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CHILD MIGRATION IN THE VOLTA REGION: EXPLORING THE DRIVERS AND SOCIO- ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

BY

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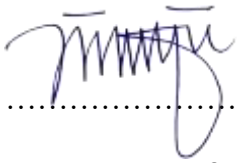
DECLARATION

I George Yao KAFU, hereby declare that except for references to published works and materials related to the topic which have been duly acknowledged and referenced, this dissertation is an original work written by me, under the supervision of Professors Joseph Awetori Yaro, Austin Dziwornu Ablo and Joseph Kofi Teye. I wish to declare that tis work has not been presented in part or whole to any other degree- awarding institution or university. All sources are referenced and cited in the bibliography.



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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Alice L. Gawu-Kafu and my three sons: Desmond Eyram Kafu, Godwin Dela Kafu and Jade Mawufeasi Kafu as well as all parents and guardians of migrant children.

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ABSTRACT

The globally growing concern of child migration in the 21st century is increasingly becoming a focus of international research. While child migration is dynamic due to its varying circumstances, modern research is needed to unravel the leading factors and their implications on migrant children. It is within this context that this study investigates the drivers, socio-economic implications and the role of social networks in child migration. Four communities in the Volta Region of Ghana; Aflao, Keta, Dzemeni, and Kpando-Torkor were selected for the study. The study examined the factors influencing child migration, the socio-economic conditions of migrant children, their families and the receiving communities. The research also explored how social networks shape migration decisions and experiences. A mixed method approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods including interview of migrant children, their parents and community stakeholders as well as surveys were adopted. The study revealed that child migration is a generally accepted practice in the study communities. It was further discovered that child migration is gendered. Boys who migrate often engaged in economic activities such as fishing and farming, while girls often migrate to offer domestic services or trade. The study identified economic hardship, educational aspirations, family instability and environmental factors (including climate change, coastal erosion and flooding) as the main drivers of child migration. It is argued that migrant children often face multiple vulnerabilities such as poor living conditions, limited access to education, economic exploitation and exposure to health hazards. It is further observed that social networks, particularly family and community ties, play a crucial role in the pattens of child migration and especially decisions on the destination of child migrants. The study recommends the development of targeted policy interventions such as improved access to education and stronger enforcement of child protection laws as strategies to mitigating child migration.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

CAR: Central African Republic

CASC: Catholic Action for Street Children

CHN: Community Health Nurse

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

GES: Ghana Education Service

GSS: Ghana Statistical Service

ILO: International Labour Organization

IOM: International Organization for Migration

JHS: Junior High School

NCMT: Neo Classical Migration Theory

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NHIS: National Health Insurance Scheme

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

SNT: Social Network Theory

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

SHS: Senior High School

UNCCD: United Convention to Combat Desertification

UNDESA: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTOIN

1.0 Background of the Study

The global picture of child migration is complex and multifaceted involving both legal and illegal forms and actors such as families, communities and governments (Obertová & Cattaneo, 2018; Swanson & Torres, 2016). Children (like adults) migrate in reaction to variations in the availability of resources and opportunities in space, with the hope of improving upon their standards of living and increasing their chances for future development (Baffoe et al., 2021). In most cases, the movement is from low-income rural areas with limited resources and opportunities to areas with better opportunities (Teye et al., 2017). According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2020), the number of migrant children below 19 years globally increased from 29 million in 1990 to 40.9 million in 2020 and constituting 14.6% of the total migrant population. However, UNICEF (2023) argued that out of the world's 281 million migrants, half of them are children from Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Myanmar, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. These countries have been identified as being the notable nations that have experienced significant levels of child migration in recent time due to geopolitical situations and conflicts.

Child migration in Africa is mostly internal, with children moving from rural to urban areas or from one region to another within the same nation (Awumbila et al., 2016; Teye et al., 2019; Zaami, 2020). This is often motivated by factors like desire for better educational possibilities, escaping poverty, search for better employment and desire to be with their families (Teye et al., 2017). UNHCR (2019) estimates that as a result of conflicts and violence, 7 million children in Africa are internally displaced. In addition, Akpuokwe et al. (2024) observe that refugee and asylum-seeking migration in Africa is a common phenomenon due to political unrest,

violence, environmental problems and violation of human rights and abuses in various parts of the continent. Amnesty International (2022) reports that several protracted conflicts, including those in South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic (CAR) and Sudan, have resulted in forced displacement of both adults and children. The socio-economic effects of these movements include disruption of families, exploitation and abuse, school dropout and loss of skills, and an increased risk of health hazards (UNDESA, 2020). Additionally, there may be detrimental effects on the target populations, such as heightened competition for resources and potential racial and social tensions.

Spatially, child migration in Ghana is based on historical trends and factors that shape migration dynamics in general (Piguet, 2022). The phenomenon follows a north-south spatial arrangement; similar to the patterns of physical development and poverty (Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia, 2022; Zaami, 2020). One prominent example is the phenomenon of Kayayei female child and youth head porters who migrate predominantly from Northern Ghana to major urban centres such as Accra, Kumasi, Takoradi, and Tamale, mainly because of the prospects these cities have to offer. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2013), areas with significant mining or natural resource extraction activities like the Ashanti and Western regions, have high demand for labour in the mining sector; hence children frequently migrate to such communities to be engrossed in activities in small-scale mining (galamsey). According to Asiedu et al. (2022), fishing communities also serve as destination regions for migrant children. Both Coastal and River towns in Ghana like the Volta region, have fishing communities where children migrate to engage in fishing activities or support services driven by the socioeconomic conditions prevalent in those areas (Asiedu et al., 2022).

The Ghana Statistical Service (2021) revealed that the Volta Region tops in migration to other regions in Ghana arguing that migratory trend in the country has shifted from the Northern

parts of the country to the Eastern. Even though child migration is not new in Ghana and the big cities like Accra and Kumasi are filled with minors from rural areas, reliable data on their numbers are difficult to obtain due to the persistent neglect in household registration and census data (Fuseini & Daniel, 2020; Thorsen & Hashim, 2011). The terms 'migration', 'child migration' and 'child trafficking' are closely related, but have distinct concepts that involve the movement of persons across borders or within nations. Migration refers to the movement of people across a territorial boundary often involving a change in their place of usual residence (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). It involves the "detachment from the organization of activities at one place and the movement of the total round of activities to another" (Yendaw et al., 2016). The term child migration on the other hand describes the transnational or transregional movement of minors (people under the age of 18), either accompanied or unaccompanied by their parents or legal guardians" (UNESCO, 2018; UNICEF, 2021). Child trafficking encompasses the recruitment, transportation, harbouring of children for the purpose of exploitation. which include forced labour, sexual abuse and other forms of abuse (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2017).

Child migration is therefore conceptualized as the movement of such persons from their habitual residence to another community or region for a continuous period exceeding one month either accompanied or unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and not involving coercion or exploitation. Besides, the study adopts the definition of Yaqub (2009) as "persons below 18 years old, who choose to move from their home (usual residence) and live at destinations without a parent or adult guardian". The main reason for adopting this definition is because it distinguishes child migration from child trafficking.

A survey by Darko (2008) revealed that child migration in communities along the Volta Lake in the Volta region is very high, resulting in absenteeism and school dropout among children. The paper further argued that majority of children who migrate to the rural communities do not

go to school, but rather, they either vend in the market or work on the farms. This line of argument has prompted the new research to investigate child migration by critically analysing the drivers and socio- economic implications in two coastal towns (Keta and Aflao) and two river communities (Dzemeni in the South Dayi District and Kpando- Torkor in the Kpando Municipality). Critical issues that require interrogation in this regard include investigating the factors responsible for child migration in coastal and riverine communities, the current state of the socio-economic conditions of migrant children, and the extent to which child migration has gone in the Volta Region. Understanding the dynamics of child migration in the Volta Region therefore provides insights into the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by child migrants including exploitation, abuse and limited access to essential services such as education and healthcare. Finally, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the push and pull factors that drive child migration and how these can inform the development of targeted interventions and policies.

1.1 Problem Statement

The increase in the movement by minors across borders has become a major concern in the twenty-first century and increasingly, a focus for international research and policy (De Haas et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2018). Globally, forced and voluntary migrations are identified as the main trends of child migration (UNICEF, 2023) and these are driven by factors such as refugee and asylum- seeking, humanitarian crisis, smuggling and trafficking, economic and educational opportunities (UNDESA, 2020). Although child migration is dynamic and can change overtime due to changing circumstances, modern research is needed to unravel the current drivers and socio- economic conditions affecting migrant children to safeguard and shape the future of child migration. Africa is often viewed as a continent of mass migration and displacement which is mainly attributable to poverty, violence and environmental disasters (Adepoju, 2004). The debates on child migration in African contexts are centred on the integration of migrant

children into the destination communities, providing legal protection aimed at preventing the exploitation and recognition of climate induced movement as a legitimate concern (UNDESA, 2018; UNHCR, 2019; UNICEF, 2023).

The literature in Ghana is replete on different forms of migration (Punch, 2007) with child migration emerging as a significant area of scholarly interest. For instance, the study by Kwankye et al. (2009) revealed that the main reasons indicated by children for their decision to migrate to Accra and Kumasi is 'independence and money'. The study further discovered that both male and female migrants follow their siblings to the city with the sole aim of getting a job which the researchers described as "a gamble because most of them fail woefully". Cebotari and Dito (2021) also opined that child migration does not always associate with poor economic conditions, but it also interlinks with family conditions such as divorce and gender, which can affect child welfare. Further research shows that children who remain with their parents after divorce perform better than migrant children (Tamanja, 2014). Previous studies in the area have also identified economic factors, conflicts between differing value systems, the nature of migration and the age at which migration occurs as significant drivers for out-of-school migrants (Fuseini & Daniel, 2020). These barriers make it difficult for migrants to adjust and integrate into their new environments. Similarly, rural-urban migration negatively impacts agricultural production in the Ketu-North district (Kavi et al., 2023). The migration of able-bodied youth to urban areas, particularly the capital city, has resulted in a noticeable decline in agricultural productivity in the district.

While the above studies have contributed immensely to the understanding of child migration, the concentration is on north-south migration and rural - urban migration of children with limited focus on child migration in rural areas especially in the Volta Region. Punch (2007) argued that child migration is usually considered as a new phenomenon because issues emanating from child migration have been ignored. Earlier studies in the Volta region have

portrayed child migrants as victims. Such studies have predominantly focused on child trafficking, child labour and streetism (Edmonds & Shrestha, 2009; Punch, 2007). Most of these studies have tendered to portray child migrants as underpinned by forced migration. They do not put much emphasis on the agency of children in the migration process. However, child migration is complex and assumes different forms, influenced by an interplay of factors and the outcomes on individuals and communities can vary from short to medium and long terms. To unravel the critically neglected areas such as the drivers and socio- economic implications of child migration on the migrant child, their families and the receiving communities, critical research is needed especially in the Volta region where the issue has gained much prominence. Furthermore, there is lack of detailed information on the frequency and trends of child migration in the Volta Region. The existing research frequently focuses on the general migration trends or on particular age groups, including adolescent mobility on forced job (Belmonte et al., 2020). There is a lack of a systematic understanding of the dynamics of child migration, including the prevalence and characteristics of the phenomenon. Understanding the magnitude and nature of this problem will be beneficial for a thorough analysis of the patterns of child migration in the Volta Region (Carling, 2014). In addition to the above, the issue of child migration has scarcely been interrogated within the theoretical concept of social networking even although it is instrumental to unravel how child migration is rooted in social migration and how it reinforces the occurrence of this problem. Serbeh and Adjei (2020) argued that the main theory that has helped in the understanding of the incidence of child migration is the social network theory. Borrowing from the idea of chain migration, the social network theory evaluates how connections and relationships influence migration decisions (Munshi, 2020).

Even though the social network theory in modern societies has great influence on child migration, little is known about how it impacts or obstructs the phenomenon of child migration

in the Volta Region. Insights into the protective factors or risks related to migration can be gained by investigating the impact of family, friends, community structures and siblings who have travelled on the migration trajectories and outcomes of child migrants in the Volta Region. This research posits that there is diminutive attention on matters of child migration into rural inland destination, their vulnerability and exploitative conditions. There is therefore the need to thoroughly interrogate and discuss this postulation further in the academic circles. Codjoe et al. (2017) intimated that river and coastal towns in Ghana have unique characteristics and challenges that lead to different types of migration including child migration. Ayilu (2023) also revealed that the key peculiarities in riverine communities that are connected to child migration include economic activities such as fishing and subsistence agriculture which have led to irregular source of income, thereby driving children to seek alternative livelihoods elsewhere. In addition, children in fishing communities often engage in hazardous works such as fishing instead of attending school (Asiedu et al., 2022). Their isolated nature also makes them vulnerable to different forms of exploitation including forced labour and trafficking (Ayilu, 2023). Thus, the study can contribute to the formulation of evidence-based policies and interventions targeted at protecting and supporting vulnerable child migrants by providing a thorough understanding of the prevalence, drivers and social dynamics of child migration in this region.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research is to explore the patterns, drivers and socio-economic implications of child migration in the coastal and river towns of the Volta Region. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Analyse the dynamics of child migration in the Volta Region focusing on the prevalence, characteristics and broader socio-economic conditions;
2. Examine the drivers of child migration in the Volta Region;

3. Explore the socio- economic implications of child migration on the migrant child, their families and the receiving communities.

1.3 Research Questions

The key research questions for the study are:

1. To what extent do the occurrence and socio- economic conditions affected the nature of child migration in the Volta Region?
2. How do socio-economic and environmental factors influence the levels, dynamics and patterns of child migration in the Volta Region?
3. What are the effects of child migration on children's welfare, household economy and communities?

1.4 Study Hypothesis

1. H0: There is no significant relationship between the drivers of child migration and the occurrence of child migration.

   H_1; There is a significant relationship between the drivers of child migration and the occurrence of child migration.
2. Ho: There is no significant relationship between social network and child migration outcomes.

   H_1: There is a significant relationship between social network and child migration outcomes.
3. Ho: There is no significant difference between the living condition of children who migrated and those who did not.

H_1: There is a significant difference between the living condition of children who migrated and those who did not.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The findings on the study of child migration in the Volta Region particularly exploring the drivers and socio- economic implications is significant for several reasons. Firstly, understanding the drivers of child migration is essential in identifying and addressing the root causes of this phenomenon. This will greatly help in developing targeted interventions to mitigate migration in situations where it poses a risk to the well- being of the child or the community (Carling & Collins, 2017). Secondly, focusing on child migration in a specific geographic area like the Volta Region can shed light on the unique factors and dynamics that influence migration patterns in that particular context. This can inform more targeted interventions that are tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of the area.

