people to readily meet challenges associated with adolescence and adulthood, while reaching their full potential. Development has evolved beyond mere economic growth to encompass social, environmental, and other dimensions. With Ghana experiencing a high youthful population, understanding the factors that hinder or support youth development is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders. The study adopts a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews with 10 respondents from various departments in higher education institutions. The data collection process considered the demographics, awareness of existing youth development intervention, perceptions of students on youth development in Ghana, and suggestions for policy improvement. A thematic analysis of the interview was conducted with Atlas.ti. Findings from the study reveal three topmost meanings of the concept: available opportunities, financial stability and job or employment opportunities. The study highlights institutional challenges, rigid education, aid dependence, cultural barriers, and low youth involvement as hindrances to development. It emphasizes youth inclusion in policymaking and evidence-based interventions to address these barriers. The research contributes to the discourse on youth development and informs the design of appropriate policies and interventions to promote youth well-being and contribute to national development.</p>	
Keywords Youth, Youth development, higher education	
Depository University of Jyväskylä	
Additional information	

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful to God Almighty for the grace and for seeing me through this 2-year journey.

My appreciation also goes to the participants of this study, from the University of Ghana, Central University College and KNUST. Without their willingness and availability, it would not have been possible to come up with this study.

Special thanks go to my sister, Akua Agyeiwaa Afrane (Snr, Lecturer) at the Central University College for her support and leading towards the recruitment of participants, and to my father and brother Samuel Erasmus Afrane and Kwaku Bonsu Afrane respectively, for their immense support and encouragement throughout the study period.

I am again grateful for the guidance and patience of my supervisor Tiina Kontinen, and to my year group and friends particularly Samuel Botchway and Stephen Kwadwo Anarley. With financial support from JYU-CAN I was able to travel to Ghana for the study.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

YD:	Youth Development
YDP:	Youth Development Policy
NYDP:	National Youth Development Policy
PYD:	Positive Youth Development
CSOs:	Civil Society Organizations
NGOs:	Non-Governmental Organizations

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

For centuries now, the concept of youth development has been widely discussed and investigated by researchers in the field of social sciences as well as by state officials, policy makers and civil society at large. The centrality of the concept in the field of development, and to the growth and development of countries across the globe makes it exigent, thus demanding constant attention. It is in this wise that it is considered further to be a contentious concept just as the broader concept, development. Among the economists, development practitioners, politicians, and other sub-groups with interests in societal issues, the practice, components, expected outcomes and processes associated with the concept of youth development is either evolving or one with certain key attributes that cannot be left out.

Golden (2016) reports that the growth of an economy for the economist, is key to development. He, however, acknowledges that, evolution has shaped the meaning of development, and thus paving way for the inclusion of areas such as the environment, social and other aspects. This inclusion is very paramount for this study.

The emergence of the concept of youth development is credited to the “early years of the twenty-first century” (Lerner et al., 2002) due to the active work and roles of scholars, development practitioners and policy makers (p. 11). The concept however, led to the its close linkage and discussions around civic activities, capabilities leading to the eventual generation of meaningful positive interventions and politico-socio cultural as well as economic policies executed and implemented by governments, development cooperations and civil society organizations in ensuring improvement or establishing ideal, positive and favorable conditions for the youths and countries in general. This affirms Pieterse (2013), remarks that the intention of development evolves around the knowledge of some crises.

For some, the concept of youth development is interpreted along concepts and practices of wellbeing, decent jobs acquisition and creation, good health, education, decent living, freedom, progress, and many inexhaustible lists. For instance, Lerner et al (2002) in his book on Positive youth development: thriving as the basis of personhood and civil society makes inferences to the emergence of vocabularies and concepts including moral development, civic engagement and thriving (p. 11). Likewise, the concepts economic empowerment, youth participation and education as used by Hoetu (2011)



in his work on ensuring effective youth development in Ghana. Literature on adolescent life and growth, as well as in the field of positive youth development (PYD) provides philosophical discussions on the relationship between purpose and thriving, as well as different approaches to defining and measuring purpose while emphasizing the importance of precise definitions for empirical measurement, (Going and Mariano, 2011). The exploration of perspectives on adolescent and adult life in connection to identified concepts highlights that purpose can be seen as both an indicator and an outcome of thriving, with various aspects such as future orientation, contribution, meaning, commitment, and focus associated with purpose, is significant in youth development.

The meaning of the concept of youth development can thus have both specific, multi-dimensional and general definitions as well as measurement approaches. Ranging from specific and one-dimensional to specific and multidimensional. While emphasis is put on the youth, the complexity of purpose and the need to consider multiple dimensions and perspectives when examining their role in development must not be overlooked as there is a direct link to the overall inward growth for countries. While it is true that the concept of youth development has been most associated with economic growth and inequalities with work and in the state, the increase in global population, changes and implications of demographic structures on socio-economic development, resource distribution, high demands, emergence of pandemics, as well as the impact of technology and globalization re-enforces the need for governments and relevant stakeholders to put in place mechanisms that will help optimize their human resource particularly the youthful populations to ensure their individual development agendas and desired growth is obtained.

Over the years reports show increase of older populations in Japan, Italy, Portugal, Greece, and Finland, countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Uganda, and Chad on the other hand continues to face high youthful populations (Burton, 2017; Haider, 2017; Radhika, 2020). Like every other country, Ghana, pursues development for all sectors of its economy, ranging from Economic, Social, Environmental to Institutional. Since the country's colonial period to post independence, different governors, presidents and ministers have worked in line with various ministries and agencies to ensure growth and improvement in the lives of citizens through development planning and policies. With a continuous increasing youthful population with about 57% being under the age of 25, the country continues to make significant strides in attempts to ensuring the development of youths. Current and former governments established several programs to promote education, health, and employment opportunities for young people in the country. Various institutions championed by the National Youth Authority, an institution under the country's Ministry of Youth and Sports have pursued youth policies that will train, equip and provide the right environment and condition to enable them to contribute to national development. The country has over the years recorded some amount of progress in the overall wellbeing and living conditions of youths in areas of unemployment, school enrollment, health and poverty reduction, nonetheless, the youths are still faced with challenges and impediments that hinders

their development contribution to national development (Secretariat, 2021). In 2021, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Youth Authority stated the average percentage rate of unemployed youths to be 8%. From the total 34.2 percent of the overall youth population in Ghana, majority of these youths are engaged in the informal sector of the economy “specifically in vulnerable employment” (pg. v). Ghana’s current government led by H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo has also recognized the growing potentials of the youths and emphasized the need for an evidenced based interventions in ensuring youth development (Secretariat, 2021).

Thus, the focus of this research is to explore the concept “youth development” in the Ghanaian context by engaging youths, specifically those in higher education. This will aid in better understanding Ghana’s current situation and the factors facilitating and hindering youth development in the country. Since the youth is generally recognized as an important part of nation development, a study like this in a developing country is of great importance to donors, nationals, and policy makers. The study is intended to inform policy makers, analysts, donors and other stakeholders of the needs of the Ghanaian youths thus allowing for appropriate development initiatives, and responsive designs to undertake that will allow for a successful policy and ensure real growth or development. Critically reviewing the country’s youth policies and interventions is key to achieving growth and this calls for the inclusion of the Ghanaian youth in policy making. Furthermore, this study contributes to development discourses, and research as a preliminary study for further research.

## **1.1 Research problem and questions.**

Considering that this is an exploratory study on the perceptions of students (youths) in higher education institutions in Ghana and how they resonate with existing policy interventions, it is important to capture all ideas that will best provide answers and clarity to reviewing youth development interventions and existing policies to better provide needed services and support for ensuring desired development. The overall research problem is: What are the factors affecting youth development in Ghana?

The problem is address through the following questions;

- I. How do students in higher educational institutions conceptualize “youth development”?
- II. From the perspective of the students in higher education institutions, what are the hindrances and facilitators of youth development in Ghana?

The first research question is very fundamental as it aims to provide an understanding of the concept within the context of the study among other reasons.

Firstly, by exploring how students in higher education institutions conceptualize youth development, the study can gain insights into their beliefs, values, and aspirations regarding their own development and the development of their communities and country. Understanding their perspectives is essential for designing effective policies and interventions that align with their needs and aspirations. It provides an opportunity to incorporate the voices and ideas of the youth into the policymaking process, ensuring their active participation and ownership.

Secondly, focusing on students in higher education institutions allows for a specific examination of a subgroup that may have different experiences, opportunities, and challenges compared to other categories of youths. The insights gained from this group can inform targeted interventions and initiatives that address the unique needs and circumstances of educated youths. Lastly, understanding the dynamism and similarities in the perceptions of the youths can provide valuable insights into the broader dynamics and factors influencing youth development across Ghana. The findings can contribute to the formulation of evidence-based policies and strategies that address the challenges and leverage the potential of youth development nationwide.

The second research question enriches the study by providing the key factors affecting the development of youths in the county. This provides the main answer to the problem of the study.

Overall, this research questions help shed light on the concept, providing valuable insights for policymakers, analysts, donors, and other stakeholders involved in youth development initiatives. It aims to bridge the gap between policy and practice by incorporating the voices of the youth and informing the design and implementation of effective youth development programs in Ghana. The questions of the study is investigated with qualitative interviews among students in higher education institutions.

## **1.2 The structure of the study**

This research consists of five main chapters. Chapter one introduces the background, objectives, research problem, and questions, emphasizing the importance of informed development paths and the need for research. Chapter two provides information on the context of the study in terms of history, geographic positioning, culture, economic and political systems, development history and relevant literature reviewed on youth development from the global perspective narrowed to the study area. Chapter three focuses on the theoretical framework inspiring the study, with a emphasis on key related concepts.