The study can also inform stakeholders about the need for programs that protect the rights of children who migrate. This can include measures to ensure that they have access to education, health care, and other essential services without being subjected to exploitation, abuse or discrimination. Finally, given the global nature of child migration, research on this topic has implications beyond the Volta Region and can contribute to a broader understanding of the issue by adding to existing literature. The problem of child migration therefore, can be addressed broadly both nationally and internationally.

1.6 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters, each contributing to the comprehensive exploration of the drivers and socio- economic implications of child migration in the Volta region of Ghana. The opening chapter provides the general introduction to the study. It outlines the background to the research, the problem statement, the objectives, research questions, hypotheses and the significance of the study. This chapter sets the stage for understanding the context and rational for the research. Chapter two presents a detailed review of relevant literature. It critically discusses the global and local trends of child migration, the drivers and

socio- economic consequences of the phenomenon and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks such as the Social Network Theory and the Neo- Classical Migration Theory, which underpin the study. Chapter three outlines the methodological approach adopted for the study. It describes the study areas, philosophical assumptions, research design, sampling procedures, data collection method and analytical techniques. It also discusses issues of reliability, validity, ethical considerations and the challenges encountered during the field work. Chapter four focuses on the dynamics of child migration in the Volta Region. It provides an analysis of the prevalence, patterns, and characteristics of child migration including aspects such as age, gender and cross- border mobility.

Chapter five delves into the drivers of child migration. It explores the economic, educational, and environmental and socio- cultural factors that shape migration decisions as well as the role of social networks such as family and peer influence in the migration process. Chapter six examines the socio- economic implications of child migration. It discusses how migration affects the well- being of the migrant children, their families and the receiving communities, covering issues like access to education, health, economic vulnerability, social integration and community level impacts. Chapter seven summarizes the key findings of the study, draws conclusions and offers recommendations. It also highlights the theoretical and methodological contributions of the research and suggests areas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to situate the study within a scholarly framework by analysing and assessing previous studies and academic publications on child migration. It begins with a review on the trends of migration and narrows down to the socio- economic implications of child migration whilst discussing the drivers and the importance of social network in child migration. This critical evaluation enables the researcher to assess the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of existing literature which informs the development of study design and methodology.

2.1 Definition of key concepts

Migration: Wright and Ellis (2016) define migration as a geographic or spatial mobility of people or groups from one location to another, usually across national or regional borders. This movement can be temporal or perpetual and may take place due to several circumstances, such as social, educational, environmental, or economic opportunities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013).

A child: The definition of a child is in three categories

(i) Age definition: Any anyone under the age of eighteen is considered as a child (UN 1998, Children's Act 1998 Act 560 of Ghana)

(ii) Rights and protection: "It is fundamental to ensure that any child needing protection receives it and that, regardless of their immigration status, citizenship or background, all children are treated as children first and foremost". (Schumacher et al., 2019).

(iii) Best interest of the child: Schumacher et al. (2019) noted that children's best interests should always come first in decisions involving them. Every adult ought to act in the best

interests of children and while making decisions adults should consider the impact of their verdicts on children.

Child migrant: International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2024) considers a child migrant as any person under the age of eighteen who relocates from his/ her place of birth to another for purposes other than recreation, medical care, or religious pilgrimage is considered a child migrant.

2.2 Trends of Child Migration

According to Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2018), child migration dates back to 1618, where needy children were sent as apprentices from developing countries to America with the aim of populating British colonies and opening new avenues for children with motivations ranging from humanitarian to imperialist. Children under age 14-years, which was considered school-leaving age were considered child migrants and were labelled “orphans”. (source/citation required here). After World War II, Canada, Australia and New Zealand became the main destinations for child migrant stock. Addressing the changing dynamics of child migration in the 21st century, UNICEF (2019) intimated that 31 million children are not residing in their country of birth or their usual place of residence. This covers children who are internally displaced, refugees, asylum seekers, child migrants, and children whose parents have abandoned them (foundling). Antia et al. (2020) argued that the phenomenon of international labour migration is the main contributing factor of child migration posing serious challenges to the survival of many homeless children. This is particularly the case because of the long-lasting effects of child migration on family relations and the rise of transnational families. This study argues that assessing the socio-economic implications of child migration is crucial for the understanding of the phenomenon of child migration.

Research on child migration in Africa offers a detailed analysis of the migratory trends and demographics of the displaced and migrating children on the continent. According to UNHCR

(2019), an estimated 7 million children in Africa are internally displaced due to conflict and violence. Dako-Gyeke et al. (2020) opined that in West Africa, most of the migrant children leave home between the ages of 13 and 17 to seek work in order to supplement family income. As noted by UNHCR (2019), a substantial portion of foreign migrants living in Africa relocate within the continent as opposed to leaving for other areas. This is consistent with the claims of Adepoju (2004) that half of the approximately 10 million emigrants from Eastern Africa remained in the same area. Further scholarly work on child migration in Africa revealed that children make up one in four immigrants which is more than double the average for the world (Galli, 2024). There are notably high rates of child immigrants in countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Kenya, with South Africa having the greatest number of child migrants (Khaldi & Prado-Gascó, 2021; Salami et al., 2021).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2024) opined that over 14 million Africans have been internally displaced due to conflict, political instability, natural disasters, violence and almost half of these individuals are children. Other studies by Erdal and Oeppen (2020) and Owoaje et al. (2016) argue that different types of conflicts such as the intestate conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998- 2000, civil wars (South Sudan- 2013 to date), ethnic and communal conflicts (Darfur conflict, Sudan 2003 to date), religious and sectarian conflicts (Boko Haram Insurgency, Nigeria) and other forms of instability such as those in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have contributed to child migration in recent times (Azubuike, 2018; Cederman & Pengl, 2019; Mabon & Mason, 2022). Levy (2022) revealed that out of the approximately 4 million refugees in Africa, children make up more than half of the total number. Much of the obligation for housing these migrants falls on African nations, particularly Uganda, which has demonstrated the best practices in their reception and integration.

The rapid urbanization in Africa is a major cause of rural-urban migration, with children leaving rural areas to move to cities in pursuit of quality work, education, or family reunions

(Barrera-Cancedda et al., 2019; Reia et al., 2022). Even though Udelsmann and Bjarnesen (2020) revealed that major cities such as Lagos, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Nairobi, Abidjan and Addis Ababa have become a significant destination for the rural-urban migrants because they act as hubs of the economy, politics and culture, providing rural-urban migrants with chances for employment, education, and higher living standards. This study contends that urban places cannot have all the necessary infrastructure or services to sustain the migrant children, so they run the risk of being trafficked, exploited, or destitute. Regarding the patterns of migration within the continent and the dispersion of juvenile migrants throughout the various African regions, UNICEF (2021) using charts, graphs and statistical data from reliable sources including UNDESA and UNICEF came out that many migrant children remain in the continent but are confronted with negative conditions such as school dropout, child labour and separation from their families.

2.3 Child Migration in Ghana

In Ghana, child migration is not a recent phenomenon, although research on the phenomenon has only recently begun. This is somewhat explained by the fact that in the past, child migration was frequently thought of as a reaction to adult migration (Channa et al., 2023). This is evident in the fact that children always accompany their parents either moving alongside with them against their will or moving to join them later at their destinations (Horn, 2019, McLean, 2020). This assertion is in harmony with the proposal of Belloni (2021), who also holds the view that children lack agency in their migration.

Consequently, the current patterns of child movement in Ghana are primarily rural-urban and north-south mirroring the patterns of adult migration (Lattof, 2017). The major cities, particularly Accra and Kumasi, are comparatively more developed and have become magnets for adult migrants as well as children and young adults looking for work and educational opportunities (Augustt, 2021; Tanle et al., 2020). This pattern seems to be in response to the

differences in spatial development (Serbeh & Adjei, 2020). Regional disparities in employment, socioeconomic growth and associated opportunities seem to have had a substantial impact on the country's child migration streams' direction and size (Hammar & Tamas, 2021; Thorsen & Hashim, 2011). To fully comprehend the current patterns and trajectories of child migration in Ghana, it is therefore, helpful to have a basic knowledge of the historical history of adult migration.

Ghana's early migrations took many different forms and were influenced by enslavement, trade, colonization of new areas, and internecine fighting. During this time, entire clans, ethnic groups and communities relocated to avoid the devastation caused by internal fighting. These wars had an impact on nearly all of Ghana's ethnic groups (Yaro et al., 2023). Empirical studies show that the major migration routes were associated with trade, agriculture and nomadic lifestyles (Addo-Fening, 2013; Padilla- Rodriguez 2020, Manning & Trimmer, 2020). Another factor that leads to migration in pre- independence era include the distribution of economic opportunities as well as political exiles in 1818, 1824, and 1832 (Adu-Okoree et al., 2023).

Research has revealed that many Africans were forced to migrate as a result of the disruption caused by the advent of the Atlantic Slave Trade by the Europeans (Inikori, 1994). The Europeans were drawn to West Africa by trade resources such as ivory, gold, and others. da Silva Jr (2021) argue that the most lucrative "commodity" for the European traders was persons held as slaves in West Africa as the need for inexpensive labour to work on plantations in America increased. Before the European contact, migration was also explained by fleeing or escaping from the territory of an oppressive monarch (Inikori, 1994). The Ewes fled Notsie (in Togo) to modern-day Ghana because of the brutality of their master, King Agorkorli (Skinner, 2010). According to Assan (2021), almost every ethnic group in modern Ghana have immigrated from somewhere to their current position.

Migrations in Ghana was also motivated by the search for good grounds for agriculture, which helped to build new settlements. Thus, migration influenced the demographic, economic, and socio-cultural dynamics of the society and was an essential component of the people's social fabric (Songsore, 2003). According to Yaro (2008), migration was therefore, a response to human needs such as favourable ecological conditions, fertile land for agriculture, shelter, trade (including the slave trade), and increased protection during tribal battles. Europeans colonized and ruled during the years 1874–1956, leading to their independence in 1957. During this time, regional and national borders for efficient government were established. These barriers did not prohibit people from traveling; rather, the pattern of individuals relocating inside the nation's borders persisted.

According to Teye and Nikoi (2022), a considerable number of the migrants to Ghana, notably those from Niger, Mali, and Nigeria, worked as independent contractors rather than as wage workers. From pre-colonial times until the early 1970s, when the Aliens Compliance Order and the Ghana Business Promotion Act 334 of August 1, 1970 were passed and used as a weapon to drive out commercial migrants, the activities of the migrants engaged in commerce continued (Anarfi et al., 2003; Teye & Nikoi, 2022). Apart from trade, many migrants were drawn to the country throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s due to the establishment of gold mines and cocoa fields. Arthur-Holmes and Abrefa- Busia (2022) indicated that southern Ghana is outstanding among the regions which benefited from the contribution of the permanent migration. He went on to say that most of the migrants were young; single men who primarily worked in mining and agriculture in the tourist destinations. Adepoju (2004) asserts that the practices of the colonial powers directly led to the migration flows that took place on cocoa estates and in mining centres.

Moreover, making Accra the capital city to replace Cape Coast changed its position in terms of politics and administration (Adepoju, 2004). Accra was the home to numerous enterprises

and the development of a harbour at Tema gave the nation's capital even more momentum (Anarfi et al., 2003; Erdal & Oeppen, 2020). In addition to requiring a lot of labour at that time, the cocoa industry offered incentives in the form of large compensation (Yaro et al., 2023). As such a lot of people travelled from Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Volta and Eastern Regions to the Western Region to cultivate cocoa.

2.3.1 Migration patterns in post-independent Ghana

Due to its relative wealth, Ghana continued to draw migrants from other African nations after gaining independence in 1957, although the northern inflow persisted unabatedly. Following independence, Ghana's internal population mobility persisted, especially from rural to urban areas. In 1960, approximately 23% of the population was considered urban; and by 2000, that number had risen to over 43%. For the most part, this increase was due to the migration from the rural areas, particularly in the 1960s (Tanle et al., 2020). The expansion of industrial activity in the metropolitan areas during the 1960s was a major contributing factor to this. High rates of naturally occurring urban population growth thereafter, became a major contributing element to urbanization. The less educated have continued to migrate to the mining and cocoa-growing regions, while those with the necessary skills and education relocate to the national and provincial capitals. The Northern and Volta regions saw net losses of enumerated native born of 157,000 and 95,000, respectively, according to the 1960 Census Report, whereas Ashanti, Greater Accra, and Brong Ahafo imported more than 10,000 persons apiece.

Since the end of World War II, there has been a notable rise in the population of West Africans residing in the metropolitan areas. For instance, between 1950 and 1960, the percentage of the population of Ghana living in the metropolitan areas with 20,000 or more residents increased from 7% to 11%. Of Ghana's 18.9 million inhabitants, 27.4% did not reside at their birthplaces as of 2000. 9.9% and 17.5%, respectively, of the population was made up of intra- and interregional migrants (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002, 2023). Nonetheless, there are notable

differences in the percentage of the overall population of the areas that are made up of intra and interregional migrants. According to the 2023 analytical report of Ghana's population census, the Greater Accra experienced the highest net migration gain (1,106,001), reflecting its economic attractiveness. Volta (-434,889), Upper East (-291,962) and Northern (-178,578) regions suffered the greatest migration losses. The Volta Region therefore, stands out as a critical area for migration research due to its exceptionally high negative net migration rate and effectiveness ratio. As captured on table 1, the net migration rate is highest in the Greater Accra Region (259.9 per 1,000) and lowest in Upper East (-184.0 per 1,000), indicating strong urban pull and rural push factors. The migration effectiveness ratios further illustrate this trend, with Greater Accra (58.9) and Western North (21.5) emerging as key migration destinations, whereas North East (-72.7) and Upper West (-72.3) experience severe population outflows.

Table 1: In-Migration, Out-Migration and Net Migration by Birth, by region

Region	In-migration	Out-migration	Net-migration	Total Population	Net migration Rate (Per 1000)	Migration Effectiveness Ratio
Western	561513	216882	111289	1930712	57.6	14.3
Central	437518	495404	-57886	2887942	-20	-6.2
Gt. Accra	1492378	386377	1106001	4255507	259.9	58.9
Volta	120595	555484	-434889	2058801	-211.2	-64.3
Eastern	378422	622350	-243928	3153869	-77.3	-24.4
Ashanti	768918	561064	207854	5204646	39.9	15.6
Western North	155841	100591	55250	820347	67.4	21.5
Ahafo	115239	95829	19410	542850	35.8	9.2
Bono	150148	172759	-22611	1224616	-18.5	-7
Bono East	189427	120839	68588	1128294	60.8	22.1
Oti	76049	110969	-34920	772279	-45.2	-18.7
Northern	91134	269712	-178578	2475846	-72.1	-49.5
Savannah	47323	79601	-32278	674658	-47.8	-25.4
North East	15294	96819	-81525	736372	-110.7	-72.7
Upper East	32378	324340	-291962	1587191	-184	-81.9

Upper West	36411	226226	-189815	1078999	-176	-72.3
Total	4107075	4218364				

Source: Ghana Statistical Service (2023)

The table clearly shows that there are significant regional and temporal variations in the patterns and dynamics of population movements, but in contrast, Awumbila et al. (2014) argued that in recent times, there has been a noticeable shift in the movement of children from northern to southern Ghana, with many girls moving independently to cities in search of work on their own. This has sparked worries about the dangers and weaknesses that young migrants, especially women who mostly engaged in "kayayei" (headload carrying) activities face (Aniah et al., 2019; de Sherbinin et al., 2022). The girls who migrate as autonomous children may be vulnerable to maltreatment, early marriage, and sexual exploitation (Sanghera, 2017). This tallies with the observation of Feyissa et al. (2019) that the adverse events have the potential to result in unintended pregnancies, STIs, such as HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health issues. These risks are increased when sexual and reproductive health treatments and information are unavailable to migrant children.

2.3.2 Child migration in Coastal and Riverine Communities in Volta Region

Child migration in coastal and river communities in the Volta Region is influenced by several factors including fishing. Sanghera (2017) indicated that the river and coastal towns frequently rely primarily on fishing as a source of income. Families may find it difficult to make ends meet because of the dwindling fish stocks and unstable economies (Leposa, 2020). In these situations, families may choose to send their children to work as fishermen to directly support the family or to supplement the family's income. Navarro-Pérez et al. (2021) argue that due to their isolated locations and restricted access to resources, coastal and river communities are frequently targets of child trafficking. Studies by Edgemon et al. (2024) revealed that children are trafficked for a variety of reasons, such as serving as domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, or working in the fishery or other sectors. Traffickers take advantage of children's

and their families' weaknesses by tricking them into circumstances where they will be exploited or by offering them better chances.

Other studies identified seasonal movement which is associated with fishing activity in riverine and coastal populations is a major cause for migration (Owusu, 2024). While families may relocate temporarily to fishing settlements during the busiest fishing seasons, the children who migrate in this way may experience educational disruptions and be exposed to the perils of working and living in fishing communities (You et al., 2020). Mattah et al. (2023) further intimated that a unique feature of child migration in communities along the Volta Lake is social vulnerability. In assessing the social factors that promote child migration at the coastal and river communities in Ghana, the paper identified limited social capital (networks and connections), frailty and physical disability, limited access to political power, representation and lobbying skills, beliefs, customs and traditions, lack of technology, and limited availability of infrastructure as the key variables.

2.4 Prevalence of Child Migration

Despite efforts by governments and other state actors to minimize child migration, the act is still pervasive. Boskovic and Jankovic (2023) categorized human trafficking which is part of forced migration as the second most lucrative illicit business in the world. Belloni (2021) also argued that the issues of corruption and poverty in Africa make many individuals perceive child migration as a shortcut to success and an escape from hardships. This is consistent with Zakari et al. (2022) that migration can be viewed as an adaptation strategy that helps households in reducing their exposure to the effects of climate change and diversification of their sources of income, thereby indirectly assisting in the accomplishment of SDG 13. Migrant children are usually forced into labour, sexual exploitation and forced marriages (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2017).

In Ghana, child migration is dominant in the agricultural, fishing and mining sectors, which is attributable to the quest for cheap labour (Atiglo et al., 2022). Children are usually forced into domestic servitude, sexual and labour exploitation in these sectors to meet the demands of the working environment (Franchino-Olsen, 2021). Koomson et al. (2023) writing on child trafficking in fishing communities in Ghana intimated that some children migrate to beg, hawk on the streets and work in fast food settings depriving them of their right to education. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021), even though Ghana has a well-defined national migration policy that addresses legal and regulatory migration, child migration is rampant due to Ghana's geographical location as a source, transit and destination for migrants in West Africa. Ghana ranks 5th among the top 10 destinations for migrants in West Africa. The prevalence of child migration is further highlighted in reports by NGOs and international organizations, such as the IOM and UNCCD (2019), which indicate that children constitute a considerable proportion of the migrant population in coastal and riverine communities. Babanawo (2021) also revealed that child migration is relatively common in coastal communities in the Volta region due to climate change. In assessing vulnerability to coastal flooding, the paper revealed that the Aflao-Keta region is severely affected by coastal erosion and regular tidal waves, which increases family vulnerability and causes displacement leading to either accompanied or independent child migration.

Further studies have shown that seasonal and circular migration is another significant phenomenon of child migration dynamics in the coastal and river communities in the Volta region (Codjoe et al., 2020). Addressing the phenomenon of "rural Africa in motion" Mercandalli and Losch (2017) argued that the dominance of circular and seasonal migration in the coastal and river communities is facilitated by improved communication and transportation network. Using national census and household surveys from selected African countries, the paper intimated that most coastal residents, particularly fishermen and traders, engage in

seasonal or circular migration by moving temporarily to other coastal towns or inland areas during specific periods, such as the off-fishing season, and return afterward. Since residents of the study area heavily rely on fishing as a primary economic activity, seasonal migration occurs when fish stocks are more abundant during specific times of the year to maximize their catch (Codjoe et al., 2020; Quaye et al., 2020).

2.5 Characteristics of Child Migration

Child migration in the Volta region exhibits diverse characteristics, influenced by age, gender, migration patterns, and purposes. Age plays a crucial role in the dynamics and impact of child migration since children of different ages experience migration in different ways and their needs, vulnerabilities and the type of support they require can equally vary significantly (Raturi & Cebotari, 2021; Thorsen & Hashim, 2011). For instance, migrant children between 6-12 years may experience trauma from forced migration and separation from their families which can greatly affect them mentally (Ratha et al., 2010, Vanore et al., 2021). Migration involving adolescents (12-18 years) on the other hand may be at risk of exploitation, including child labour and trafficking, particularly if they are unaccompanied. (ibid). Even though the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2021:33) indicated that "there is a large concentration of young adults between the ages of 15 and 49 involved in migration while, a small proportion of children below the age of 15 involved in migration, some scholars described the contemporary era as the "age of migration" which is influenced by a variety of factors including economic, globalization, political changes, social networks and technological advancements, and argued that Ghana's migration pattern has changed drastically from north- south (Castells, 1999; Imamov & Semenikhina, 2021). More children move from rural areas in Ghana to the cities to better their living conditions.

Researchers and interventions therefore, have increasingly focused on the youngest participants in global migration trends. These perspectives range from the earlier assumptions

of universal childhood ideals to recognizing childhood and youth as constructed categories that vary historically and cross-culturally. Migrant children who were considered helpless objects of exploitation, devoid of autonomy in the decision-making and migratory process in the past are now conceptualized as active participants of migration in recent times. However, views of migrant children as articulate social actors have become "somewhat of a new research orthodoxy" (Bond, 2014).

In understanding the phenomenon of child migration, gender also plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of child migrants. Gender differences are evident, with boys being more likely to migrate for economic opportunities and girls often migrating for domestic work or due to family arrangements. Awumbila et al. (2017) refers to the changing roles of women in independent movement as the "feminization of migration". The plurality of views revealed that in the past, boys travelled more than girls because the former were considered more resilient in terms of stress resistance and a greater sense of independence (Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). It is however, noted that though more males than females in absolute terms are likely to be internal migrants, the difference is not significantly large (Lattof, 2017). Additionally, it was observed that males are more likely to be involved in migration over long distances including across borders (Adepoju, 2019). Whereas females dominate rural migration, mainly for marriage purposes, males dominate urban and international migration to search for better livelihoods or economic conditions (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013, 2021). Migration of women has evolved from their roles as accompanying spouses or help to relatives while their independent movement is aided by relations and networks of friends (Fleury, 2016, Reynolds et al., 2024). This study therefore, argues that even as accompanying spouses, mothers and caregivers, migrant fisherwomen take up additional roles in the destination areas as business partners associates, employees and other services.

Indeed, there is a piece of evidence to show that migration is an important distributor of Ghana's population since it has a significant role in the socio-cultural and economic development of the population (Adjei-Mensah, 2023; Awumbila et al., 2012). Specifically, studies show that migration in Ghana is predominantly internal and much of it, as in other developing countries, is undocumented (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021; Yendaw et al., 2016). Internal migration is conceptualized as rural to urban, rural to rural, urban to rural and urban to urban with a significant implication on both rural and urban areas, impacting economic development, social structure and environmental sustainability of any country (Awumbila et al., 2017).

Additionally, international migration has always been a main feature of the demographic redistribution in Africa. Due to the importance of international migration as a livelihood strategy for dealing with socio-economic challenges and with the increasing globalization, most Ghanaian entities have relied on international migration as an option for improving upon their livelihoods (Awumbila et al., 2014). Thus, there has been a reversal in international migration trends from net immigration to being a net emigration country post-independence i.e. from the 1960s (Ayanie et al., 2020). Recent pointers show that the common destination for a lot of the immediate post-independence epoch emigration was the United Kingdom (Okia, 2020). Colonial ties including a common language with the former colonial masters made emigration to the UK conducive (Okudzeto, 2022). Suffice to say, other English-speaking countries in North America also became attractive destinations for the Ghanaian emigrant (Awumbila, 2007). In contrast, Arthur (2016) states that in recent times, the destinations for international Ghanaian migrants are becoming increasingly diverse to countries in Asia and South America and even other African countries have also received Ghanaian migrants.

There is a lot of movement between Ghana and other countries in the West African sub region particularly with neighbouring Togo, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and Nigeria (Adaawen, 2017;

Semanou, 2019). Some scholars are of the opinion that in most cases, the national borders separate people of the same ethnic group and the porosity of these borders makes it difficult to identify people who cross them as migrants (Bauböck, 2018). In an assessment of international migration on population growth in Ghana, Codjoe (2007) notes that the impact of migration on national population growth is negligible. From the preceding discussions, it is apparent that age, gender, seasonal, internal and international migrations are key features of child migration in Ghana.

2.6 Drivers of Child Migration in Ghana

Children and adults respond in different ways to situations and circumstances in their communities or environments (You et al., 2020). Hence the drivers of child migration are both positive and adverse and vary extensively (Azunre et al., 2021). These factors can be broadly classified into environmental, socio-economic, policy, and individual drivers (Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia, 2022; D'Odorico et al., 2023; Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020). The interplay of these drivers determines the prevalence and pattern of child migration on the local, regional, and global scales (Mercandalli & Losch, 2017; Thompson et al., 2021; Van Hear et al., 2020). Child migration in general can be classified under voluntary or involuntary or forced migration while the factors that influence child migration can be grouped under push and pull factors. The push factors are those unfavourable conditions in the rural areas that force people to migrate to the urban centres. They are thus, the many negative situations in the migrant source region that make such areas unattractive. These include shocks, economic conditions or poverty, socio-cultural and educational and insecurity.

2.5.1 Environmental Drivers of Child Migration

Various environmental factors have led to the relocation of numerous children from their original places of residence, either within their own country or across international borders (D'Odorico et al., 2023; International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2023). These

environmental factors exert a significant influence on the global migration of children, affecting the decisions made by parents or guardians regarding whether to migrate with them or leave them behind (Khavarian-Garmsir et al., 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2022). The International Organization for Migration emphasizes that environmental change and disasters have long been significant factors in child migration on a global scale (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2023). Climate change, natural disasters, and land degradation are the three most prevalent reasons for families to migrate from one place to another (Hoffmann et al., 2020).

In the 21st century, the issue has become more pronounced due to climate change reports, and many families will soon be compelled to migrate because of a rise in weather-related occurrences, including floods, storms, and droughts (Khavarian-Garmsir et al., 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2022). Climate change causes rising sea levels, erratic weather, and extreme temperatures, making it challenging for people living in the affected areas. Natural disasters like hurricanes, floods, landslides, and wildfires displace people, forcing them to seek refuge elsewhere (Shakya et al., 2022). Millions of families worldwide depend on agriculture to make a living (Coulibaly & Li, 2020). However, the negative effects of land degradation, including salinity, low soil fertility, chemical contamination, soil pollution, soil erosion, and desertification, are having a severe impact on their ability to sustain their livelihoods (IOM & UNCCD, 2019). Consequently, many of these families are forced to leave their homes and move to urban areas or other places in search of better opportunities (Hermans & McLeman, 2021).

Using the national transfer account approach, Kwankye et al. (2021) asserted that child migration in modern Ghana can be attributed to population dividend due to three main factors: (i) Demographic Dynamics: Due to Ghana's rapid population expansion, there is a greater need for labour from within the country, especially in regions like the Upper East Region. This puts

pressure on the amount of arable land that is available and encourages out-migration. (ii) Young Population: There is a high number of educated young adults who are ready to work but feel out of place in rural areas, so they move to metropolitan areas in search of better prospects. (iii) Economic Disparities: Urban-biased macroeconomic policies have a significant impact on rural-urban migration, leading to workforce changes away from agricultural output and large income disparities between rural and urban areas. Even though the approach is good, it overlooks the differences and subtleties within each age group. Additionally, it assumes that all people of the same age have the same patterns of resource acquisition and usage, which may not always be the case.

2.6.1.1 The Impact of Climate Change on Child Migration

Climate change has become a significant catalyst for child migration in recent years (Beine & Jeusette, 2021). As climate change intensifies, it gives rise to various environmental challenges, such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and disruptions in agriculture (D'Odorico et al., 2023). These challenges directly affect the livelihoods and well-being of communities, compelling families to make tough decisions, including relocating to seek better opportunities and safety for their children (Hauer et al., 2020; Hermans & McLeman, 2021, Sensoy et al., 2020). The concept of migration as an adaptation is increasingly being acknowledged as a viable coping strategy in the context of climate change.

In a recent study conducted by Amo-Agyemang (2023), the climate-induced migration of the Frafra ethnic group in Ghana was examined as a means of both livelihood and adaptation amidst environmental shifts. The study revealed that due to the detrimental effects of climate change on agricultural production, families belonging to the Frafra ethnic group have turned to migration as a coping mechanism, seeking out better opportunities in the Southern region of Ghana. Jarawura (2021) conducted a similar study exploring the impact of climate change-induced drought-related migration in five villages within the Savannah of Ghana. The results

indicated that the drought-related migration in Northern Ghana is not solely limited to rural-to-rural migration, but also, involves rural-to-urban migration. Additionally, the study found that 21.5% of household-related migration occurs in the study area. However, the study emphasized the necessity of adopting a more comprehensive approach to climate migration issues, recognizing it as a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple driving forces.

Relatedly, a study conducted by Azumah et al. (2022) on maize farmers in Ghana examined the correlation between climate perception, productivity, and migration. The findings indicated that climate change, specifically high temperatures, droughts, and irregular rainfall patterns, significantly affected maize productivity, which in turn affected the decision-making process of families regarding migration as a coping mechanism. These studies shed light on the complex ways in which climate change influences migration patterns, particularly among at-risk communities in Ghana. Amo-Agyemang (2023), Jarawura (2021), and, Azumah et al. (2022) each offer unique insights into the intricate relationship between environmental shifts and human movement with a specific focus on the Frafra ethnic group and maize farmers in Northern Ghana. In this review, these studies were carefully analysed taking into account their policy implications, methodological approaches and the wider context of climate change and migration.