Chapter four of this research explains the detailed methods employed, highlighting the use of a qualitative approach and software used in the gathering and management of information from participants. Chapter five presents the discussions and analysis

of the findings, exploring the Ghanaian youth's understanding of youth development, highlighting the challenges, and facilitators to youth development in Ghana.

## **2 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter and review reports on the geographic location of Ghana, identified ethnic groups, languages, culture, and economic activities, shedding light on the country's fascinating historical trajectory as well as its political and development practices.

### **2.1 Ghana; geography, culture and economic activities**

The study is conducted in Ghana, a country located in West of Africa. It is bordered by three countries: Ivory Coast to the West, Burkina Faso to the North, Togo to the East. and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. Its favorable location along the coast has historically facilitated trade and contact with other regions, contributing to the country's cultural diversity and economic significance (Ayee, 2015). As a country, there are a wide array of ethnic groups with each having its distinct cultural practices and languages. The major ethnic groups in Ghana are the Akan, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, Mole-Dagbani, and Hausa, among others. The Akan ethnic group however, constitutes the largest in the country, as it comprises the Ashanti, Fante, and Akuapem subgroups. The Akan language, Twi, serves as one of the most widely spoken in the country. The country has a diverse and vibrant cultural heritage characterized by various artistic expressions, traditional festivals, and social customs, which is believed to have a merit for development (Asante, 2015). Another significant economic activity that has shaped its development is its agricultural sector with exports in products such as cocoa, timber, and minerals. In modern times, Ghana has witnessed the growth of industries such as manufacturing, petroleum, and services, contributing to its economic diversification (World Bank, 2020). Ghana has a significant historical legacy as the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence from colonial rule. After centuries of European influence and the establishment of various trading posts, Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast, achieved independence from British colonial rule on March 6, 1957. This momentous event marked a turning point in the country's history and inspired liberation movements across Africa (Agyeman-Duah, 2017).



Figure 1. 1 Geographic map of Ghana showing its position on the African map as well as neighboring West African countries. Picture uploaded by; Divine Kwaku Ahadzie.

## 2.2 Political structure and development history

Ghana has experienced stability in its politics making it gain recognition and thus becoming a beacon of democracy in the region. This, however, was not the case in past decades as it was highly characterized by autocracy and military rules (Apter, 2015).

Ghana is a democratic country with three distinct yet inseparable bodies forming its system of government namely, the executive, legislative, and judiciary. The executive arm of government headed by the head of state; the President, is elected every 4 years according to Article 66 (1) of the Constitution of Ghana and is mandated by the constitution to oversee the activities of the country's development planning and execution. This makes the National Development Planning Commission responsible to the president.

The history of Ghana's development planning dates back almost a hundred years ago. Right from the colonial times with different governors aiming to transform a part of

the economy or society. According to an online source, Governor Sir Gordon Guggisberg unveiled a ten-year program (1920 - 1930) in 1920. After the country gained independence, it began its developmental programs under the first Republic with President Nkrumah. Since then, the country has also had several other short term to medium-term national development plans such as the '7-Year Development Plan for National Reconstruction and Development (1963/64-1969/70), the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (2001-2003), the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (2004-2007) and the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (2015-2020)' but none of these lead to any real improvements or proved to be successful as the outcomes did not tally with the intended objectives. The country is categorized as part of the poor countries due to its Lower - Middle-Income economy status (World Economic League Table, 2021) and other challenges as compared to the developed countries.

The country has over the years made significant strides in sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure development, promoting socio-economic progress and human development (World Bank, 2020). Additionally, Ghana has gained international recognition for its commitment to environmental conservation and sustainable development (Government of Ghana, 2018).

### **2.3 Youth development**

Youth development refers to the process through which young individuals acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and opportunities necessary for their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth. It encompasses the transition from adolescence to adulthood, with a focus on empowering young people to reach their full potential and become active and productive members of society.

In the global context, youth development is recognized as a critical aspect of sustainable development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly highlight the importance of investing in youth to achieve social, economic, and environmental progress. These goals emphasize access to quality education, employment opportunities, healthcare, and social inclusion for young people worldwide (United Nations, 2015). Additionally, international organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank promote comprehensive approaches to youth development that encompass education, health, civic engagement, and entrepreneurship (Benson et al., 2011). Despite this recognition, the development of youths continues to pose a challenge to governments, policy makers and other stakeholders. This is partly due to the rapid globalization and the ever-increasing needs of youths coupled with increase in youthful populations across the globe.

Narrowing the focus to Ghana, youth development is pivotal in the development of the country. In Ghana, youths are considered as a valuable part of the human resources as they constitute the "true wealth and future of a country and must be harnessed for national development" (Government of Ghana, 2010). With a significantly

youthful population of approximately 57% under the age of 25 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2023; World Bank, 2019), they present Ghana with both opportunities and challenges for the nation's development thus, highlighting the importance in addressing the needs and aspirations of this demographic group.

On the one hand, the youthful population offers immense potential for economic growth, innovation, and social transformation. They possess the energy, creativity, and dynamism to drive progress in various sectors, including entrepreneurship, technology, and agriculture. On the other hand, the country currently faces the challenge of harnessing this potential effectively. High youth unemployment rates, limited access to quality education and skills training, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful engagement, inadequate health services pose obstacles to youth development in Ghana hence hindering the full realization of the potentials of the youth (National Youth Authority, 2018; Ghana Statistical Service, 2018; International Labour Organization, 2020). In the country, issues of unemployment and underemployment are significant among the challenges for Ghanaian youth, leading to a loss of productivity and social unrest. Limited job opportunities, inadequate vocational training, and a mismatch between skills and employment requirements contribute to the youth employment crisis (International Labour Organization, 2020).

To address these challenges and unlock the potential of the youthful population, Ghana has implemented various initiatives and policies. The National Youth Policy of Ghana serves as a framework for promoting youth empowerment, participation, and employment (National Youth Authority, 2010). A comprehensive and integrated approaches to youth development including the promoting youth participation in decision-making processes, strengthening social protection systems, expanding access to quality education and vocational training, facilitating entrepreneurship to enhance youth employability and create sustainable livelihoods, and improving healthcare services have been implemented through various youth development programmes in the country (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

## **2.4 The National Youth Policy**

Having a comprehensive National Youth Policy allows both government and stakeholders to engage the youth and in meaningful partnership to develop appropriate interventions and services for youth empowerment and development. In Ghana, both long- and medium-term policy frameworks provides the guidelines and set objectives for ensuring youth development. Thus, recognizing the need for proper documentation and a conscious effort to train and integrate the youth into the development discourse, a National Youth Policy was formulated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in collaboration National Development Planning Commission to guide development of the youth. It is the hope of this policy to guide, engage, empower the youth and create for them, opportunities for effective participation in the country's goals towards development (National Youth Authority, 2018).



The National Youth Policy of Ghana, formulated in 2010, serves as a comprehensive framework for youth development in the country (Government of Ghana, 2010). It aims to address the diverse needs and aspirations of young people and provides guidelines for promoting their education, health, employment, and participation in decision-making processes. The policy emphasizes the importance of partnerships between government, civil society, and the private sector to create an enabling environment for youth development.

One significant aspect of Ghana's youth development policies is education. Education plays a central role in youth development by enabling young people to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for employment and active citizenship. Also, education allows for economic development considering the increase in technology and globalization. As such, the government has implemented various programs and initiatives to increase access to quality education for young people. For instance, the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy, introduced in 2017, provides free secondary education for all Ghanaian students (Government of Ghana, 2017). This policy is reported to have significantly expanded educational opportunities for young people, promoting inclusivity and reducing financial barriers to education. In Ghana, efforts have been made to increase access to education, but disparities still exist, particularly in rural areas (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Additionally, the relevance and quality of education need to be improved to equip Ghanaian youth with marketable skills that align with the demands of the labor market (International Labour Organization, 2020).

In terms of employment and entrepreneurship, the government has implemented several initiatives to address youth unemployment and underemployment. The National Youth Employment Program (NYEP), now known as the Nation Builders Corps (NABCO), aims to provide skills training and job placements for unemployed graduates (Government of Ghana, 2018). Youth development initiatives such as school youth was used to train 1,597 people in areas of leadership, Nabco, NEIP and YES programmes were also extended to reach more youths.

Additionally, the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Plan (NEIP) supports young entrepreneurs by providing funding, mentorship, and business development services (Government of Ghana, 2017). These initiatives demonstrate the government's commitment to fostering youth-led enterprises and creating job opportunities for Ghanaian youth.

## **2.5 The National Youth Authority (NYA) and National Development Planning Commission (NDPC)**

As a way of including the participation and representation of youths in decision making processes, the government has established the National Youth Authority (NYA) to serve as the coordinating body for youth-related issues (Government of Ghana, 2010). The National Youth Authority Act, 2016 was also established by government to

enhance the development of the youth, creative potential, discipline, a spirit of nationalism, patriotism and a sense of propriety and civic responsibility for effective participation in the national development agenda. Hence, the revision of the National Youth Policy, 2010 and subsequent youth development modules rolled out by successive governments.

The National Youth Authority (NYA) and the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) both play crucial roles in the development of Ghana's youth. These are government organizations responsible for formulating policies, coordinating programs, and implementing initiatives aimed at promoting youth development, empowerment, and participation in the nation's development agenda. The NYA serves as the focal point for youth development by collaborating with government ministries, agencies, civil society organizations, and international partners to implement initiatives that enhance youth education, skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment. The NYA's programs include vocational training, mentorship schemes, entrepreneurship support, and job placement services, all geared towards equipping young people with the necessary tools for sustainable livelihoods.

In addition, National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) established under Articles 86 and 87 of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, which forms part of the Executive body with such functions as advising the president on development planning policy and strategy, taking development initiatives on its own or at the request of the president, monitor, and coordinate development policies, programmes and projects among others (Ghana, 1992 Constitution) is pivotal to the development interventions in Ghana. The Chairman of the Commission is appointed by the president, together with the Council of State. However, the National Development Planning Commission is a neutral body that is primarily focused on the realization of the continual developmental aspirations of Ghana. The NDPC, per its mandate has overseen formulation and implementation of both long- and medium-term policy frameworks such as An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All (2018-2021), Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA - 2014-2017), and the Seven Year Development Plan. The GSGDA sets out the government's vision and priorities for sustainable development, including specific objectives and strategies related to youth empowerment, education, employment, and participation. The NDPC collaborates closely with the NYA and other stakeholders to integrate youth concerns into national development planning. It conducts research, collects data, and analyzes youth-related indicators to inform policy formulation and decision-making processes. The NDPC's efforts ensure that youth development is mainstreamed and prioritized within the broader national development agenda.

Abubakari et al., (2018) report that most of the governments' policies are spearheaded by government ministries with limited inclusion of the National Development Planning Commission who have been instituted and mandated by the constitution to oversee development planning for the country (pg. 29). This makes the neutrality in policy implementation questionable. Just as the practice of politics is found in almost all parts of the world, encompassing power, ideas, resource distribution, conflict resolution, as well as the governments that oversee it, it is not surprising to see its influence when it

comes to policymaking and its implementation as they wield more authority. Gyampo (2015) report on this case as a “Winner Takes It All Politics” implying the delivering of manifesto promises and populist ideas instead of (sticking) to the development plan. While Ghana's youth development policies have made significant strides, challenges persist. Limited implementation capacity, resource constraints, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms have been identified as key barriers to the effective implementation of youth development policies (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

## **2.6 Impact of CSOs, NGOs, and Private Entrepreneurs on Youth Development in Ghana**

Youth development in Ghana is not solely the responsibility of the government; it requires active involvement and collaboration from various stakeholders, including Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and private entrepreneurs.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a significant role in youth development in Ghana by serving as critical actors in advocating for youth rights, providing support services, and facilitating the participation of young people in decision-making processes. Several CSOs work towards addressing the diverse needs and challenges faced by young Ghanaians, including education, health, employment, and civic engagement. They play a crucial role in empowering youth, promoting their inclusion in society, and fostering their active participation in community development initiatives. CSOs often collaborate with government agencies, international organizations, and other stakeholders to create a conducive environment for youth development in Ghana (Bafour-Awuah, 2016; Owusu and Osei-Boateng, 2019; Owusu-Ansah et al, 2018)

For instance, the Ghana Youth Network (GYNet) is a prominent youth led CSO that advocates for youth rights and engages in capacity building activities to empower young people (Ghana Youth Network, n.d.). The Youth Advocates Ghana (YAG) is another CSO that actively engages in youth development initiatives, including mentorship programs and skills training (Youth Advocates Ghana, n.d.). These CSOs serve as platforms for youth voices, providing opportunities for participation and representation.

NGOs also contribute significantly to youth development in Ghana through various initiatives and programs. One notable example is the Youth Empowerment Synergy (YES-Ghana), an NGO that focuses on youth empowerment, education, and leadership development (Youth Empowerment Synergy, n.d.). YES-Ghana implements projects that promote youth entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and advocacy for youth-friendly policies. Another organization, the African Youth and Governance Convergence (AYGC), brings together youth leaders from across Africa to discuss and

find solutions to youth-related challenges (African Youth and Governance Convergence, n.d.). These NGOs provide platforms for skills development, knowledge sharing, and networking opportunities for young people.

Private entrepreneurs also play a significant role in youth development by creating job opportunities, fostering innovation, and contributing to economic growth. The government has implemented policies to support entrepreneurship and private sector involvement in youth development. The National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Plan (NEIP) provides funding and business development services to young entrepreneurs (Government of Ghana, 2017). Private entrepreneurs, particularly those in the technology and innovation sectors, have been instrumental in promoting digital skills and entrepreneurship among Ghanaian youth. For example, organizations like the Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology (MEST) offer training and support for young tech entrepreneurs (Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology, n.d.). While CSOs, NGOs, and private entrepreneurs contribute significantly to youth development in Ghana, they also face challenges. Limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and capacity constraints hinder their efforts to scale up their programs and initiatives (United Nations Development Programme, 2018). Additionally, coordination and collaboration among stakeholders need improvement to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize impact.

## **2.7 Role and influence of politics on Ghana's youth development**

There is a growing interest among scholars in exploring the interplay between nationalism, social policy, and territorial solidarity in developed multinational states. Considering that states are formed under an authority, it is essential to emphasize the linkages between citizenship, economic solidarity and development through social programs, in the contested nature of national boundaries.

In all countries, the role of politics is crucial in national development as it serves as the foundation upon which leadership, direction, and guidance is further provided to a country. Politics, may take different shapes and forms in different fields. Kpessa et al, (2011) expounds on the relationship between nation-building and social policy Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the argument is that development programmes mostly follow Western ideologies, post-independence nationalist leaders that emerged in Africa utilized health, housing, and education programs to foster a sense of national unity and overcame ethnic divisions caused by colonial state boundaries. However, the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s led to a decline in state-level integration and solidarity, resulting in territorial mobilization and fragmentation (Bantang 2005; McEwen 2006; Boychuk 2008; Kpessa et al., 2011). In Ghana, politics is a major drive of development programs and policy formulations. Not only does it serve as a tool for national solidarity, but it is also a deciding factor of who wins power. A candidate's probability of being elected to office largely depends on significant development projects and social policies and programs proposed. The politics of this is that elected persons will

eventually help to shape policies and strategies that promote economic growth, social welfare, and environmental sustainability. Through the democratic process, politics allows for the voices of the people to be heard and helps to ensure that the needs and interests of all citizens are considered. By creating a stable and predictable environment for businesses and investors, politics can stimulate economic growth and create jobs. Additionally, politics can help to address social and environmental issues such as poverty, inequality, and climate change by creating policies and programs that support vulnerable populations and protect the planet. As an essential component of national development, as is to provide the framework and support necessary to create a prosperous and sustainable future for all citizens.

Max Weber, in his writings on bureaucracy expresses an ideal state where government or politicians serve in the interest of the “collective” through neutral institutions (Duran, 2009). The case of Ghana is such that governments in power lead and implement their plans and political promises, which in most cases, differ and not always in line with the suggestions and plans of the National Development Planning Commission. Another contrasting report from Abubakari et al., (2018) reveals governments interest in supporting and committing to global efforts on sustainable development through its initiatives, programmes, and policies. This further implying that having a drawn development plan, a willing government, and a statutory body to ensure the success and direction of development intended for the country is very helpful especially as it will allow for proper accountability, sustainability, and direction. However, the same study including several others show trends in failure of development plans due to negligence on the part of governments. As a result, the country’s Constitution Review Commission (CRC) has requested for an entrenched national development plan that will be obligatory on successive governments. This attempt is to ensure progress in the nation’s development. Gyampo (2015) reports that the request was rejected by the then government in power.

### **3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter describes the underpinning theoretical framework as well as the key concepts associated with youth development. Considering that this study focuses on the development of youths, inspiration was drawn from the Positive Youth Development and capabilities framework. These theoretical approaches are traceable to the works of Amartya Sen, Nussbaum, development workers and policy makers (Secretariat, 2021). The concepts associated with youth development includes human development interventions, “set of opportunities” (Syvertsen et al, 2011), assets, experiences and supportive systems considered helpful and essential to the development of every human and individual.

The study does not challenge the existing interpretations of youth development. Rather, this study contributes to the contemporary discussions on youth development by operationalizing the concept youth development in a specific context; in this case Ghana. Furthermore, by operationalizing the concept, there is the opportunity to check whether or not the meanings and identified factors and variables with youth development are applicable across different youths in various countries.

#### **3.1 Youth Development as a concept**

Youth development as a concept is multidimensional encompassing the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth of young individuals (Damon & Lerner, 2006). It focuses on nurturing their strengths, fostering positive relationships, and providing opportunities for them to thrive and contribute to society. Thus, the importance of a holistic approach to youth development, recognizing the interplay between individual characteristics, social environments, and cultural contexts (Lerner et al., 2013).

Researchers have identified various factors that contribute to positive youth development. For instance, the presence of supportive relationships with family members, peers, and mentors has been found to enhance resilience and promote healthy development (Benson et al., 2006). Participation in structured activities such as sports, arts, and community service has also been associated with positive outcomes, including

improved academic performance and reduced engagement in risk behaviors (Mahoney et al., 2005).

Furthermore, youth development programs and interventions play a vital role in fostering positive youth outcomes. These programs provide opportunities for skill-building, promote positive values, and empower young individuals to become active participants in their communities (Lerner et al., 2005). Effective programs often incorporate principles of positive youth development, such as promoting autonomy, fostering a sense of belonging, and facilitating the development of skills and competencies (Catalano et al., 2004).

The complex nature of the concept of youth development is a complex as a result of the influence of several other factors makes it crucial to understanding and promoting it, in order to ensure the well-being and future success of young individuals. By nurturing their strengths, fostering supportive relationships, and providing opportunities for growth, society can empower youth to thrive and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

### **3.2 Youth development as a practice**

In terms of practice, youth development involves implementing interventions and programs aimed at promoting the positive growth and well-being of young individuals. It encompasses a range of activities and strategies designed to support their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Lerner et al., 2005). With this, key components and approaches are employed in the practice of youth development.