Beyond Ghana, numerous studies have shed light on the correlation between climate change and child migration. For instance, Ibrahim and Mensah (2022) conducted a comprehensive analysis of child migration resulting from natural disasters and climate change in sub-Saharan Africa. Their research established that climate change's detrimental effects, such as reduced and erratic rainfall patterns, often result in low agricultural productivity and consequently forcing families to migrate from rural areas to urban centres in search for better prospects. Additionally, the study found that rising sea levels, which are a direct consequence of climate change, are exacerbating the situation, prompting more people to migrate from rural

communities to urban areas. From a different perspective, Jacobson et al. (2019) explored the use of migration as a coping mechanism for climate change and whether the practice is adaptive or maladaptive in Cambodia. Their study observed that about 45% of households use migration as a coping mechanism. However, migration of families does not solve the problem but rather leads to an inadequate labour force for the communities. Yavçan (2021) utilized present-day evidence of climate migration and natural disasters to forecast the potential effects of these events on global child migration. The study's findings indicated that climate change and development-related issues could lead to a surge in global child migration by 2050 and 2075.

2.5.2 Shocks

Storti (2022) defines shocks as abrupt, unforeseen disruptions in people's daily lives. These could be floods fires, droughts, conflicts or deaths. This means they could either be natural or artificial. These conditions make people including children inept to handle and control their lives because they are mostly sudden and unpredictable. Children therefore. migrate away from the shock affected areas as a survival strategy. Atanga et al. (2021) argue that shocks in the form of conflicts and drought are major drivers of population movement in Ghana, especially in the northern sector. Even though Ghana was ranked 43rd in the Global Peace Index and the most peaceful country in West Africa, the nation has witnessed notable conflicts in its history and these have resulted in mass exodus from the conflict prone zones to places regarded as peaceful (Lamptey et al., 2017). Tribal conflicts such as the trade dispute between the Kokomba and the Nanumba, the intra-ethnic conflict at Bimbilla, land dispute by Nkonya and Alavanyo, Dagbon chieftaincy crisis and the Bawku chieftaincy clashes have resulted in dozens of Ghanaians especially the youth to flee from the troubled communities to identified lands of safety. According to Dadson and Kato (2015) in their analysis of migration trends in Ghana, it was indicated that in the past two decades, the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti, Western Eastern and Central regions have been the important destinations for most Ghanaian migrants. The Greater

Accra and Ashanti regions continue to be the preferred destinations of most migrants due to mining, education, industry and trade (Awumbila et al., 2015, Schewel 2018). For instance, the 1994 ethnic violence between the Kokomba and the Nanumba led to the establishment of Agbogbloshie, a suburb of Accra to house victims who escaped the fight in the North. This has drawn many people, including young people to Accra from rural areas due to the promised job opportunity.

Closely associated to conflict is the deaths of parents which have caused migration of people, especially children, from the Northern-Savannah regions to other areas, primarily the coastal and forest regions. Studies by Cebotari and Dito (2021) shows that the inheritance system practiced in Ghana mostly does not empower children to directly inherit their parents. Thus, to avoid depression, anxiety, school dropout, post-traumatic stress, low self-esteem and sexual risk, the children move from the rural arrears to the urban communities.

Climate change is another important driver of migration in Ghana due to its influence on food production and livelihood activities (Fernández et al., 2024). Dominant livelihood activities in rural Ghana are rain-fed agriculture fishing, salt extraction and trading. A major climatic element that affects these socio-economic activities and influences migration is drought. This occurs both in the northern and semi-arid regions as well as in the coastal areas. In the coastal belt, it is associated with erosion, flooding, soil salinization and the destruction of critical habitats such as mangroves, which further threatens the agricultural sector. Yaro (2008) contend that migration is considered as survival strategy by agrarian people with the hope of reducing poverty levels of migrant households, bridge the inequality gap between the rich and poor households, linking to economic growth and development in both the source region and receiving region. That notwithstanding, the excessive out-flow of able-bodied persons from agricultural zones can be disincentive to the sector (Adhikari et al., 2013, World Bank 2021, Veronese et al., 2020).

Arhin-Sam (2019) indicates that the Sahelian droughts of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when environmental stress was at its highest, coincided with lower outmigration from northern Ghana. The study indicated that environmental considerations were less important during this time in northern Ghana's history of migration than were economic and political factors. Due to this, migration was considered as a coping mechanism with structural environmental shortage rather than one of distress in the face of environmental disaster (Arhin-Sam, 2019; Bob-Milliar, 2019).

2.6.3 Economic Motivation

Regardless of the circumstances, economic reasons predominate when people migrate (Keopasith & Neng, 2020). Both the push and pull theories of migration consider economic differentials between rural and urban dwellers as a leading factor of child migration in developing countries like Ghana. Manyerere (2020) argue that while many young people travel to urban communities with the aim of taking advantage of employment opportunities in the cities, others migrate as a result of lack of employment in the rural areas which in most cases serve as the source regions for many migrant children. A critical analysis of migratory literature reveals that the main motivation for Ghanaian children to choose to leave their homes is poverty and famine (Manyerere, 2020). This collaborates with the findings of Adepoju (2022) who also argued that the inability of parents to meet the fundamental needs such as food, clothing and shelter of their wards due to financial problems has weakened and disintegrated family control over children who resort to the streets and look for employment with low pay.

According to an assessment on street children in Accra by UNICEF (2019) and the Catholic Action for Street Children (CAS), 35% of those enrolled in the city's program for street kids mentioned poverty as the reason they left their homes. In a similar vein, Yeboah (2021) argued in a study of north-south independent child migration in Ghana that despite there being many factors that contribute to child migration, economic incentive has been the primary driver

behind the movement of children from northern to southern Ghana (Baffoe et al., 2021; Yeboah, 2021).

2.6.4 Socio-cultural motivation

Children's migration intentions are strongly influenced by the sociocultural environment in which they are raised (Storti, 2022). A survey by UNICEF (2019) in several African nations including Ghana reveals that a strong sense of filial obligation drives many kids to look for employment opportunities. Jingzhong and Lu (2011) discovered that migration of children is in response to their parental expectations and the desire of children to support their families. The paper further argued that children are trained to believe that being polite and submissive is essential to understanding the importance of family responsibility. Consequently, they see it as their obligation to support their family leading to child migration to seek for green pastures to support their families (Anarfi & Appiah, 2009; Thorsen, 2020). Anarfi and Agyei (2009) showed that the high rate of child migration in the north especially among the Frafra tribe of Northern Ghana can be attributed to a shift from patrilineal system of inheritance to nuclear family structure, where parents focus on their own children and often neglect the children of deceased relatives. The main argument is that children especially orphans, are deprived of access to land and economic opportunities, pushing them to migrate to areas where they can work to support themselves, and their families (Abebe, 2010).

2.6.5 Educational Motivations

One of the main drivers of child migration is education attributable to the belief that education is essential for escaping poverty and achieving success in modern societies (Clark et al., 2020). Since many young people in rural areas especially in developing nations are confronted with lack of educational access, most of them migrate to urban centres to have access to good schools (De Haas et al., 2019). For instance, in Ghana, most rural schools have poor infrastructure, insufficient teaching and learning resources and inadequate teachers; these

situations mostly prompt children to seek better educational opportunities outside their local communities (Kyereko & Faas, 2022; Porter et al., 2011).

Punch (2007) points out that factors such as limited resources, lack of teaching materials, inadequate infrastructure, poor teaching quality, and low teacher salaries contribute to the negative perceptions of schooling in some rural areas of Ghana (p. 11). This is in consonance with the claims of Coulson (2017) that the negative perception of education coupled with failure of students and parents to meet their educational goals has exacerbated rural-urban migration. Conversely, Ifeanyichukwu et al. (2023) found that education and apprenticeship opportunities drive migration among various tribes in Ghana. Insecurity in rural areas emanating from negative traditional practices, beliefs and taboos such as trokosi system, female genital circumcision and puberty rites can also cause the youth to move to the urban centres for fear of being victims to such practices (Msuya, 2017).

Apart from the push factors as, discussed above, there are those conditions and opportunities in the urban centres that attract rural dwellers into cities. There are, thus, many attractive things in the migrant destination that stimulate the urge to leave source. These pull factors include presence of socio-economic amenities such as electricity, good drinking water, schools, health facilities and entertainments. Freedom from traditional laws and family pressures may attract people to the urban centres. In the urban areas, traditional rules and taboos are not regarded as it is the case in the rural areas. Thus, some people move to urban centres to free themselves from taboos, family pressures and negative practices.

2.7 The Socio-Economic Implications of Child Migration

The phenomenon of child migration bears significant implications for the migrant child, their family, and the receiving community (Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia, 2022; Bhabha, 2019). The implications of child migration encompass a broad range of spheres, including psychological, cultural, educational, economic, and health domains (Salami et al., 2020). The

purpose of the literature review in this subsection is to offer a thorough and inclusive assessment of current scholarly research focused on the socio-economic implication of child migration. The review incorporates a diverse range of disciplines including economics, sociology, demography, psychology, education policy, and social work. It delves into significant themes such as the effects of migration on human capital, shifts in population demographics, stresses on healthcare and education infrastructures, vulnerabilities to exploitation and trafficking, separation from family, social conflicts, and the complexities of integration.

2.7.1 The Socio-Economic Implications of Child Migration on the Migrant Child

2.7.1.1 Health Implications of Child Migration on the Migrant Child

This talks about all the health implications the migrant children faced at their destinations. These include psychological trauma and stress, disrupted healthcare and poor living conditions.

2.7.1.1.1 Psychological Trauma and Stress

The migration journey itself is incredibly traumatic for children, as they are exposed to severe adversities that can have lasting psychological impacts (Cohodes et al., 2021). Violence, including rape, physical abuse, and witnessing violence is common (Gatt et al., 2020). Children are at high risk of being kidnapped, trafficked, or forcibly recruited by gangs/cartels (Führer et al., 2020). Extortion and threats are frequently used against migrant families. Basic needs like food, water, shelter, and healthcare access are severely lacking (Vos et al., 2022). Family separations caused by death of parents, deportations, or forced separations at borders represent a profound trauma and toxic stressor that disrupts the crucial attachment relationships instrumental for child development (Zhang et al., 2022). Children left unaccompanied are exceptionally vulnerable. Even in relatives' homes or shelters, high rates of abuse, child Labour, and child marriage persist due to lack of protection mechanisms (Gatt et al., 2020).

The constant state of fear, uncertainty about the future, and immense acculturation stresses of adapting to new environments and cultures aggravates the psychological burden. Climates of xenophobia and stigma add to the distress (Maioli et al., 2021). Unsurprisingly, migrant children exhibit high rates of mental health problems like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD, anxiety, depression, attachment disorders, substance abuse issues, anger, and aggression. Unresolved childhood trauma frequently leads to long-term effects including developmental delays, failure to meet milestones, stunting, self-harm, and high-risk behaviours later in life (Maioli et al., 2021; Stevens et al., 2023). With inadequate access to counselling, therapy, and mental health services, the overwhelming psychological stressors and trauma experienced by migrant children too often go unaddressed (Cohodes et al., 2021). This unresolved trauma can create cyclical effects and perpetuate mental health challenges across generations (Führer et al., 2020). Providing greater protections and psychological support services for these vulnerable children is critically important (Cohodes et al., 2021).

2.7.1.1.2 Disrupted Healthcare

Migrant children experience profound disruptions to healthcare access, severely heightening their vulnerability to a myriad of preventable medical conditions (Salami et al., 2020). A dearth of routine immunizations renders this population exceptionally susceptible to outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, polio, diphtheria, and pertussis (Black et al., 2003). The suboptimal living conditions coupled with low immunization coverage rates propagate the rapid transmission of these highly contagious pathogenic agents within migrant camps and shelters (Halevy-Mizrahi & Harwayne-Gidansky, 2020). For those afflicted with chronic illnesses like HIV, tuberculosis, asthma, cancer, or diabetes mellitus, therapeutic interventions are sporadic at best (Black et al., 2003). Lapses of months or years without consistent treatment monitoring, medication access, or disease management profoundly

escalate the risk of acute decompositions and life-threatening complications (Linton et al., 2020). The lack of continuity of care poses a formidable challenge.

The convergence of malnutrition with high intestinal parasite and diarrheal disease burdens precipitates severe ramifications for appropriate cognitive and physical development trajectories (Salami et al., 2020). Without nutritional supplementation and antiparasitic therapy, malnutrition can culminate in long-term developmental stunting and impaired neurocognitive capacities (Black et al., 2003). Antenatal care is virtually non-existent for pregnant migrant adolescents and women, precluding vital prenatal vitamin supplementation, ultrasound screenings for fatal anomalies, or skilled birthing assistance - potentiating high-risk pregnancies and adverse maternal/neonatal outcomes (Halevy-Mizrahi & Harwayne-Gidansky, 2020).

When acute medical issues like infections, dehydration, or respiratory pathologies arise, migrant children are bereft of access to fundamental supportive interventions including oral rehydration solutions, antibacterial agents, supplemental oxygenation, and over-the-counter pharmacotherapies that could pre-empt clinical deterioration necessitating emergent care (Ayalew & Andualem, 2023). Regrettably, mental health conditions, developmental disabilities, and specialized healthcare needs are seldom identified or accommodated due to the paucity of qualified professionals, thereby perpetuating functional impairments and diminished quality of life metrics (Vos et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

2.7.1.1.3 Poor Living Conditions

The displacement of populations due to conflict, natural disasters, or other humanitarian crises often results in overcrowded camps and shelters that pose severe health and safety challenges (Miescher et al., 2023). Inadequate ventilation and congested living conditions in these settlements create a conducive environment for the rapid transmission of respiratory infections such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, and meningitis, posing significant risks, particularly to

vulnerable groups like children and the elderly (Wardeh & Marques, 2021). The lack of proper sanitation facilities and the prevalence of open defecation near living areas exacerbate the spread of diarrheal diseases, including cholera, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever (van der Wiel et al., 2021). These illnesses can lead to severe dehydration, malnutrition, and potentially fatal consequences, if left untreated especially among children (ibid). Moreover, stagnant water bodies in and around camps and shelters serve as breeding grounds for mosquito vectors, increasing the risk of vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue, and Zika virus (Wardeh & Marques, 2021). These diseases can manifest with fever, flu-like symptoms, and in severe cases, complications such as organ failure and haemorrhagic fever (Mendola & Busetta, 2018).