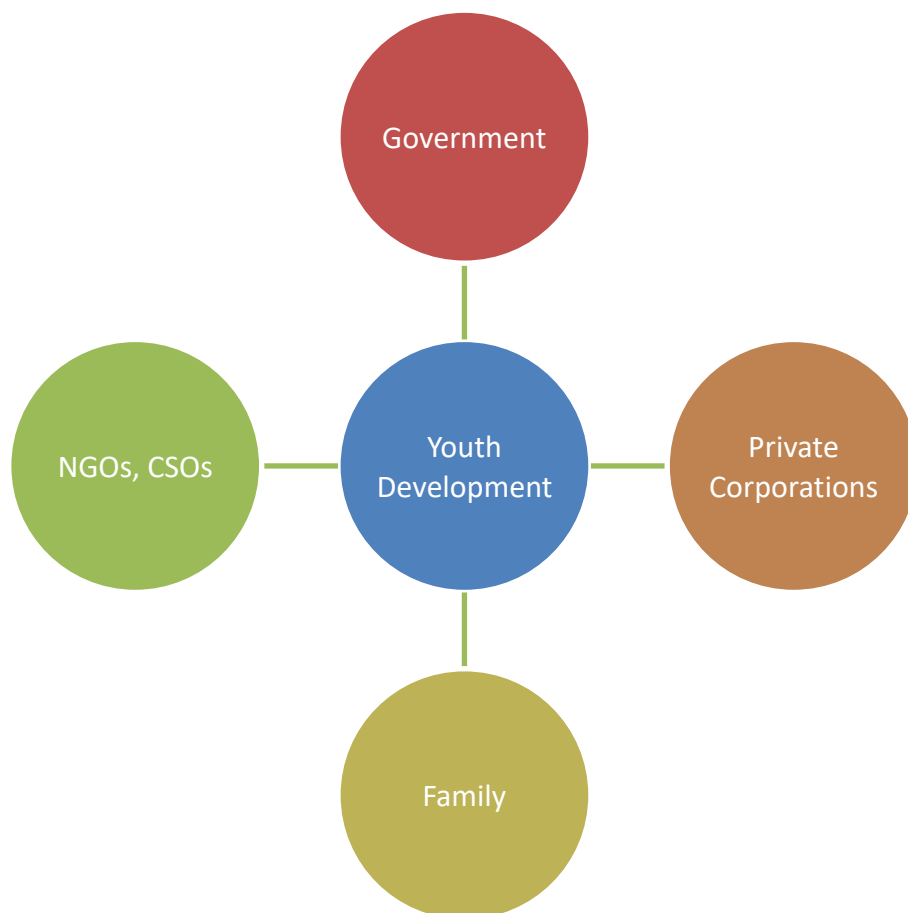
One important aspect of youth development practice is the provision of structured activities and programs that offer opportunities for skill-building, engagement, and personal growth (Hirsch et al., 2007). These activities may include sports, arts, leadership training, and community service, among others. Such programs not only foster the acquisition of specific competencies but also promote the development of positive values, attitudes, and behaviors (Catalano et al., 2004).

Another crucial element of effective youth development practice is the cultivation of supportive relationships and networks. Mentoring, peer support, and positive adult-youth interactions play significant roles in promoting resilience, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging among young individuals (Scales et al., 2011). The establishment of safe and inclusive spaces, both physical and virtual, also contributes to fostering positive youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Youth development practice is further strengthened by the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including families, schools, communities, and policymakers (Lerner et al., 2013). Collaborative efforts ensure that resources, opportunities, and support systems are accessible and tailored to meet the specific needs of young individuals. Ad-

ditionally, youth participation and empowerment are fundamental principles in effective youth development practice, as they promote active engagement and ownership of the developmental process (Brennan & Barnett, 2009). By providing structured activities, cultivating supportive relationships, and involving diverse stakeholders, youth development practitioners contribute to the holistic development of youth and the creation of thriving communities.

Figure 2. 1 Illustrating the interconnectedness in the practice of youth development.



### 3.3 The challenge of Youth development

The conceptualization and practice of youth development face several challenges that impact the effectiveness and implementation of programs and interventions.



One significant challenge is the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition of youth development, leading to varied interpretations and approaches across different contexts (Zeldin et al., 2008). This ambiguity can result in inconsistencies in program design and hinder the measurement and evaluation of outcomes.

Another challenge lies in the diverse needs and experiences of young individuals, making it crucial to consider intersectionality and address the unique circumstances of marginalized and vulnerable youth populations (Brock et al., 2011). Failure to do so can perpetuate disparities and exclude certain groups from benefiting from youth development initiatives.

The limited resources and funding available for youth development programs pose another challenge. Insufficient financial support can hinder the implementation of comprehensive and sustainable interventions, limiting their impact on young individuals (OCED, 2022). It becomes essential to advocate for increased investment in youth development and the allocation of resources to address the complex needs of young people effectively.

Additionally, the limited coordination and collaboration among stakeholders involved in youth development can impede the effectiveness of initiatives (Molcho et al., 2014). Building strong partnerships among government agencies, community organizations, schools, and families is crucial for creating an integrated and comprehensive approach to youth development.

Lastly, the rapid pace of societal changes and technological advancements presents a challenge in keeping up with the evolving needs and realities of young individuals. Addressing issues such as digital literacy, mental health, and social media influences requires continuous adaptation and innovation in youth development practice (Bacci et al, 2019).

Overcoming these challenges requires a clear definition of youth development, consideration of diverse youth experiences, adequate resources and funding, coordination among stakeholders, and adaptability to societal changes. By addressing these challenges, practitioners and policymakers can enhance the effectiveness and impact of youth development initiatives.

### **3.4 Application of Positive Youth Development (PYD) in the Ghanaian Context**

At its core, PYD consists of five interrelated components that contribute to optimal youth development: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (Lerner et al., 2006). Competence refers to the acquisition of skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary for success in higher education and beyond. Ghanaian students need access

to quality education, resources, and mentorship opportunities to develop their competencies.

Confidence entails building self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a positive identity among Ghanaian students. Overcoming barriers such as self-doubt and negative societal perceptions is crucial for fostering confidence. Connection emphasizes the importance of positive relationships with peers, faculty, mentors, and the community. Supportive relationships contribute to a sense of belonging, social support, and guidance, thereby facilitating youth development.

Character development focuses on moral and ethical growth, including values such as integrity and social responsibility. Ghanaian students should be encouraged to engage in activities that promote character building, such as community service and ethical decision-making. Caring encompasses empathy, compassion, and prosocial behavior, which contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities. Encouraging Ghanaian students to be caring and actively contribute to the betterment of society is essential.

Protective factors play a crucial role in promoting positive youth development. Supportive relationships with peers, faculty, mentors, and family serve as a foundation for growth (Benson, 2007). Setting high expectations and providing opportunities for participation in extracurricular activities and community service are critical (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Creating a positive higher education climate that fosters inclusivity and support further facilitates youth development.

Contextual influences, including family, higher education institutions, community, and Ghanaian culture, shape the experiences of Ghanaian students in higher education. Family dynamics, parental involvement, and cultural values significantly impact youth development (Catalano et al., 2002). The educational environment, resources, and campus culture within higher education institutions also play a significant role (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). The wider community provides resources, opportunities, and cultural norms that influence youth development (Lerner et al., 2013).

The processes of self-determination, resilience, positive identity development, and social competence is integral to positive youth development. Promoting autonomy, adaptive coping strategies, a sense of purpose, and effective communication skills contribute to the growth and success of Ghanaian students in higher education (Lerner et al., 2013).

By applying the PYD framework to the context of Ghanaian students in higher education, this research aims to understand the specific barriers and facilitators to youth development in Ghana. The findings will contribute to creating interventions and policies that support the holistic development of Ghanaian youth, leading to a better Ghana for future generations.

## **4 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

This chapter introduces and discusses the methodological design of the study. For a deeper understanding of the case under study, a systematic approach coupled with selected data collection techniques were used. I will begin with discussing the methods employed in the gathering of the data, reasons for the selected group of participants, how the selection process was done, and reasons why the techniques are considered most suitable. Further discussions under this chapter will be the demographic features of the group under study, the compilation of the questionnaire, how the data is going to be analyzed as well as the challenges and limitations of the study.

### **4.1 Overall Methodological Approach**

For a thorough understanding of the situation of youth development, particularly from the viewpoint of Ghanaian youth, I employed the use of semi-structured interviews. My aim was to gather data that would offer a comprehensive understanding of the case, focusing on the viewpoint of young individuals.

Considering the nature of the research problem, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate method. This approach allows for the exploration of lived experiences, meanings, and perspectives of individuals, providing valuable insights into the factors influencing youth development. Hammarberg et al., (2016), emphasizes that qualitative data are more expressive and not statistic, and includes group discussions, indepth interviews, observations, life histories and document analysis among others. In this case, meanings of 'why', 'what', and 'how', in the case of youth development in Ghana from the experiences of the youths in Higher Institution are captured.

Lastly, as an active participant of the study, notes taken from the field served as additional information to enrich the study by providing firsthand experiences and insights into the realities on the ground. This thesis incorporates references from participants as well, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

## 4.2 Data collection and the respondents

The data collection for this study, grounded in the Positive Youth Development Framework, took place in December 2022. A semi-structured interview guide, provided in Appendix I, was used to gather the data. The focus of the study was on youths in Higher Institutions in Ghana, and the sample was drawn from higher institutions in the capital city, Accra. However, it is worth noting that some participants attended schools in another city.

The participants consisted of 10 Ghanaian citizens, with six females and four males. The classification of male and female was based on the gender identity indicated by the interviewees during the study. They represented diverse disciplines and programs of study. Purposive selection was employed for four participants from the Central University College. This intentional selection aimed to avoid interviewing students from similar programs in order to obtain varied opinions. The assistance of a senior lecturer at the university was sought to facilitate introductions and create a friendly atmosphere between the respondents and the researcher, establishing comfort and willingness to participate in the interviews. The interviews were conducted on the campuses or at arranged locations, considering that some participants were on vacation during the data collection period, which coincided with exams and vacation time for many students.

The process of participant identification was relatively straightforward. The specific focus on youths narrowed down the target population. Legal, convenience, accessibility, and understanding factors were taken into account. Discussions with the supervisor and colleagues helped determine the group of youths that could be easily reached within the limited time frame. Consequently, students in higher education became the chosen target group, as they were generally above the age of seventeen and capable of providing voluntary consent for interviews.

There were no specific criteria for selecting universities, and the availability of students during the study period influenced the choice. As most students were on vacation, participants were mainly from educational institutions in the city of Accra. The geographic location presented a limitation due to time constraints and convenience. Considering these factors, the next step focused on the execution of the interviews. With the guidance of a Senior Lecturer at the Central University College, I selected four participants from that institution. Despite the students being on vacation or taking exams, the Senior Lecturer facilitated introductions and arranged interview sessions at convenient times. For the remaining six participants, personal contacts were utilized. Through these contacts, students who expressed interest in the study willingly participated. Interviews with this group were conducted at the Head Quarters of the Hunger Project in Ghana, which also served as my workplace and provided a suitable meeting point.

While the definition of "youth" may vary, the UN defines it as individuals aged 15-24 years (Garg & Singh, 2018). For this study, the age range was set as 18-35 years, considering two factors. Firstly, in Ghana, youth is defined as individuals between the ages of 15-35 years. Secondly, for legal and ethical reasons, interviewing young adults within this age range was deemed appropriate.

The sample consisted of ten respondents, comprising six females and four males. They represented various disciplines, including Social Sciences, Agricultural Science, Business Management, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, and Physical Sciences. The participants were a mix of second to final year students, offering a range of perspectives and experiences within the higher education context.

Tabel 1. 1                      Research participants' demographics

Gender	Education Institution	Programme of Study
Female	University of Ghana	Sociology
Female	KNUST	Geography and Rural Development
Male	Central University College	Economics
Female	KNUST	Business Administration
Female	University of Ghana	Political Science
Male	Central University College	Environment and Development Studies
Female	KNUST	Human Resource
Male	Central University College	Civil Engineering
Female	Central University College	Agricultural Business Management
Male	KNUST	Tourism

Note. From the data analysis - Author's own construction

### 4.3 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a widely used qualitative research method that combines flexibility and structure in data collection (Liamputtong, 2011). These interviews

are characterized by a predefined set of open-ended questions, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and meanings (Sandelowski, 1995).

One advantage of semi-structured interviews is their adaptability, as the interviewer can probe deeper into specific topics or ask follow-up questions based on participants' responses (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). With an exploratory study like this, the flexibility enabled by the use of this method facilitates the generation of rich and detailed data, enabling researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Liamputtong, 2011).

Moreover, semi-structured interviews promote participant engagement and collaboration, as participants are encouraged to actively contribute to the conversation (Kvale, 1996). This participatory approach fosters a sense of empowerment among participants, allowing them to share their perspectives and shape the direction of the interview (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). It is not meant that semi-structured interviews do not have limitations.

I fully recognized my own subjectivity and biases since the interpretation of data relied on my skills. Nonetheless, due to the sensitivity of the case under study, and how politically inclined it could be for some youths, I was objective as much as I could during and after the interviews.

#### **4.4 The conduct of interviews**

According to Edwards and Holland (2013) as quoted by Adhabi & Anozie (2017), qualitative interviews is "linked to philosophical development of research paradigms" and it dates back to the twentieth century with its roots in anthropology and sociology (pg. 2). Interviews are attempts made at obtaining, exploring and understanding a phenomenon from individuals' point of view as quoted by Adhabi & Anozie (2017). The authenticity of the information derived from individuals, as a result of using interviews as a data collection tool gives it an advantage. In this study, the interview was conducted with the guide of a semi-structured open-ended questions that followed a carefully reviewed literature and policy documents. The questions were organized under 5 different sections, each meant to allow interviewees to express themselves and share information. The first section of questions was about the demographics of the respondents. The demographics showed the gender, nationality, age and degree programme. This information was necessary as the study's target were youths and Ghanaians. The second section had series of questions that centered on awareness of the promotion of youth development. Respondents were asked series of questions under this section and observations were made as I watched out for facial expressions and body movements. The reason for this was because there was rumors and radio discussions of the youths complaining of not seeing development in their lives and blaming government for it. The purpose of this question was to find out their

knowledge about existing measures taken by government and private persons concerning youth development. The third section had questions seeking the perceptions of respondents about youth development in Ghana, the intention was to gather as much information as possible on the concept of youth development and how it relates to the current situations in the country. This question made respondents reflect on their own ideologies, beliefs and to consider possible or similar trends in those of other youths. It was also very central to the objective of the study as analyzing the response provides more insight into the needs of the Ghanaian youth. The fourth and fifth sections sought to know how the perceptions of the youths resonates with existing policy intervention and how they can be improved. Understanding this will enable policy makers and development workers to identify areas in which to pay much attention as the research seeks to do.

A total of 10 interviews were conducted with students from various higher education institutions. They were recorded with phone. Only personal observations were written. The length of interviews was from 20minutes to 120minutes. Before each interview, there was a formal but friendly introduction, and interviewees were asked whether they prefer to read through the study's consent form (see Appendix II) or would prefer I read. Out of the 10 respondents, 6 preferred I read them out so they verbally consent. Interviewees were given a preview of the study and its purpose, and to help establish a good connection with them, they were encouraged to use any language they were comfortable with, nonetheless the research material was collected in English with few words in a dominant local language (Twi). It is important to note that in this study, interviewees were not given any prior information about the topic to be discussed other than the day of the individual interviews. The reason behind this was to prevent any form of biases or influence on their thoughts.

Since having quality data is necessary for good research, a pilot study was undertaken in Greater Accra, two days prior to conducting the main interviews. This trial was done with two students in higher education institutions just to ensure feasibility of the interview questions. Piloting a study provides clarity for the researcher by making him or her aware of the procedures involved in the main study, as well as finding the most suitable method and approach to conducting the interview (In, 2017). After the pilot interviews, some of the questions were modified to better ensure their comprehension. Also, in the course of the main interviews, additional questions were asked as relevant themes emerged.

The two students who took part in the pilot interviews took 30 to 50 mins which was much shorter than most of the interviews in the main interviews.

For the data management and analysis, I used both Microsoft Office and ATLAS.ti3 software.

For the data management and analysis, a combination of Microsoft Office and ATLAS.ti3 software was utilized. The interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Office,

resulting in a total of 125 pages. With access provided by the university, audio recordings were uploaded and organized into separate files within a designated folder. Manual checking for errors and translating local dialect expressions were performed. Initially, the data analysis was conducted manually, but later transitioned to utilizing ATLAS.ti. Despite being a new tool for the researcher, ATLAS.ti facilitated easy organization of the data, aiding in the final analysis. Coding of the data involved using both suggested codes from ATLAS.ti and codes derived from the research questions and objectives. The research questions and objectives guided the identification of relevant information, forming the basis for thematic analysis and subsequent discussions. Additionally, ATLAS.ti software was utilized for data storage and maintaining memos, while some coding was done manually using Microsoft Word.

## **4.5 Thematic Analysis**

The data was analysed based on the identified patterns from the interviews. As an exploratory study, the research questions, and objective served as my main guide in the generation of themes for the study. After the interviews, I took time to read through and to re-read after it was transcribed. The use of the ATLAS.ti was very helpful in the development of codes. It suggested codes and also helped in grouping them under my identified themes. The themes were manually refined for easy interpretation leading to a deeper understanding of the research topic. Thematic analysis enables the uncovering of latent meanings and generation of new insights. See Figure 3.1 for the progression of the themes.



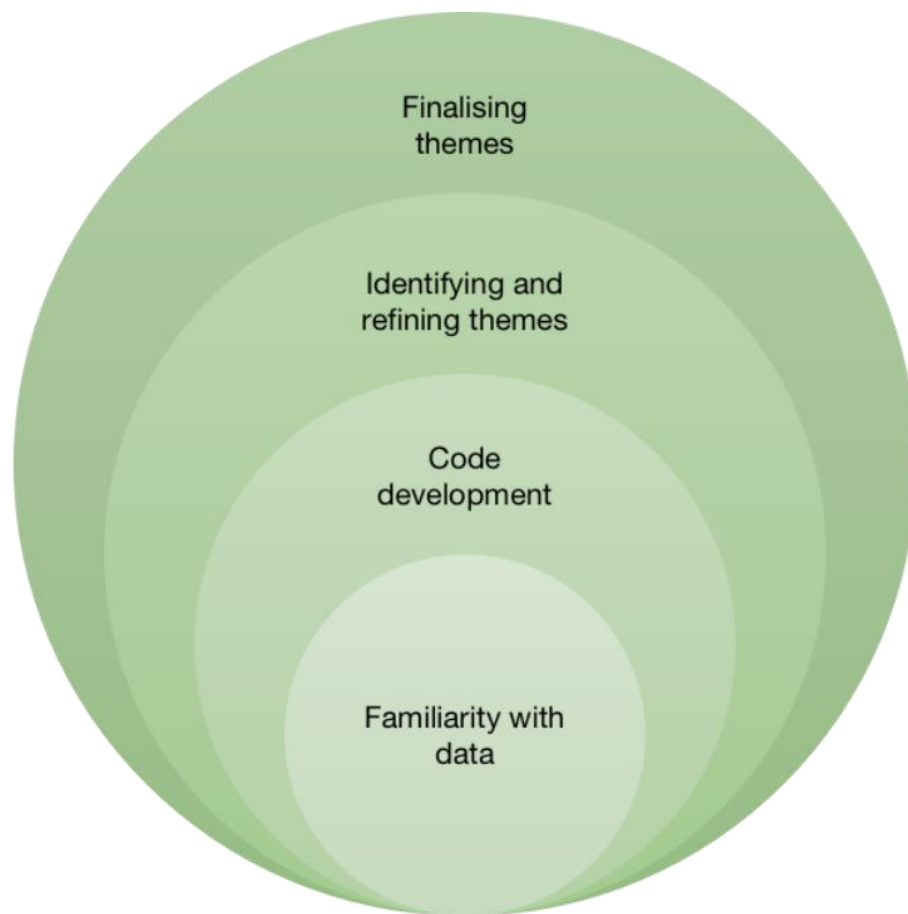


Figure 3. 1 A diagram showing the progress in the thematic analysis.