Displaced populations frequently reside in makeshift shelters that offer inadequate protection against extreme temperatures, rendering them susceptible to heat-related illnesses or hypothermia (Führer et al., 2020). Furthermore, natural disasters such as floods or earthquakes can exacerbate existing health issues and heighten the risk of injuries and exposure to infectious diseases (Vos et al., 2022). The absence of adequate security measures in these camps and shelters leaves children and women vulnerable to various forms of violence, including physical and sexual assault, exploitation, child labour, and human trafficking, experiences that can have long-lasting psychological and physical ramifications (Gatt et al., 2020). Food insecurity and limited access to potable water and nutritious sustenance can precipitate nutrient deficiencies, stunting (impaired growth and development), wasting (low weight for height), and other health issues, particularly among children (Dondi et al., 2020). Malnutrition can compromise immune system functionality, increasing susceptibility to infectious diseases and impeding physical and cognitive development (Maynard et al., 2019; Wardeh & Marques, 2021).

2.6.1.2 Cultural implication of child migration on the migrant child

The phenomenon of child migration wherein children move across borders without their parents or guardians accompanying them carries immense cultural implications that profoundly

shape the experiences and well-being of these migrant youth (Davila et al., 2020). One of the most daunting challenges they face is the disruption and renegotiation of their cultural identity (Marks et al., 2019). Displaced from their home cultures, they find themselves thrust into new socio-cultural contexts with vastly different norms, values, and expectations (Davila et al., 2020). This sense of cultural dislocation can breed significant acculturative stress, marginalization, and internal conflicts as the children struggle to adapt to the host culture while preserving ties to their heritage cultures (Wassink & Viera, 2021). Caught between worlds, they grapple with fundamental questions of belonging, self-perception, and reconciling divergent cultural schemas an identity crisis that take a heavy toll on their overall well-being and adjustment (Marks et al., 2019).

Further exacerbating, these children's cultural challenges are formidable language barriers that impede access to education, services, and social support networks in the new environment. To bridge this divide, many migrant minors assume the mantle of "cultural brokers"—translating not just languages but the entire cultural codes for their families and communities (Maehler et al., 2021). While this role cultivates invaluable cross-cultural skills in the children, it also burdens them with immense stress, role reversals, and potential family conflicts stemming from their culturally incongruous positions as linguistic and cultural guides at tender ages. The pressures of cultural brokering are compounded by expectations in some cultures that these children contribute economically to households through employment (Spencer et al., 2021). The divergent rates at which migrant children and their parents acculturate breed significant intergenerational cultural dissonance that strains family cohesion and dynamics. As the children adapt more rapidly to the cultural norms of the host, issues like gender roles, parenting, individualism vs. collectivism and attitudes toward education, rifts emerge between their lived reality and their parents' more culturally entrenched values and expectations (Maehler et al.,

2021). Navigating these intergenerational cultural chasms, mitigating conflicts, and preserving family unity becomes an immense challenge in itself.

Tragically, the experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and "othering" due to cultural differences are widely documented hardships that hinder the integration of child migrants. Anti-immigrant prejudice, xenophobia, and racism from segments of the host society undermine their cultural adjustment, self-esteem, and mental health (Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia, 2022; Maehler et al., 2021). They often find themselves deprived of a sense of social belonging and culturally responsive support systems to assist with the already tumultuous process of adaptation to new cultural environments. This isolation and rejection based on cultural markers like ethnicity, religion, or nationhood exact a heavy psychological and developmental toll on the migrant children (Hoffmann et al., 2020). However, the literature also illuminates the tremendous cultural assets, values, resilience strategies, and cross-cultural competencies that migrant children develop and leverage to cope with overwhelming adversity (Spencer et al., 2021). Many prioritize maintaining connections to heritage cultures, community bonds, and spiritual or religious anchors as vital sources of strength throughout the migratory journey. They cultivate remarkable cultural flexibility and malleability, allowing them to straddle multiple cultural contexts while forging bicultural identities and coping mechanisms to manage stress and facilitate transitioning (Maehler et al., 2021; Marks et al., 2019). This rich interplay of cultural allegiances, growth, and resilience emerges as both an invaluable resource and exemplar of human perseverance amidst turmoil (Azumah et al., 2022).

As child migration continues to be a global issue, deepening our understanding of how migration shapes the cultural landscapes and lived realities of these young migrants is imperative (Wassink & Viera, 2021). This ongoing research delving into their voices and experiences can yield powerful insights to crafting culturally informed policies, interventions,

educational approaches, and holistic support systems to nurture their well-being and successful integration into host societies (Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia, 2022).

2.7.1.3 Educational implications of child migration on the migrant child

Migration can have significant implications on the education of children who are involved in it. Migrant children often face multiple challenges and disruptions that can significantly impact their academic performance and overall educational experience (Kyereko & Faas, 2022; Wassink & Viera, 2021). These challenges can manifest in various ways, creating barriers to their educational success and personal well-being (Liang & Sun, 2020).

One of the primary issues is the interruption of schooling. Depending on the circumstances of the migration, children may miss several weeks or even months of education during the transition process (Gagné et al., 2020). This disruption in their learning journey can lead to significant learning gaps and difficulties in catching up with the curriculum at their new school (Semela & Cochrane, 2019). They may struggle to grasp concepts and skills that their peers have already mastered, leaving them feeling lost and overwhelmed. Furthermore, the abrupt change in educational environments can be disorienting, as they are required to adapt to different teaching styles, classroom dynamics, and academic expectations (Kyereko, 2020). The language barrier presents another major obstacle for migrant children. If the language of instruction differs from their native tongue, it can severely hinder their comprehension, participation, and academic progress (Wassink & Viera, 2021). Language proficiency is fundamental to understanding course content, communicating with teachers and peers, and demonstrating one's knowledge through assignments and assessments (Liang & Sun, 2020). Without adequate language support, migrant children may experience feelings of isolation and frustration impeding their ability to fully engage in the learning process and express their true potential (Kyereko, 2020).

The social and emotional toll of migration should not be underestimated. Migrant children frequently experience significant stress, anxiety, and a sense of displacement which can adversely impact their ability to focus and engage in learning (Cayabyab et al., 2020). Leaving behind familiar surroundings, friends, and routines can be traumatic, particularly for the younger children who may struggle to cope with such drastic changes (Lu et al., 2021). Adjusting to a new cultural environment, making new friends, and adapting to different educational systems and expectations can be overwhelming for many young migrants (Marks et al., 2019; Raturi & Cebotari, 2023). This emotional turmoil can manifest in various ways, such as withdrawal, behavioural issues, or even physical symptoms, all of which can hinder their educational progress (Liang & Sun, 2020). Furthermore, migrant families often face economic hardships, housing instability, and other socio-economic challenges that can indirectly affect a child's educational attainment (Wang et al., 2021). Limited financial resources may restrict access to supplementary educational materials, tutoring, or extracurricular activities that could enhance a child's learning experience (Chen et al., 2014). Migrant families may also struggle with transportation issues, making it difficult for children to attend school regularly or participate in after-school programs (Gagné et al., 2020). Additionally, frequent relocations due to housing instability can disrupt a child's continuity of education, further exacerbating the challenges they face (Mendola & Busetta, 2018).

2.7.1.4. Economic Implications of Child migration on the Migrant Child

Child migration, whether prompted by conflict, natural disasters, or economic necessity poses significant economic challenges for the young migrants themselves. One of the primary economic impacts on migrant children is the disruption to their educational attainment (Gagné et al., 2020). Education plays a crucial role in determining the future economic prospects. However, migrant minors frequently encounter obstacles that impede their academic progress (Chen et al., 2014; Gagné et al., 2020). The upheaval caused by migration, language barriers,

cultural disparities, and limited access to educational resources in host communities can hinder their learning and cognitive development (Gagné et al., 2020; Kyereko & Faas, 2022). These educational setbacks have long-term implications, as they diminish migrant children's prospects for securing stable, well-paying employment in adulthood, perpetuating a cycle of economic marginalization (Amoah, 2020). Moreover, migrant children often face restricted access to essential social services and financial assistance programs due to their precarious legal status or lack of documentation (Chen et al., 2014; D'Odorico et al., 2023). This deprivation of critical resources, such as healthcare, housing subsidies, and nutritional support, exacerbate their economic vulnerability and compromise their physical and mental well-being (Dibeh et al., 2018).

Driven by economic necessity, many migrant children are compelled to engage in informal labour, subjecting them to exploitation, hazardous working conditions, and substandard wages (Brown & Jimenez-Soto, 2015). This exposure to exploitative employment practices does not only jeopardize their immediate well-being but also perpetuates a cycle of economic marginalization, as these early experiences shape their future employment prospects and earning potential (Gagné et al., 2020). Furthermore, the economic hardships endured by migrant children can have lasting repercussions that transcend generations (Hauer et al., 2020). Limited educational opportunities, restricted access to social services, and early exposure to exploitative labour practices can perpetuate a cycle of poverty, making it challenging for these individuals to accumulate wealth and achieve upward economic mobility (Hermans & McLeman, 2021; Hoffmann et al., 2020).The economic deprivation experienced by migrant children could have lasting negative impacts on their offspring's cognitive development, health outcomes, and future earning potential, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty (Shakya et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021).

The multifaceted economic challenges faced by migrant children underscore the urgency of addressing this issue through comprehensive policy interventions (Hermans & McLeman, 2021). To mitigate these economic burdens and foster inclusive economic growth, a concerted effort is required from policymakers, civil society organizations and international bodies (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020). Targeted investments in educational initiatives, robust social safety nets, and legal frameworks that protect the rights and well-being of migrant children are paramount (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020). Furthermore, promoting economic opportunities and fostering inclusive labour markets can empower these vulnerable individuals to break free from the cycle of poverty (Serbeh & Adjei, 2020).

2.6.2 The Socio-Economic Implications of Child Migration on the Receiving Community

Child migration, whether internal or international, has significant health, cultural, and economic implications for receiving communities (Allport et al., 2023; Bwambale et al., 2021). Previous researchers have shown that migration can lead to the spread of infectious diseases, as migrant children often come from regions with limited healthcare access (Cayabyab et al., 2020, Van de Wiel et al., 2021). Diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV, and hepatitis B among migrant children compared to local populations can strain facilities of host communities (Maioli et al., 2021; Mishra et al., 2020). This situation necessitates preventive measures such as screening, vaccination, and disease surveillance to prevent outbreaks (Mansour et al., 2020). The integration process can also lead to psychological stress and mental health challenges for both migrant children and the local population, as cultural differences may result in misunderstandings and prejudices (Marks et al., 2019, Vanore et al., 2021; Salami et al., 2020). Migrant children, especially refugees, may suffer from PTSD, depression, and anxiety, which places additional strain on the mental health resources of receiving communities (Raturi & Cebotari, 2023; Cayabyab et al., 2020). These mental health challenges often manifest in behavioural issues, adding further pressures on local services (Russell et al., 2019). Further,

child migration can put pose pressure on infrastructure of receiving communities. Educational institutions for instance must adapt to meet the needs of migrant children, including providing furniture, additional classrooms and addressing cultural gaps (Katipoğlu et al., 2018; Maehler et al., 2021). These adjustments often lead to pressure on local budgets and resources, and increased competition for jobs, housing, and public services which has the tendency of fuelling social tensions (Vos et al., 2021; Kwankye et al., 2021). Cultural exchanges resulting from migration can enrich local communities, but they also challenge pre-existing norms and values, leading to potential discrimination and exclusion (Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia, 2022; Marks et al., 2019). Schools, in particular, face challenges related to linguistic diversity and the need to support students who have experienced trauma (Spencer et al., 2021; Salami et al., 2020; Azumah et al., 2022).

Economically, child migration has both positive and negative effects. The migrant children entering the workforce may compete with local workers for low-skilled jobs, exerting downward pressure on wages in some sectors (D'Odorico et al., 2023; Cai et al., 2020). Conversely, they may also fill labour shortages in industries with difficult or undesirable conditions (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020). Receiving communities must also bear the cost of providing social services, such as education, healthcare, and housing, to accommodate migrant children (Beine & Jeusette, 2021; Marks et al., 2019). The cost of overcoming language and cultural barriers through education and integration programs is substantial, yet these efforts are essential to ensure the migrants' successful integration into the local economy and society (Franc et al., 2019; Kyereko, 2020).

Despite these challenges, well-integrated migrant children can contribute to the local economy as they grow older, through employment, business creation and tax contributions (Cai et al., 2020). Remittances sent back to their families in their countries of origin can also stimulate local businesses and foster economic growth in receiving communities (Wang et al., 2021;

Cuadros-Menaca & Gaduh, 2020). However, these positive contributions are contingent upon providing equal access to education and vocational training, as barriers to these opportunities can hinder their future economic potential (Karabchuk & Salnikova, 2017). Demographic shifts caused by migration can also affect labour supply and consumption patterns in receiving communities, presenting both opportunities and challenges (Fripp & Kogulathas, 2021). Collaboration between governments, civil society, and the private sector is crucial for addressing the multifaceted challenges of child migration (Franc et al., 2019, Kyereko & Faas, 2022). Overall, the economic implications of child migration are complex and multidimensional, requiring a balanced approach that considers economic, humanitarian, and social concerns (Cai et al., 2020).

2.8 Remittances

Many households in third world nations rely heavily on remittances as a source of income (Makina, 2024). The World Bank's official records indicate that remittance flows to poor nations are expected to have reached $372 billion in 2011, up 12.1% from $351 billion in 2010 (Ratha et al., 2010). Despite a reduction in remittance flows in recent time due to COVID- 19, it still remained resilient in 2020. According to the most recent migration and development report, officially documented remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries totalled $540 billion in 2020-just 1.6% less than the $548 billion total recorded in 2019 (World Bank, 2021). Remittance refers to transferring money and other goods to a recipient who is located in a different country and this is a significant driving force behind migration (Brown & Jimenez-Soto, 2015). Transfers in cash or kind must be carried by hand, either directly or via a close friend, relative, or reputable transportation provider; bank transfers are also an option. Even though adult migrants frequently view children as recipients of their remittances, which they use to settle their educational expenses and basic necessities, children are considered remitting agents in recent times. This study argues that to adequately conceptualize the

complexity of remittances in child migration, it is important to consider social networks and multi-locational living arrangements because they are deeply integrated in them. Bastia (2015) notes that youngsters in Bolivia travel in search of employment in order to fulfil their responsibilities of helping to provide for the necessities of the household. Similarly, Ahmad et al. (2020) contend that children are expected to participate in their household's livelihood activities and are encouraged to do so. Children's remittances are not only financial; but can also take the form of goods and labour in a reciprocal relationship (Ahmad et al., 2020).

However, financial remittances remain a prevalent aspect of child migration. Anarfi et al. (2003) discovered that over 50% of the child migrants in Kumasi and Accra, Ghana, sent money home, they also noted that remittances were primarily made through friends, family, traders, and drivers, and that the majority of the time, food was purchased with the money provided by guys more frequently than by girls. Research also shows that child migrants send remittances to the home in a form of return intention (Tamanja, 2014). This is consistent with Schielke (2020) who also argues that most migrant children migrate with the intention of working and saving money to start small businesses or get married and settle down when they return home. This is evident in the fact that most of the migrant children live in less secured accommodations at their destinations and run a significant danger of taking profits and earnings to send home for safekeeping.