## 4.6 Ethical Consideration

Before the interviews and participation of respondents, consent was also sought for. The participants consented by verbally agreeing to the request to use their responses as my research data, and was recorded. They were made to read the consent form which was attached to the interview questions, together with a short introduction of the study and its purpose by themselves and for a few, I read it out to them. Just like all research, ethical concerns will be raised if participants are not fully informed and made aware of the details, purposes, methods and risks involved. This was mentioned in the introduction nonetheless, as the construction of the study's topic make it sound 'political' in the country where the study was conducted, some participants expressed concerns about the phrasing of the study topic and whether other youths will not be offended. Although their concern was thought of before the field data collection, it was established that this was purely for academic purposes and that there were no political attachments. Other questions asked was on the benefits or results of the research. Most of the youths mentioned the constant research being done in the country,

yet with less evidence of change or implementation on their opinions and suggestions. In this case, there could be a bias since though this study is academic based, it is also a real social problem which I intend to actively contribute to getting solutions for. The study was voluntary and it was established that they could withdraw from the study and express their concerns whenever they were unclear or uncomfortable about the study. Most of the participants expressed interest in the study and asked to be notified after analysis has been done. There was no agreement for incentives, nonetheless, some of the participants were given bottled of mineral water in the course of the interview when they expressed being thirsty. For safety and convenience, all the interviews were conducted in open places, most of which were on the Central University Campus on the Prampram-Miotso road and the others at the Hunger Project Head Office in Accra.

Some other possible unintentional biases may occur in the representatives of this study as the students were selected based on availability and convenience hence, perspectives of some students from other higher education institutions are left out. In the course of the study, I needed to resist expressing some personal comments and affirming or disagreeing to comments by allowing interviewees to express themselves as much as possible while probing further and maintaining a neutral attitude.

## **4.7 Positionality**

Three main reasons serve as the ultimate motivation for this study.

First being my position as a student in the field of development. As a young researcher in the field of development, I have high level of interest in issues affecting social aspects of development, and youth development happens to be one. I am committed to learning and working on issues to youth development as youths form essential components in the field of development, as a human resource. Conducting this study on the topic of youth development in my country, gives me a unique position. With the knowledge and skills, I will be able to understand the experiences and needs of young people.

Secondly, as an African, Ghana is one of the countries which has experienced tremendous impact of development aids and programmes not only towards the economy but youths. Both internationally and nationally, youth development programs are executed and yet little is seen. Being patriotic to my country and having the responsibility of seeing the youth challenges curbed is my aim hence the desire to get acquainted with the root cause of the case.

Lastly, as someone with field work experiences in working in rural areas on issues including teenagers, youth and women, conducting this study gives me the opportunity to be close to the challenges as I am able to seek out the opinions of others.

Allowing me to shed light on the challenges, opportunities, and effective strategies for youth development. This study allows for a comprehensive examination of the youth's perspectives, the effectiveness of existing policies and programs, and the identification of gaps that need to be addressed. Ultimately, contributing to informing policy decisions and shaping interventions that will positively impact the lives of young people in the country.

#### **4.8 Limitations to the study**

The study had limitations, including a small voluntary sample size and limited time for data collection. Timing was unfavorable due to holidays and exams. The research focused on participants from Accra, Ghana, due to familiarity with the location. The analysis is subjective and acknowledges the need for a broader representation.

## 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, there will be discussions, analysis and reporting on the findings from the data collected. The study sought to explore the conceptualization of youth development among students in higher educational institutions. The discussions and report are presented in themes in line with the research objective and questions and supported with direct quotes from the data.

### 5.1 Awareness and familiarity of the youth development: programmes, policies and interventions

Youth development programmes and policies should be tailored, organized and made visible such that, the intended recipients, that is, youths in the country are fully aware of them. In attempting to find out how knowledgeable the students (youths) are with the theme; participants were asked to mention any existing youth development institution or policies they knew in the country. Three different codes were generated from the responses given and were categorized into sub themes.

1. There were those who outrightly said they had no idea and could not name any programme, policy or intervention.

Three out of the ten interviewees outrightly confessed that they were not aware of any youth development policy, programme or institution in the country. For instance, a participant expressed his view about this as:

*"I don't know and I have heard of any"* - Female A

This group of people comprised one female and two males. Probing further about their lack of knowledge about youth development institutions, programmes and policies, reasons given were personal choices, lack of publicity on the part of government

and indifference towards youth development programmes, institutions and policies. An interviewee stated:

*"I am not interested in hearing about them because they don't affect my life"*

This in my opinion raises an alarm and is of great concern. A greater portion of the blame will be given to the government since that is the main body responsible for ensuring the development of the youths in the country. The expressions of "I do not care", "I do not know", "It does not affect my life" only reveal the depth of the seriousness of matter, and how little the government is doing as opposed to the official documents and reporting's on youth development being a priority.

2.Those who knew and were able to mention one or two policies and institutions.

Out of the ten, only four mentioned interventions including Nabco, NEIP, Youths in Agriculture and Deployment for employment. The most common institution mentioned was the Ministry of Youth and Sports. An interesting fact about this group of students (youths) was, they all had records of some work experiences with student associations that follow some policies on youth development in their schools or they have some work experiences with NGOs. Throughout the interview, they made references to their experiences. This shows how important exposure is when it comes to youths becoming aware of policies and programmes geared towards the youth. There isn't much literature conducted with regards to the important contribution of youths' exposure when it comes to youth development.

3.Those who were aware of the existence of youth development policies, programmes and institutions but could not mention any.

The last set of identified groups had some idea of the existence of youth development institutions, policies and programmes but could not outrightly mention any. They had to be given prompts before they could remember. One of the interviewees is quoted saying:

*"Oh that, is it working."* - Female B

After she acknowledged her remembrance of Nabco. Generally, the awareness level of participants was low and upon further questions, it was noted that, not only are they unaware but had less in-depth understanding of the policies and programmes they mention including the role of the youth development institution. Figure 4.1 below illustrates best the responses of the participants on the state of awareness of youths concerning youth development policies and programs in Ghana. The responses in the figure were captured after I had mentioned some of the institutions and policies.

Generally, respondents were indifferent towards the institutions and policies. This can be partially attributed to the government's role in disseminating information and creating interest. The government should take responsibility for tailoring, organizing, and promoting these initiatives to ensure that youths are fully aware of them (United Nations, 2015). The government's failure to effectively publicize and make these programs visible may contribute to the lack of knowledge among youths (Guberman & Chaban, 2018). Additionally, the indifference expressed by some youths towards youth development programs can be seen as a reflection of the perceived lack of relevance or impact on their lives (O'Donnell et al., 2020). See Figure 4. 1.

○ <b>Awareness</b> Gr=10	10
○ <b>Awareness: Deployment by employment</b> Gr=1	1
○ <b>Awareness: Ministry of Youths and Sports</b> Gr=1	5
○ <b>Awareness: Nabco</b> Gr=5	6
○ <b>Awareness: YEP</b> Gr=1	1
○ <b>Awareness: Youth in agriculture</b> Gr=1	3
○ <b>Awareness; NEIP</b> Gr=1	1

Figure 4. 1 Illustrating participants awareness of youth development policies and institutions in Ghana.

## 5.2 Definition of the concept

As per the first research question: How do students in higher educational institutions conceptualize “youth development? Two main questions were purposely asked to generate meaning. The first allowed participants to reflect on the concept as a general term in practice in the country, and the second was intended for them to give their own opinion of the concept. The logic behind the first question was to understand and to identify the general expectations of the students (as youths) in the country. Under this, three main meanings were identified based on my analysis:

## 1) Youth development as available opportunities

According to the respondents, youth development as available opportunities include infrastructures and established social systems that support the overall growth of youths, such as mentoring programs, youth associations, career development centers, and technical training centers. These resources play a crucial role in providing guidance, skill development, and access to educational and vocational opportunities for young individuals. They serve as platforms for enhancing their capabilities and preparing them for successful transitions into adulthood. The availability and accessibility of such resources are important factors in promoting positive youth development and empowering young people to reach their full potential.

*“So, I think to the Ghanaian youth, having opportunities, you know like after school I have something or some structures are put in place to help you. For those who are not in school and those who are in the rural areas probably a plan to help them develop and achieve their aim” – Female C*

*“Things the government can do to help the youth develop. Like creating more job opportunities” – Male D*

*“In practical terms, I think it is dealing solely on equipment. How you equip youths with skills” – Female A*

## 2) Youth development as financial stability

Financial stability, as described by the respondents, encompasses a youth's capacity to generate income through profitable work, well-paying jobs, or entrepreneurship. Some participants also mentioned receiving financial support from the government in the form of allowances and remittances. When young individuals have access to financial resources, they can become self-reliant, with their basic needs taken care of. This financial stability enables them to meet their daily expenses, pursue further education, invest in their businesses, or save for the future. By attaining financial independence, young people can gain a sense of empowerment and have the freedom to make choices that align with their goals and aspirations. It also contributes to their overall well-being and enhances their ability to participate actively in society.