2.9 The Agency of Child Migration

Historically, child migration has been associated with protection, vulnerability and exploitation (Pauli 2021). Although these perspectives are valid, they mostly overlook the deliberate and calculated decisions made by children when they migrate. Scholars such as Thorsen (2020) and Punch (2007) are of the view that a shift towards understanding child migration as a project actively pursued by children especially those from rural areas where independent migration can represent a rational response to limited opportunities. Based on this perspective, it is

appropriate to indicate that child migrants are social actors with goals, plans, and adaptability rather than just displaced dependents. Even without adult supervision, children can leave their homes to go to school, obtain employment, acquire independence, or satisfy social needs (Manning & Trimmer, 2020, Hashim 2005 and Preda, 2021).

On migration decisions, studies from South Asia, Latin America, and West Africa show that a large number of children initiate migration on their own (Grubb, 2016, McAuliffe & Ruhs, 2017, Tanveer et al. 2020). For instance, in northern Ghana, Hashim (2005) discovered that children mostly decide to migrate southward especially to Accra in search of employment not under compulsion, but independently and as a means to contribute to the wellbeing of their families.

Similarly, Böcker & Gehring (2015) are also of the view that the idea of "autonomous migration" undermines the traditional dichotomies of forced versus voluntary movement and captures children's motivations. Children are portrayed in this literature as being able to weigh risks, use social capital and decide whether to stay or migrate. Children's decision-making reflects agency exercised within institutional constraints even though it may take place in limited situations (Rossi & Rossi 2018). The agency of autonomous child migrants to arrange shelter, find labour, find transit routes, and create support systems is very clear. While children demonstrate resourcefulness and perseverance even in extremely hazardous situations, such as urban street life or domestic service (Thorsen 2020), research has shown that children-initiated migration is often ambiguous and partial leading to the idea of return migration (Pauli 2021). The agency of return migration among migrant children can be broadly classified into two groups: those who successfully migrate and those who do not. Put differently, while "some children return successful with goods and money, others return with problems, like debt, sexual diseases, babies, and challenges to traditional customs," (McAuliffe & Ruhs, 2017). Children who return to continue their education do it after mobilizing resources to meet their educational

needs and this migration is normally based on a short term. For instance, Tamanja (2014) observes that JHS students from Namoo, an agricultural community in Upper East Region of Ghana migrate on their own during the holidays to work in southern part of the country to raise money but return to continue their education when the vacation is over.

In Ghana, even though society frowns at autonomous child migration, migrants who return with their talents and skills they have acquired to meet their family needs like taking care of their ailing parents or maintaining family property are regarded as good leaders and positive role models who can develop their communities (Kwankye et al. 2021). Additionally, children who successfully migrate back (bringing with them assets and fulfilling lives) have the tendency to inspire other children (non-migrants) to migrate as well and this will feed the cycle of independent child migration (Storti 2022 and Tanveer 2020).

2.10 Return migration

Return migration is a significant part of migration process and can lead to other types of migration (Pauli, 2021). It is not regarded as the end of migration cycle, but rather as one of the stages of migratory patterns, such circular migration or repeat migration (Manning & Trimmer, 2020). It involves both adults and children who are involved in both seasonal and permanent migration, and it happens when migrants return to their places of origin, typically from destinations they have reached during or after their journey.

Return migration among migrant children can be broadly classified into two groups: those who successfully migrate and those who do not. Put differently, while "some children return successful with goods and money, others return with problems, like debt, sexual diseases, babies, and challenges to traditional customs," (McAuliffe & Ruhs, 2017). Children who return to continue their education do it after mobilizing resources to meet their educational needs and this migration is normally short term. For instance, Tamanja (2014) observes that JHS students

from Namoo, an agricultural community in Upper East Region of Ghana migrate during the holidays to work in southern part of the country to raise money but return to continue their education when the vacation is over.

Similarly, longer-staying immigrant children do occasionally come home, particularly during festive occasions like Christmas, Easter, and funerals, but they always go back to their original destinations afterward (Preda, 2021). Since these migrants are able to achieve their short-term migration goals, they regard their migration as successful and beneficial. Conversely, children who stay longer return with comparatively more capital and personal possessions to begin a new life. In Ghana, male migrants return with bicycles, motorbikes, computers, sound system and money for starting small businesses, whereas female migrants from the south bring sewing machines and cutlery for marriage (Böcker & Gehring, 2015; Hashim, 2005). Rossi and Rossi (2018) further revealed that apart from the material and financial benefits, some migrants return with their talents and skills they have acquired to meet their family needs like taking care of their ailing parents or maintaining family property. Due to this they are regarded as good leaders and positive role models who can develop their communities.

Nevertheless, "there can be a clash of values between the generations; between old and new ideas, when children return home, whether for a short visit or for longer periods of time."(Grubb, 2016). This is primarily due to the fact that they adopt lifestyles that are inconsistent with those of their hometowns. According to Tanveer et al. (2020) this happens primarily when migrant children return with issues such as debt, sicknesses and behaviour that contradicts the norms of their homes of origin. These returned migrants are regarded as social misfits in their hometown when they become liabilities on their families or because they become frustrated upon arrival (Tanveer et al., 2020). For instance, Kwankye et al. (2021) stated that traditional rural communities may view new-borns who are born during migration

as illegitimate children but upon return the society may regard their urban lifestyles as disrespectful and promiscuous. Storti, (2022) contend that children often migrate back either to their original destinations or to new ones as a result of the difficulties and frustrations they experience at their destinations. Additionally, children who successfully migrate back (bringing with them assets, talents, and fulfilling lives) have the tendency to inspire other children (non-migrants) to migrate as well and this will feed the cycle of child migration. Thus, rather than trying to solve the problem of child migration, policy makers and implementers of return programs should exercise caution.

2.11 Theoretical Framework

Theories serve as crucial road maps for research. They act as a filter through which the researcher views and assesses factors and discovers the solutions to the issues posed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In order to describe natural phenomena, they are collections of interconnected constructs (variables), definitions and propositions that provide a systematic understanding of phenomena by defining relationships between different variables (Bryman, 2016). This study was conducted within the framework of Social Network Theory, Neo-Classical Migration Theory. These theories, along with the conceptual framework, act as analytical instruments for this research. The frameworks, both theoretical and conceptual are discussed in the sub-sections below.

2.11.1 Social Network Theory (SNT)

Massey & Taylor (2004) described social networks as a collection of interpersonal connections that link migrants, previous migrants and non-migrants in both origin and destination areas through relationships of kinship and friendship. The authors argued that network theory focuses more on the factors that keep migration going instead of those that initiate the process. Vertovec (2023) also considers SNT as a framework for analysing how individuals and groups are interconnected and how these connections influence social phenomena such as migration trends

and resource allocation. SNT was propounded by Jacob L. Moreno in the 1930s from the field of sociology (Anjos and Campos, 2010). Scholars such as Hansen et al. (2010) and Wasche et al (2017) argue that SNT did not gain popularity in the academic circle until the 1980s and 1990s, when computers and digital data were available offering fresh perspectives on social phenomena, community structures and organisational dynamics. Although the main ideas of SNT were developed in the 1960s and 1970s (Bourdieu, 1985), it has become quite popular recently (Anjos and Campos, 2010). Apatinga et al. (2022) argue that the fundamental tenet of Social Network Theory is that social ties are a part of life. According to Teye (2012), social networks are built on the principle of interdependence using "Foucaultian entanglements of power." Foucault (2020) maintains that in a social, economic and political systems individuals collaborate to pursue shared objectives due to the scarcity of resources and fluidity of power. The philosophical foundation of SNT was rooted in human agency, cultural identity and social capital (Ong, 1999). Touching on human agency and choice, scholars such as Hannah Arendt emphasised the significance of human action and freedom in determining one's destiny, which is consistent with migrants' choices to look for greater possibilities through existing links (Fırat 2022 and Jacobs, 2022). On communitarianism and cultural identity, Handley (2006) argue that individuals are embedded within communities and derive their identity from shared traditions and experiences. This idea is reflected in SNT as migrants move to areas where their cultural identity and support systems already exist fostering ethnic enclaves and diasporic communities.

Embedded in SNT is social capital. Islam & Rokonuzzaman (2023) believe that social capital is an implicit resource that comes from constructive interactions between members of a network that are founded on reciprocity and trust. Dunwoodie et al. (2025) reiterated that social capital helps migrants to leverage trust, share norms and social networks to access resources and navigate new environments. This reliance on social capital ensures that newcomers can

integrate more easily and access jobs, housing and cultural support (Munshi, 2020). The primary feature of social capital is the ability to be transformed or translated into other types of capital to enhance or preserve one's standing in the society (Turolla & Hoffmann, 2023). The literature highlights three broad categories of social capital that migrants depend on for survival in the host communities. These are connecting, bridging and bonding social capital. While bonding social capital exists between family members, neighbours and friends, bridging social capital describes ties that are far away like those with traders and service providers (Claridge 2018). According to Munshi (2020) connecting social capital takes place among migrants in disparate situations (such as persons who live in completely different circumstances). In this study, the three types of social capital are analysed because it is assumed that different migrants depend on different types of networks.

SNT Model

In the migration literature, several conceptual models have been employed to explain how social networks operate with the concept of strong and weak ties of Mark Granovetter being one of the main frameworks used. According to Granovetter (1973), strong and weak model explains how different types of social ties influence information flow, social cohesion and individual opportunities. While strong ties provide immediate financial and logistical support for migration, weak ties often serve as bridges between different communities enabling children to access migration opportunities beyond their immediate environments (Claridge 2018, Bryceson and Vuorela, 2020). According to this model, strong ties are characterized by frequent interactions where individuals engage with each other on a regular basis across different aspects of life (Swanson and Torres, 2016). These relationships serve as bedrock for emotional support and trust-building (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2020).

The theory also challenges the traditional assumption that strong ties (close relationships) are the most valuable in social networks instead proponents argue that weak ties in a social network

act as links between clusters that would otherwise be separated (Amfo et al., 2022, Bryant et al., 2021 and Zaami, 2020). Other studies indicate that weak ties such as peers help spread new ideas, innovations and job opportunities across different groups whereas strong ties tend to reinforce the already existing information within close-knit groups (Munshi, 2020 and Boujija et al., 2022). The strength of weak ties in the flow of information is given by the formular:

$P=1-(1-p)^k$

Where: *P* is the probability of successful migration emerging through weak ties. *p* is the likelihood that a single weak tie transmits useful migration related information. *k* is the number of weak ties connecting a migrant child to the migration opportunities. Given these principles, it is theorized in this study that both strong and weak ties tend to reinforce already existing bonds leading to migration decisions and outcomes. Thus, while strong ties provide immediate financial and logistical support for migration, weak ties often serve as bridges between different communities enabling children to access migration opportunities beyond their immediate circles (Granovetter's 1973). This framework is essential for understanding how children use different types of relationships to navigate migration pathways. For instance, while some children migrate based on immediate family connections (strong ties), others leverage distant networks (weak ties) to migrate to urban centres.

Core Tenets of SNT

An important aspect of the SNT is the focus on power, control and governmentality. The SNT is also useful in analysing power dynamics within migration networks. According to Teye et al. (2017), social networks are built on the principle of interdependence using "Foucaultian entanglements of power." Foucault (2020) argue that in the social, economic and political systems, individuals collaborate to pursue shared objectives due to the scarcity of resources and fluidity of power. Foucault's ideas of power-knowledge, governmentality and bio power offer a framework for examining how power functions in the context of child migration.

According to Foucault (2020) power -knowledge is not only the exercise of control over others, but it goes further to provide information about them. Power is conceptualised in child migration as how children on transit are regarded, managed and controlled by elders in the society (Swanson & Torres 2016). Again, governmentality in the Foucauldian sense refers to the techniques and procedures employed by governing bodies to manage and control people (Teye et al., 2019). According to Apatinga et al. (2022), the ideologies of governmentality and bio power are manifested in the laws, regulations and practices intended to limit the freedom of movement and rights of children. These principles are relevant in this research because different actors such as parents, teachers, religious leaders and policymakers shape migration outcomes through regulatory policies, social control mechanisms and institutional power structure.

Another important dimension of the SNT relevant for this work is the principle of flexibility and adaptability. Bilecen and Lubbers (2021) argue that migration networks are not static but change in response to economic shifts, migration policies and personal aspirations. The authors believe that migration networks and connections evolve over time and across borders challenging the traditional notion that migration is a one-time and linear process. This implies that migration is an everchanging phenomenon due to an expansion in the economic, social and political conditions (Boujija et al., 2022). On the principle of social influence and information flow, Gebreyesus and Tadesse (2021) revealed that social networks act as catalysts for migration providing the necessary information and support.

Other studies have tested the viability of the SNT in explaining child migration trends. For instance, Ryan & Dahinden (2021), Zaami (2020), Hashim (2005) and Anarfi & Agyei (2009) highlight that family and community networks play a crucial role in facilitating migration by balancing economic necessity with social obligations. Garvik & Valenta (2024) found that children in the Upper East Region migrate to Bisa in Burkina Faso through household networks

that emphasize both dependence and independence, showing how migration is sustained through kinship ties. Tamanja (2014) on the other hand, demonstrates that migration networks in rural Ghana continue to shape migration flows, particularly among young people who seek urban employment.

On gendered dimensions of migration, Zaami (2020) emphasized that men and women often utilize social networks differently in their migration processes. Using in-depth interviews with 58 migrants from the Northern region, the study reveals that social networks facilitate migration by offering pre-migration information, travel assistance and post-migration employment connections. Men tend to use extended kinship networks for job opportunities, while women rely more on religious and ethnic networks to find safe housing and work (Zaami, 2020).

These studies reinforce the argument that migration decisions are not purely economic, but are embedded in social obligations, cultural expectations and kinship-based decision-making structures. This is particularly relevant for coastal and riverine communities, where migration is often interwoven with historical trade, fishing and social mobility pattern. Serbeh & Adjei, 2020) posit that migration decisions are rarely made in isolation rather, they are embedded in pre-existing relationships that influence a child's departure and experience in a new environment.

In this study, the SNT is deployed to analyse how family and communal connections shape child migration patterns in coastal and riverine communities in the Volta Region. The theory also helps to investigate how strong and weak ties promote child migration since children often migrate to stay with extended family members who provide housing, education or employment opportunities. Apatinga et al. (2022) show that the existing migrant networks such as the presence of a family member or friend at a destination place increases the likelihood of migration.