*“Some form of improvement that can help them improve their lives or that can help them have their own way of making income or sustaining themselves other than having to work for other people” – Male E*

In the context of the Positive Youth Development Framework, financial stability plays a crucial role in promoting positive youth development. It enables young individuals

to meet their basic needs, pursue education, invest in their businesses, and save for the future. By attaining financial independence, youths experience a sense of empowerment, align their choices with their goals, and enhance their overall well-being. This aspect of financial stability aligns with the framework's focus on providing opportunities and resources that enable youth to thrive and actively engage in society.

### 3) Youth development as job or employment opportunities

This was described as the general and most practical definition for the Ghanaian youth. Respondents stressed on the economic hardships, and joblessness situation in the country. A lot of the factors for this was directed at the general economic situation of the world from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic however, other blames were put on government's poor and temporally policies and interventions, mishandling of funds and politicization of programmes and policies concerning the youth. Having a job to do is therefore crucial for the youths. To be actively engaged in a profitable work was considered fulfilling and that, to the respondents will help reduce the youth's engagement in social vices and idleness which can sometimes be mistaken as laziness.

Here too, the concept of youth development is reflected within the Positive Youth Development Framework by recognizing social expectations as positive. For instance, Male E said:

*"there is no job that's why there are a lot of youths engaging in robbery, gambling....if there were jobs there will be less social vices" – Male E*

This may be true as scholarly reports have shown that there are low crime rates in the developed countries than there are in the developing.

## 5.3 Facilitators of Youth development programmes

A major component of the study was to find out the facilitators of youth development in the country. Questions intended to generate responses for this was met with multiple answers as well as sentiments. Two different groups or agents were identified from the analysis to be responsible for facilitating youth development. They included;

### 5.3.1 Social policies implemented by government

First group of responses made mentioned of social interventions by government such as the Free basic education and the Free SHS as instrumental in the development of



youths. These projects targeting education were said to be key for the entire development of the country. Participants expressed in various ways how education is crucial in the modern world and a tool for globalization and nation building.

Nabco was also expressed to have been helpful in its early phases but not effective currently.

*“at least they are proving free basic education now which is also contributing to our development” – Male F*

The analysis reveals that participants acknowledge the positive impact of social interventions by the government, specifically the Free Basic Education and Free SHS programs, on youth development in Ghana. Education is recognized as crucial for both individual and national development, with participants emphasizing its significance in the modern world and as a tool for globalization and nation-building. However, there is a mixed perception regarding the effectiveness of Nabco, which was deemed helpful in its early stages but not currently effective. Nonetheless, the provision of free basic education is seen as a contributing factor to the overall development of the youth population in Ghana.

### **5.3.2 Roles and works of NGOs, CSOs**

The roles and actions of NGOs, Church groups and Private entrepreneurs in Ghana. From the data analyzed, the roles of these set of groups were considered as motivating, inspiring and thus constantly keeping the minds of the youth safe and to think about the future. One private entrepreneur cited was MacDan, who is believed to offer start up supports to youths who pitch their business ideas after going through some series of tests.

An interviewee goes to the extent of stating how seminars and development projects organized and implemented by NGOs and CSOs motivate him and other youths, thus making them still have hope in spite of “hardships”. See quote below;

*“the initiatives of NGO's or I don't want to call it church groups...there's something they do in Ghana every year 'IYES', Success Africa, those kind of summits. Even though I don't want to call it church because it's not church, most of the speakers the speakers are 'Osofo's'. They build the mindset of the young people. When engage us, they remind us of the how lazy the environment can make us feel because of the state of affairs in the country.” – Male E*

*.... “individuals like McDan is also reaching out to young people, to support their ideas to start up business.” – Male F*

Generally, participants expressed mixed sentiments about the government's efforts, with some acknowledging the positive impact of initiatives like free education while others believed more should be done. The actions of NGOs, CSOs, and private entrepreneurs were seen as motivating and inspiring for the youth, providing support and opportunities for their development. Some others had very opposite views. To them, there was nothing facilitating the development of youths in the country. Female A reportedly stressed that the development of the youth has always been about self-initiatives and not on anyone including government.

However, there were calls for greater involvement of youth in decision-making processes and the need for continuous adaptation of programs to meet current needs.

## **5.4 Hindrances to effective youth development**

The aim was to identify the barriers to youth development in Ghana. Participants highlighted various factors, which were categorized into subcategories. These findings shed light on the multiple challenges that hinder youth development in Ghana. These included the exclusion of youth from decision-making processes, institutional challenges, lack of visibility, politicization of youth development programs, mismanagement of funds, and the implementation of temporary interventions and unenforced laws. Another institutional barrier was the inflexibility of the educational system, which was considered unsuitable for meeting global demands.

### **5.4.1 Youth involvement in decision making**

When discussing the involvement of youth in policymaking, all ten interviewees mentioned that the involvement of the youths in decision making was low. This was greatly emphasized and of concern. However, some felt the problem was partly caused by the youths themselves as they thought if youths openly voice out their opinions and follow initiatives by government closely, they will not be left out. It was mentioned that some youths are lazy and overly reliant on the government, thus emphasizing the importance of taking initiative and creating opportunities for themselves as government policies and interventions cannot meet all the needs of the youth. Other contrary views suggested that the culture in Ghana do not permit the younger ones to criticize their elders as such, right from infancy that training or upbringing is impacted making it difficult for the youths to even get into politics not to talk of questioning ideas of those in authority.

*“Our involvement is important. We are the youths and we know what we want but they don't involve us” – Female A*

#### **5.4.2 (a) Institutional Challenges; Ministries**

In terms of hindrances to youth development, the data identifies institutional system and the lack of opportunities for self-improvement. Respondents expressed their concern about the government institutions mainly, the ministries (including education). The current educational system is seen to place excessive emphasis on completing school and finding employment, leaving limited room for alternative paths to self-development. Also, students spoke on the teaching materials and the subjects being taught to students. In their view, most of these were 'irrelevant' and does not meet the changing times and demands in the modern world. Strong opinions were suggested for government to consider using education materials that stress on developing the youth to be innovative, solve social challenges and to be able to fit in the global sense.

Additionally, the data showed expressions on the lack of support in terms of job creation avenues, and financial support. One female respondent expressed this as "suffer yourself". Youths in Ghana are reported to face struggles especially if they do not come from a family of affluence or wealth. This further extends the poverty issues in the country.

The unfavorable economic then leaves them with no option than to exit the country in search for greener pastures.

*"Our education system is the problem. Ministry of Education has the authority to define what must and should not be included in the syllabus but what do we see...even weeding was used as a punishment in school so how do you expect youths to go into agriculture" - Male E*

#### **5.4.3 (b) Institutional Challenges; Rule of law**

Views on the inapplicability of laws ensuring effectiveness in the practice of youth development were expressed. To the respondents, a lot of funding and opportunities for youths are misused and embezzled by leaders in authority who are left unpunished even after they have been caught. This made youths question the neutrality of the law enforcers. Many linked this to politics in the country whereas to other, the issue of unenforced laws has to do with financial status or standing in the country.

*"Laws don't work. A minister will embezzle funds and still be left unpunished how do you expect any development to go on"- Male F*

#### **5.4.4 (c) Politicization of youth development programmes**

The issue of politics featured during the discussion on hindrances. Six out of the ten interviewed blame politics as a major determining factor in policy making including those targeting the youths. One of the students mentioned his frustration concerning how government makes a lot of promises but do you deliver them after gaining the votes from the youth. Other views concerned the unwillingness on the part of most

politicians and leaders in power to step down when they are old thus rejecting the innovativeness of young people.

*“the elderly ones are not ready to leave their position. But the elderly ones are not ready to let the youth get on board. They want to be where they are. They don't want to invite new ideas” – Female G*

This highlights the negative impact of politicization on youth development programs in Ghana. Politicians prioritize short-term gains, leading to misallocation of resources and unequal distribution of benefits. Depoliticization and inclusive governance are crucial for effective and equitable youth development.

#### **5.4.5 (d) Implementation of temporary interventions and unenforced laws**

Although, social interventions were name as one of the facilitators of youth development in Ghana, the question was, how sustainable, effective and efficient are they in tackling the country's problem on youth development.

Here, one of the interviewees said:

*“When Nabco came, it was very helpful but now it's not. I even heard they are owing some of the people for 6 moths now. Is that helpful?”*

To me, this opinion expressed by the interviewee raises valid concerns about the sustainability and effectiveness of social interventions like Nabco in addressing youth development in Ghana. The issue of delayed payments undermines the perceived helpfulness of such programs. Hence, government should re-evaluate its youth development policies and put up the necessary resources while ensuring that laws concerning the execution of youth development programmes are adhered to, for the benefit of all.

#### **5.4.6 Lack of Visibility**

This was clearly seen from the interview conducted. Six out of the ten interviewed could not mention any policy, programmes or institutions related to youth development. This lack of visibility of youth development interventions, policies, and programs is a significant concern. It suggests that the government's efforts may not effectively reach and engage the youth population. To address this issue, it is crucial to enhance the dissemination of information through various channels, including traditional media and social media platforms. By increasing visibility and ensuring targeted communication, young people can become more aware of the available opportunities and actively participate in youth development initiatives.