Even though Social Network Theory serves as a powerful tool for the understanding of child migration, it also has limitations and these have been disinterred by earlier scholars who used it as an analytical tool in their studies. For instance, De Haas et al. (2019) opined that social network analysis does not always account for structural factors such as economic trends or state- level migration regulations despite their significance in migration decisions. Studies by (Klaver 1997: 45; Cited in De Haas, 2019) make it clearer by stating that in migration studies, "labour migration movements often decline or stop when the root causes of migration are resolved", but social network is unable to do a reversal analysis of the decline. Further studies also intimated that SNT does not fully explain why some children, even within the same network, choose to migrate, while others do not (Wellman. 2018, De Haas, 2010). These studies have shown that migrants do not always serve as helpers in migration because the migrants can act as gatekeepers lacking information to help their friends to also migrate. Due to these limitations associated with the theory, this study employed the neo classical migration theory to examine spatial differences in both the host and the receiving communities which is a great gap in the SNT.

2.11.2 The Neo-Classical Migration Theory (NCMT)

The Neo-Classical Migration Theory (NCMT) originates from the nineteenth century and is rooted in the works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo on labour markets and capital distribution (De Has 2010). Dan (2020) posits that the NCMT emerged as an extension of classical economic theories which considers migration as a function of labour market dynamics. Scholars such as Todaro (1969) and Aagaard et al. (2021) regards NCMT as an economic theory that explains migration as a rational decision made by individuals or households to maximize income and improve their living conditions. According to Karimi & Wilkes (2023), the prefix "neo" indicates a shift from the traditional economic perspective to one that incorporates mathematical and analytical elements. As embedded in the functionalist

perspective, the NCMT postulates that wage differentials, employment prospects, demand and supply of labour are the main drivers of migration (Olsson, 2023; and Gheasi et al., 2023). The theory assumes that individuals as rational economic actors, migrate to maximize income and improve their standards of living (De Haas, 2010).

According to Hejduková & Kureková (2020), the NCMT explores issues at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, the NCMT views migration as a response to geographical labour imbalances because labour-surplus economies have low income while labour-scarce economies with high income levels often induce labour migrants to move to labour-scarce economies from labour-surplus economies (De Haas, 2010a). In addition to labour movement, is capital migration from the developed economies to less developed economies until economic equilibrium is reached (Gheasi et al., 2023). This subsequently leads to no incentives (neither increased income nor labour scarcity).

At the micro-level (individual decision-making) proponents theorise migration as a cost-benefit analysis in which people weigh the costs of migration against employment prospects, expected wages and other factors (Gheasi et al., 2023; Todaro, 1969; Harris & Todaro, 1970). They are of the view that the cost-benefit analysis takes into account the expense of migration, the risk of deportation and the fact that the immigrant is undocumented. Furthermore, there is a great possibility that migrants will travel so long as the net capital returns connected to their mobility are beneficial (Chavykina & Pakhomov, 2023; Olsson, 2023). The micro perspective is applicable to internal migration in Ghana due to the income disparities between the south and the north and also between urban and rural communities.

The NCMT Model

Generally, advocates of the NCMT argue that the various connections that people have with businesses and manufacturers form the model of the NCMT (Chavykina & Pakhomov, 2023; Todaro, 1969). The interactions reveal that the two economic players have a balanced relationship. In this research, Harris and Todaro's (1969, 1970) two-sector model was adopted to explain the complexities of rural-urban migration based on 'expected income' differences adjusted for the probability of unemployment. According to Tadora (1969), the model challenges the assumption that migration occurs simply because urban wages are higher than rural wages. Instead, he argues that migration is based on expected earnings rather than current wage differentials. The key feature of the two-sector model is two economic sectors. According to (Karimi & Wilkes, 2023), while the rural or traditional sector is marked by low wages, subsistence agriculture and high levels of underemployment, the urban or modern economy offers higher wages and better economic opportunities, but has limited job availability due to low industrial expansion and high competition for employment. This imbalance creates a paradox where people continue migrating to cities in search of better wages despite the high risk of unemployment (Hejduková & Kureková, 2020; Borjas, 1989, 1990). Figure 1 summarises the model.

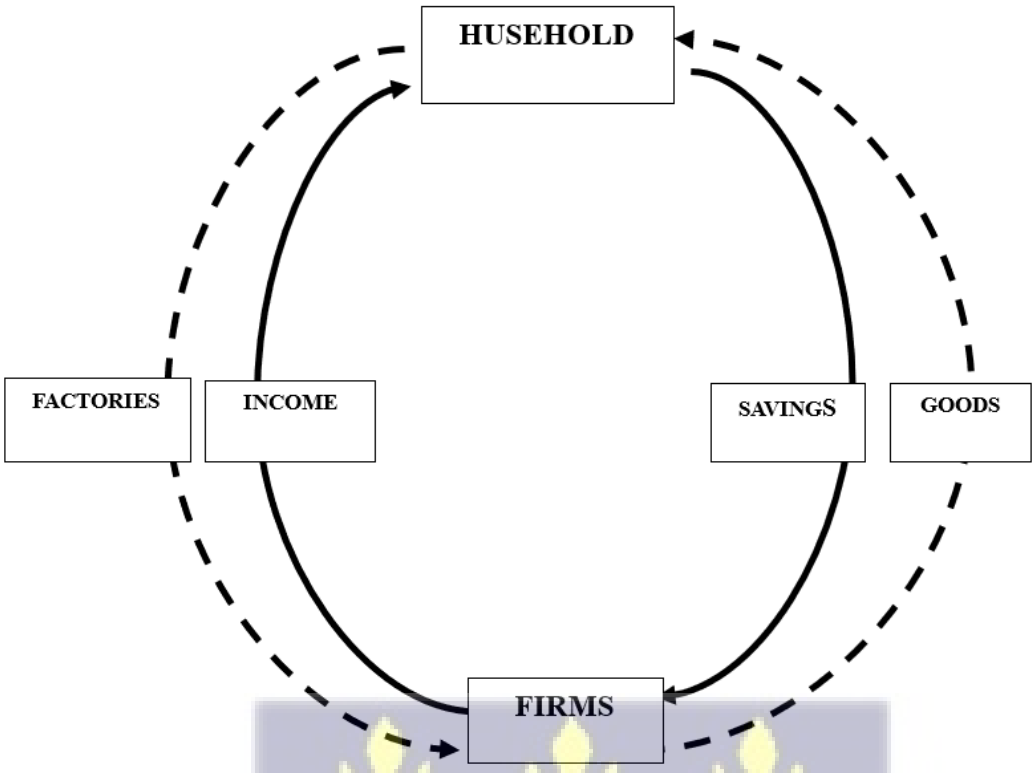

Figure 1: Two sector model

Source: Mankiw (2021).

The model emphasis that 'economic differentials' play a major role in driving migration processes (Mankiw, 2021). People normally migrate due to wage/salary differentials, and enhanced condition of service (Todaro, 1969). The Neo-Classical Migration Theory is a mechanism that helps to optimize the productivity distribution. Harris and Todaro (1969, 1970) further postulate that wherever there are economic opportunities such as employment, people would maximize their productivity by actively moving to that location to be engaged in that venture. This model was also adapted to international migration by researchers like Borjas (1989, 1990). Further studies revealed that the NCMT has the capacity to incorporate migration costs and risks, seeing migration as an investment in human capital (Batista & McKenzie, 2021; Bauer & Zimmermann, 1999). Studies by Faggian et al. (2018), and Fischer et al. (2021) are very useful in that they helped in explaining why certain individuals especially rural dwellers and the less privilege migrate based on the potential for human capital gains. In Ghana, Anarfi

and Kwankye (2003) investigated youth migration from northern Ghana to southern cities using NCMT and discovered that economic disparities drive migration. Similarly, Awumbila et al. (2014) using the model to analyse rural-urban migration, revealed that income disparities is a major factor influencing migration patterns.

Touching on the paradox of unemployment, Fields (2005) argue that migration continues even when urban unemployment is high because migrants expect long-term benefits from better wages in the future. This often leads to overpopulation in the cities increasing informal employment and urban poverty (Bhati & Jasti, 2024). These studies authenticate the NCMT's role in explaining labour migration, child mobility and economic-driven relocation in Ghana. Applying the NCMT to this research on child migration in the Volta Region will help assess the economic factors influencing child mobility. While children may not make independent migration decisions, household economic conditions often dictate their movement Karimi & Wilkes (2023).

Despite its relevance, the NCMT has some limitations. For instance, it ignores non-economic factors. Migration decisions are also shaped by social, cultural, and political factors, which the NCMT does not fully consider (De Haas et al., 2019). Further, it fails to explain return migration. Critics such as castle (2019) argue that the NCMT does not adequately address cases where migrants return home despite economic disparities remaining. Other critics indicate that one major limitation of the NCMT is its emphasis on economic rationality. Scholars such as Saito (2024) and Simons et al. (2022) opine that most migrants often return due to family obligations, social ties, cultural identity, or dissatisfaction with life abroad, yet these factors are neglected in NCMT analysis. According to Virtue et al. (2022), the NCMT does not incorporate macro-level factors such as migration policies, labour market conditions and institutional constraints. The paper discovered that the model ignores non-economic drivers

like political and social factors and fails to conceptualize macro-structural influences, such as policy and labour market forces on migration choices (Virtue et al., 2022).

Despite these limitations, the NCMT is a valuable framework for analysing economic-driven child migration in the Volta Region. Many rural households in the Volta Region face economic hardships, making the NCMT relevant in understanding migration as an economic survival strategy. Even though children may not directly make migration decisions, their movement can reflect family choices which is influenced by economic pressures and job opportunities. Since families can be "pushed" by poverty or the lack of employment for parents, this study argues that the NCMT is a useful model for a study on child migration in the Volta Region.

Integrating the SNT and NCMT provides a more comprehensive explanation of child migration. While the neo-classical perspective emphasizes that individuals migrate primarily to maximize economic gains by moving from low-income to high-income areas, social network theory highlights the role of existing relationships such as family, friends, and community members in facilitating and sustaining migration. Economic motivations can explain why migration is desirable, but social networks explain how migration becomes possible by reducing the costs, risks, and uncertainties associated with moving. Thus, migration decisions are not made solely on individual rational calculations, but are embedded in social ties that provide information, support and opportunities. Integrating the two theories shows that child migration is both an economic strategy and a socially influenced process, where networks play a critical role in initiating and perpetuating migration flows.

2.12. Conceptual Framework of Child Migration

Figure 2 outlines the motivations to migrate at the origin due to certain factors which are put into four major groups. In addition, social network which includes family ties, friendship and other migrants have great influence on the decision of children to migrate. The diagram further argues that child migration in the Volta Region happens mainly because of difficult conditions

in the communities of origin and the hope for better opportunities elsewhere. In relation to objective one, the prevalence and nature of the migration are linked to challenges such as poverty, limited jobs, climate-related problems, broken homes, loss of parents, and poor school conditions. These situations make children, especially those in fishing, farming and market communities, consider moving to new places. For objective two, the framework highlights that the decision to migrate is strongly influenced by social networks made up of family members, friends, and other migrants who encourage and support the movement. These networks reduce the fear and uncertainty of migrating. For objective three, the framework shows that migration can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, some children gain work opportunities, access good schools and improve their future prospects. On the negative side, some experience school dropout, teenage pregnancy, exploitation, abuse, and involvement in social vices. These outcomes affect not only the children but also their families and the communities they move to. Some children adapt and stay, some return home, and others move to new places, showing that migration is an ongoing process rather than a one-time even. This discussion is illustrated in Figure 2.

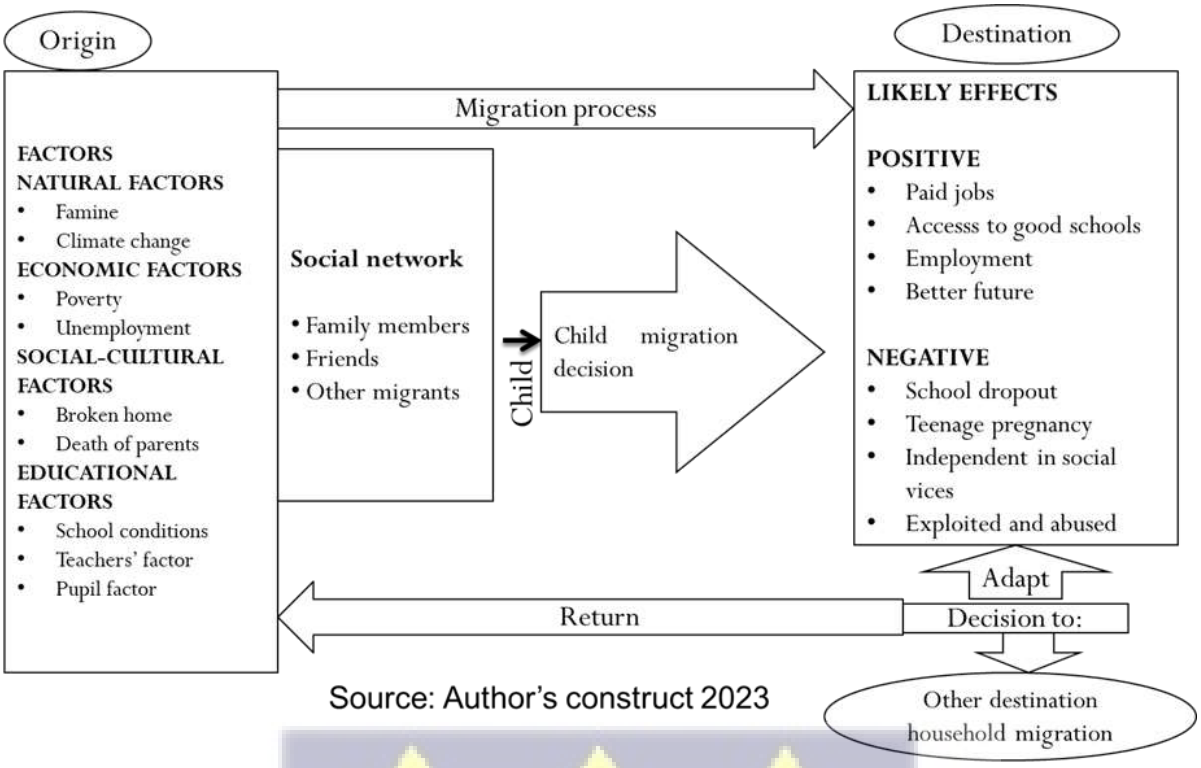

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Child Migration

Source: Author's Construct (2023).

2.1 3 Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive literature review on child migration with specific focus on Ghana. It is established that while literature exists on the prevalence, the characteristics, drivers and socio-economic implications of child migration in Ghana, there is limited research on the role of child agency in the migration process and patterns especially with respect to independent child migration. The review reiterated that much of the existing studies continue to portray child migration as vulnerability, exploitation, adult decision making, thereby marginalizing the voices, motivations and the strategic choices of migrant children themselves.

Furthermore, the review argues that although the emerging studies have begun to highlight children as active social actors who are capable of initiating, negotiating and managing their

own migration journeys, these perspectives remain under theorized and under explored in the coastal and river communities in Ghana especially in the Volta Region.