*“Government only makes noise about programs when they want to be voted for. Look at the massive publication they made on the Free Senior High School” – Male F*

#### **5.4.7 Overdependence on external aid and interference from Western influences.**

A lot of the blame was put on government as the youths felt excessive interferences in the forms of cooperation's with the Western World was more disadvantageous to the country, and to the development of the youths. There was one whose view opposed this. To him, there is the need for collaboration and support from the Western World as they are considered to have developed already.

*"I think we depend so much on foreign aids and you see, these people they do not care about us." – Male F*

The analysis suggests that while some youths in Ghana believe that overdependence on external aid and interference from Western influences is detrimental to the country and youth development, there is also a contrasting view that emphasizes the importance of collaboration and support from developed nations. The quote reflects the sentiment of distrust towards foreign aid and highlights the perception that these aid providers may not genuinely care about the well-being of Ghana. This observation underscores the need for a balanced approach in engaging with external actors to ensure that their involvement aligns with the country's long-term development goals and benefits the youth population.

#### **5.4.8 Family-related barriers included individual upbringing and cultural factors.**

The upbringing of the youth was an area of concern for five of the interviewee's although they expressed it differently. The mindset of the youth was the dominant interpretation given for this sub theme. Respondents mentioned that the mentality of youths now is not towards the future, in other words, youths only "live in the moment" and only look for what would satisfy them in their current state. In my own opinion, I see it to be incorrect since generalizing such perception may not be right.

Other relatable explanations for this were comments from two interviewees who seem to share similar views. They express that, the home is the starting point and the foundation for every youth. In this case, how they will think or the kind of motivation they will have, are mostly dependent on the training from home. That forms the culture of the youth.

*"Everybody is different, and so is our upbringing too. I don't know what they are being taught." – Male A*

## 6 CONCLUSION

The study set to explore the concept of youth development by finding out what the barriers/ hindrances of youth development were in Ghana. By understanding how the concept is understood and practiced in the Ghanaian context, a greater understanding is established. This is important for youth development workers, as well as governments and policy makers. With this study, I hope to give a better perspective on how youth development is conceptualized from the participants point of view. Inspired by the positive youth development framework, this research shows that youth development is indeed multifaceted. Recapping the research questions;

RQ1: How do students in higher educational institutions conceptualize “youth development”?

Participants expressed their personal views on the concept as well as the practical actions and activities attached to the concept. Here, they mentioned that youth development is a process and not “one time”. These were expressed as growth and not stagnation, constantly improving one’s life.

Practically, gaining meaningful employment, having several job opportunities as well as supportive institutions that foster personal and professional development.

RQ2: From the perspective of the students in higher education institutions, what are the hindrances and facilitators of youth development in Ghana?

The analysis of barriers to youth development in Ghana aligns with existing literature. Research by Amponsah and Gyimah (2020) supports the identification of exclusion from decision-making processes as a significant barrier, limiting youth participation in policy shaping. A study by Adu-Gyamfi and Owusu (2018) emphasizes institutional challenges as obstacles to youth development. Additionally, Boateng et al. (2019) highlight the lack of visibility as a constraint, restricting opportunities for young people to showcase their abilities. The politicization of youth development programs and its adverse effects on implementation are echoed by Asante et al.

(2017). The mismanagement of funds and the need for better financial management and sustainable solutions are addressed by Aborampah-Amoah (2021). Lastly, Ofori and Asiamah (2018) discuss the need for educational reforms in Ghana to meet global demands. The convergence of these studies with the findings underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of the barriers hindering youth development in Ghana.

## **6.1 Contribution of the study**

Findings from the study contributes to our knowledge that the concept youth development is dynamic in nature and has its specific characteristics in the case of Ghana. This aligns with existing literature on youth development, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the process and the need for various facilitators to support positive outcomes. The positive youth development framework resonates with the discussion by emphasizing the importance of empowering young people and providing them with opportunities for growth. The facilitators mentioned in the text, such as empowerment, training programs, mentorship, and supportive environments, align with the key elements of the positive youth development approach, and are thus crucial actors for fostering the positive development of young individuals and enhancing their overall well-being.

For an effective work to be done by both government and stakeholders in the area of youth development, there is the need to first recognize and tackle the real problems facing youths as they are common problems. For instance, in the case of Ghana, the hindrances to youth development in Ghana, factors such as high unemployment rates, limited access to resources and opportunities, and social and cultural barriers are challenges faced by youth in many developing countries. These barriers restrict young people from realizing their full potential and actively participating in the development of their communities.

## **6.2 Recommendation**

The concept of youth development is dynamic and can vary across different countries. In Ghana, youth development is a multifaceted process influenced by various factors. The lack of plans or assistance for youths highlights the need for individual self-improvement, suggesting that self-improvement is an important aspect of youth development in the country. However, there are facilitators that contribute to youth development in Ghana, such as empowerment, training programs, mentorship, and supportive community and environments. These factors play a vital role in empowering young people, fostering their personal growth, and enhancing their overall well-being.

Despite the efforts of stakeholders involved in youth development in Ghana, there are significant hindrances that hinder progress. High unemployment rates, limited access to resources and opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and social and cultural barriers pose challenges for young people in realizing their full potential and actively participating in the nation's development. To address these challenges, collaboration between the government, civil society organizations, and the private sector is crucial. Effective policies and programs with long-term goals should be implemented to create more job opportunities, improve access to education and training, enhance youth-friendly services, and overcome socio-cultural barriers that impede youth participation in decision-making processes. It is also important to involve youths from rural areas in the formulation, execution, and implementation of youth development policies.

By strengthening the facilitators and addressing the hindrances, Ghana can create an enabling environment that supports the holistic development of its youth population and contributes to the sustainable development of the nation. The recommendations provided in the report focus on improving awareness and publicity, enhancing youth involvement, strengthening the education system, increasing job creation opportunities, addressing institutional challenges, and enhancing the visibility of programs. Government can make do with the various career counselling units in campus and in organizing periodic seminars to educate youths about the various youth development policies. These recommendations aim to create a conducive environment for youth development, empower young people, and equip them with the necessary skills, opportunities, and support needed to thrive and contribute to Ghana's growth and development.

Overall, by implementing these recommendations, Ghana can pave the way for a brighter future for its young generation, ensuring their active participation in shaping the nation and driving progress.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix I Interview Guide

### APPENDIX I INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### SECTION 1 - IDENTIFICATION

This section provides the enumerator with the background information concerning the respondents. Please specify;

1. Sex.....
2. Age (18-35).....
3. Nationality.....
4. Education Level .....

#### SECTION 2 - AWARENESS OF THE PROMOTION OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

1. Are you familiar with any existing youth development policies and interventions?

[List/name some]



2. What youth development institution are you aware of?

#### SECTION 3 - PERCEPTIONS

3. Could you share with me what youth development in this country could mean in practical terms?

4. In your opinion, what do you consider to mean youth development?

5. How will you describe the current state of the development of youths in the country?

6. What is your perception on the involvement of the youths in the making of youth development policies in the country? [prompt: should they be more involved? How? Why not?]

7. What are some of the youth development institutions and interventions you know?

8. Do you think those youth development institutions are doing well? [Indicators; how? What shows?]

9. What are some of the hindrances to youth development in the country?

Double-click to edit header

**PART 4 - HOW YOUTH PERCEPTIONS RESONATES WITH EXISTING  
POLICY INTERVENTION**

10. How do you think existing youth development policies and interventions are meeting the needs of the youths in the country?

**PART 5 - HOW YOUTH DEVELOPMENT POLICIES CAN BE IMPROVED**

11. What do you think should be included in the existing youth development policies to better meet the needs of the youths?

12. What do you think the youth development institutions in the country can do to be more efficient in the execution of youth development interventions?

13. What can be done to prevent/ reduce the barriers and hindrances to youth development in the country?

14. Is there anything you would like to add or ask me?

## Appendix II

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO



### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

#### **Towards a better Ghana? Understanding barriers and facilitators to youth development in Ghana: perspectives of urban youths in Accra.**

I understand that participation in the study is voluntary and that I can stop participating at any time, without giving a reason. There will be no negative consequences for me if I withdraw. The data collected about me up to the point of withdrawal may still be used in the study.

I have been adequately informed about the study and the processing of my personal data. I have received the information sheet about the study, as well as the privacy notice. I have also had the opportunity to ask the researchers further questions.

I consent to audio recordings of me being used for research purposes, but they have been processed in such a way that I cannot be identified.

Yes  No

I consent to my name/photograph being published in connection with publications and research data

Yes  No

I consent to be contacted at a later stage for possible further studies (follow-up or equivalent to this study).

Yes  No

I consent to be contacted at a later stage for possible further studies (follow-up or equivalent to this study), options:

- To being asked to participate in further studies: Yes  No
- To the request for further use of data collected about me: Yes  No

I confirm that I will not participate in face-to-face data collection if I have flu symptoms, fever, am recovering from illness, or am feeling otherwise unwell.

 Yes

I understand the information that I have received and agree to participate in this study.

Yes



By verbal confirmation/confirmation by ticking the relevant box in this form I accept that

- data will be collected from me as described in information sheet,
- my data can be used in accordance with the procedures outlined in the privacy notice

I give my consent to the sections specified above by ticking the "yes" boxes.

If I do not wish to participate in a particular section, I have the right to refuse by ticking the "no" box. However, I still agree to participate in the study otherwise.

Confirmation

By ticking this box, I agree to participate in this study.

Yes



Or

I have given my consent verbally and the researcher will document it in a reliable way.

If this document is signed, it should be placed in the PI's archive. Informed consent documents will be stored in a secure location for as long as the data are in an identifiable form. If the data are anonymised or deleted, informed consent documents do not need to be preserved.