The chapter discovered that empirical research is yet to adequately examine the many ways children exercise agency under limited circumstances, the dynamics of return migration among children and the impact of weak and strong social ties. In order to close this important gap, this study explores how children from riverine and coastal communities in the Volta Region exercise agency in their migratory choices and paths, and how their networks and life experiences influence their choices outside of narratives imposed by adults.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDY AREAS AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the study areas and the methodology employed for the thesis. About the study area, the geography is discussed considering the main themes of the study area that touch on the main theme of the research. In this regard, the physical, socio-demographic, economic and cultural characteristics were discussed. The second part deals with the logic of justification of materials and methods from the research design, data sources, sample design and the analytic strategy adopted.

3.1 The Study Area

The study was conducted in the Volta Region which is well-known for its varied topography including the Volta River and its tributaries. This South-eastern region of Ghana is a diversified and alluring area known for its rich cultural heritage, breath-taking scenery and a mixture of river and coastal communities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Four out of the eighteen districts/ municipals were purposively selected for this study. These are Keta, Aflao, Kpando-Torkor and Dzemeni in the South Dayi District.

Keta

The Keta Municipality is located in the southernmost part of the Volta region. It is located between latitudes 5.45^{0}N and 6.005^0 N and longitudes 0.30^0 E and 1.05^0 E (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2020). The Anloga District is located at the west, Ketu North and South Districts at the east, Akatsi South District at the north, and the Gulf of Guinea at the south all having common borders with the Municipality (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013).

The total population of the municipality is 78,862 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021) with an annual growth rate of 1.8% which is below the national growth rate of 5.4% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Aagaard et al. (2021) argue that the low annual population growth rate can be

attributed to perennial coastal flooding and erosion, which has left many people homeless leading to different kinds of migration including child migration. The main economic activities in the municipality include fishing, trade-related enterprises, cultivation of crops, salt mining and livestock rearing (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). The main tourist sites in the area include Fort Prinzenstein, Cape St. Paul Lighthouse and Atokor Slaves' market beaches (Brinks, 2017).

Aflao

The second coastal town selected for this study is Aflao in the Ketu South Municipality at the southeastern coast of Ghana. It is the major border town with Lome the capital of Togo (Babanawo, 2021). The municipality has a population of 96,550 making it the twenty-eighth most populous settlement in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Aflao is located on Longitude 1.1833° E and Latitude 6.1167°N and on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean which provides maritime activities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013).

On the basis of its proximity to the Equator and the Greenwich Meridian, it has a tropical climate with double maxima of rainfall. The wet season runs from April to October with the heaviest rains occurring in June and July, while the dry season starts from November to March with dry and hazy conditions in December and January due to the Tropical Continental Airmass-cT (north-east trade wind) wind which blows from the Shara Desert. The region experiences warm temperature throughout the year with an average temperature between 24°C (75°F) and 30°C (86°F) (Babanawo et al., 2022).

The town is important for cross-border trade and transportation since it is a major point of entry and exit between Ghana and Togo. Topographically, the land is flat, low-lying and sandy suitable for agriculture and settlement. In the 18th century, Aflao served as a transit point where slaves from the interior of the country were brought before being transported to larger coastal trading posts and forts. Its location made it suitable for slave trade in Ghana and other West

African countries. The valuable resources found in the municipality include marine fisheries, wetlands (particularly mangroves, marshlands) as well as minerals such as salt, sand and groundwater.

The primary occupations of the people include vegetable farming, salt production, aquaculture, lagoon and sea fishing, trading and tourism. These professions which cover a wide range of socio-economic activities are heavily dependent on the natural resources in the municipality. Aflao has a busy market and serves as economic hub for different categories of people. It is a key location for cross-border trade, particularly in goods such as textiles, food products, and electronics. Its status as a trade hub, the political instability in Togo, and the porous border between Ghana and Togo have led to the influx of migrants.

Kpando Torkor

The two river communities selected for this study are Kpando Torkor and Dzemeni which are both significant fishing and landing towns situated on the shores of Lake Volta. Kpando Torkor is found at coordinates 7.0041° N and 0.2644° E (Amu-Mensah et al., 2014). Administratively, it is located in the Kpando Municipality in the Volta region and has an approximate population of 6,800 residents (Adzei & Alornu, 2023). The primary ethnic group in Kpando Torkor consists of Ewes who have migrated from various parts of the Volta region. It falls within the tropical zone and is influenced by the South West Monsoon winds from the South Atlantic Ocean and the dry Harmattan winds from the Sahara (Anyan, 2018). The region experiences two rainy seasons: a major one from April to July and a minor one from September to November, with an average annual rainfall of about 1,500mm (Adzei & Alornu, 2023). The mean annual temperature is around 27 degrees Celsius, with fluctuating daily temperatures. The vegetation of Kpando Torkor is characterized by the guinea savannah woodland, featuring grasslands with scattered trees like acacia, bamboo, and baobabs (Ankutse et al., 2021). The

town is drained by Lake Volta, which serves as the main source of livelihood for the people. The lake also supports irrigation farming, fishing and tourism (Asase et al., 2014).

Dzemeni

Dzemeni is a town under South Dayi District which lies at Latitude 6.6157° N and Longitude 0.1635° E. It predominantly consists of indigenous inhabitants with a modest population size of approximately 7,200 people (Agbodza, 2016) who migrated mostly from Bator, Mepe and other parts of the Volta Region to engage in fishing and trade (Amu-Mensah et al., 2014). Dzemeni's location at the shore of the Volta Lake and economic activities intensifies different forms of migration including child migration. It is a major landing site for fish as well as a major market for various goods and services (Amu-Mensah et al., 2014). The main occupation of the people of Dzemeni are farming, fishing and trading (Amu- Mensah et al., 2014). Darko (2008) further revealed that training at Dzemeni refers to using the resources at their disposal to help the child become useful, but not necessarily going to school. Furthermore, it is customary for them to send their children to stay with relatives in order to teach them trade or other skills (Darko, 2008).

The vegetation of Dzemeni is characterized by both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and these include riparian, tropical forest and woodland (Agbodza, 2016). The riparian woodland which includes grasses, shrubs, stalks and other water-tolerant plants are found along the shores of the Volta Lake. The zone protects biodiversity such as insects, birds and aquatic animals. It is also used as breeding place for fishes which are crucial for the local fishing industry. Patches of the woodland and tropical forest can be found across the area offering a variety of habitats for different types of plants and animals. Being an inland fishing community, Dzemeni provides transport services such as boats and ferries which are vital for moving goods and services which attract traders from different parts of Ghana and beyond for commercial activities.

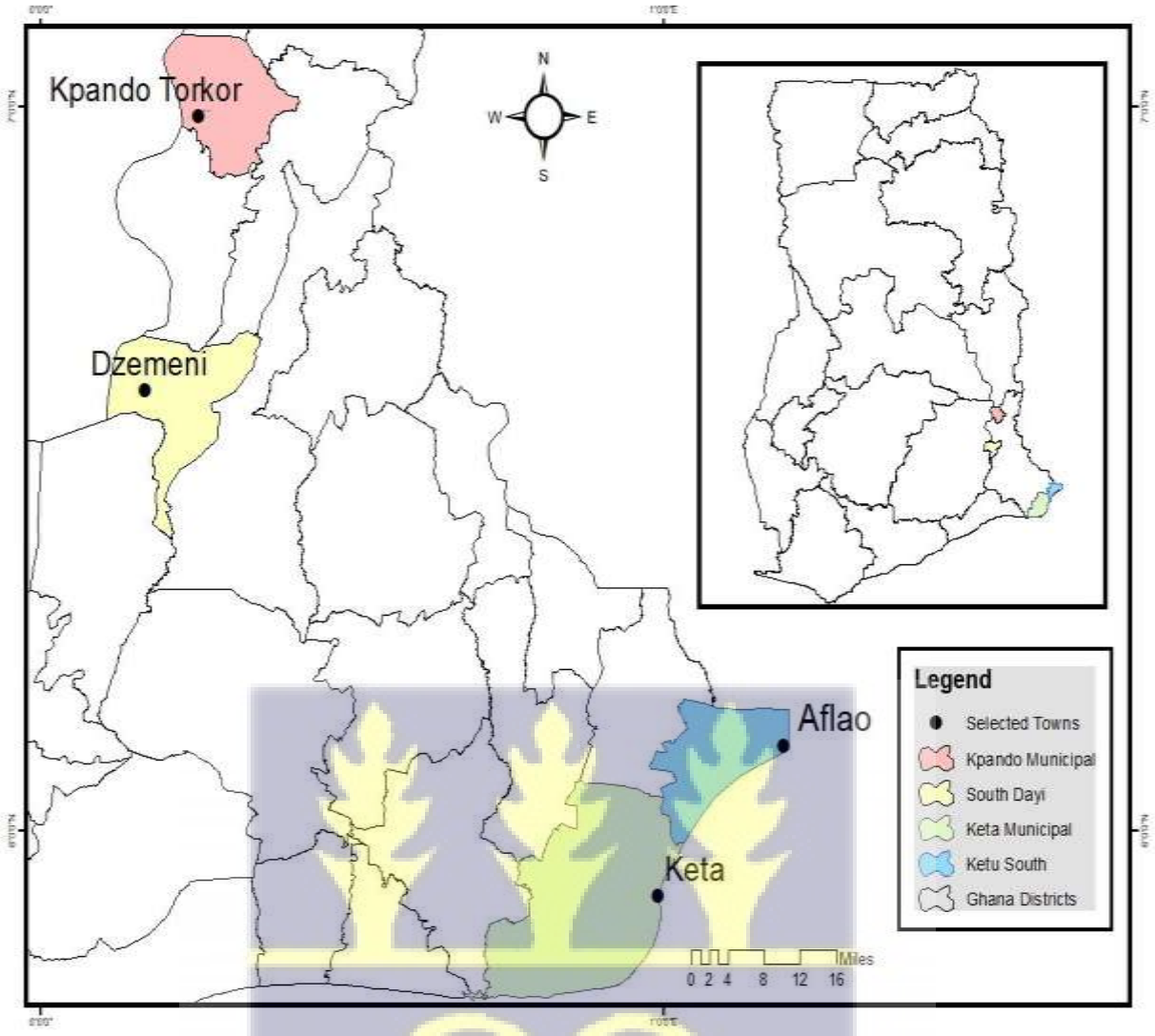

Figure 3: Map of Ghana showing the Study Areas.

Source: Author's construct, 2024

3.2 Justification for the Study Areas.

Figure 3 clearly highlights the spatial distribution of the four selected study areas (Kpando-Torkor, Dzemeni, Keta, and Aflao) across different parts of the Volta Region. Their selection was purposively based on their strategic relevance to the understanding of child migration dynamics in the Volta Region. Thus, they are selected due to their wide recognition as hotspots of child migration by local authorities in the region. Kpando-Torkor and Dzemeni are major inland fishing and trading communities known for their busy market activities, boat transport systems and fish-processing industries that attract a significant number of migrant children who

work as porters, fish carriers and helpers along the lakeshore. These two communities are also recognized hotspots for child labour and child mobility within the region, making them suitable for examining the characteristics and lived experiences of migrant children in inland settings. Kpando- Torkor for example has a river port which connect to Affram Plains and other communities in the Eastern Region. The two river communities being settler communities make migration to be very common. On the other hand, Keta and Aflao represent coastal and border environments where migration takes on different patterns. Keta being the lowest human settlement in Ghana is characterized by economic activities related to fishing, petty trading, tourism and prone to coastal erosion which leads to different types of migration including child migration. While Aflao, being a major Ghana–Togo border town, serves as the busiest land border in Ghana, transit and destination point for cross-border movement involving children. These coastal locations allow for a broader understanding of how migration operates not only within the region but also across national boundaries. These communities are widely recognized within the region and by local authorities as hotspots where children are often involved in physically demanding and low-paid work. Their selection therefore provides insight into lake-based economic activities and child migration linked to the inland fishing sector.

3.3 Philosophical Perspective

Conceptually, this study is underpinned by critical realist ontological and epistemological interpretation of truth and knowledge. The critical realism is a philosophical framework propounded by Bhasker in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of positivism and other philosophical perspectives (Tinning & Fitzpatrick, 2012). As adopted by Sayer (1992), critical realism emphasizes the existence of an external reality that exists independently of our perceptions and interpretations of the phenomenon (Sayer, 1992). This reality is structured and shaped by underlying causal mechanisms that can be investigated through scientific inquiry

(Ketokivi and Choi, 2014)). Critical realists argue that knowledge of reality is fallible and limited, but it can be improved through critical examination and engagement with empirical evidence (Tinning and Fitzpatrick, 2012). Consequently, they advocate for the use of scientific methods to uncover the underlying causal mechanisms that shape observed phenomena (Guest et al., 2020). This involves moving beyond mere description and correlation to understand the deeper structures and processes that generate social phenomena.

Critical realists argue that social phenomena are not simply the result of individual actions or random events, but are shaped by social structures, mechanisms and forces that operate independently of human consciousness (Ketokivi and Choi, 2014). In summary, some basic ideas of critical realism necessary for this research include: stratification of realism based on ontological status and causal powers, contextualizing socio-economic conditions, uncovering generative mechanisms, uncovering underlying structures and mechanisms that shape reality (epistemic relativism) and combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

In addition, since critical realism permits an examination of both observable experiences and the more profound, frequently concealed processes that shape them, it provides a strong philosophical basis for examining the agency of child migrants. When studying the migratory choices of children, who are frequently placed in environments of poverty, societal norms, and no institutional support, this dual-level methodology is essential.

Even with its significant contributions to the social sciences, realism has been criticized for different reasons. Opponents contend that critical realism unjustly affirms the presence of an objective reality that is accessible and intelligible apart from human perception and interpretation. They criticize the degree of objectivity of reality that is hard to attain and dispute the extent to which humans can accurately reflect this reality. Contrary to that, realist believe that one is close to objective knowledge if it reflects more on their opinion (Sayer, 2004). The reductionist nature of critical realism has attracted criticism. Some academics have argued that

critical realism tends to oversimplify social phenomena by reducing them to their most fundamental structures and mechanisms thereby failing to fully represent the complexity of social reality (Archer et al., 2016).

Carter (2021) intimated that because critical realism assumes the existence of innate, unchangeable structures, entities, or attributes that characterize social processes, it has been charged with slipping into essentialism. Opponents contend that this viewpoint may result in an unduly deterministic picture of social evolution because it ignores the flexibility and contingency that are inherent in social systems (Smith, 2010). Finally, the lack of empirical foundation: Critics argue that critical realism has little factual support in actual social science studies and can be unduly abstract and philosophical. Neglecting contextual elements and focusing just on underlying structures and causal mechanisms may result in a lack of useful insights into social phenomena (Zhang, 2023).

3.4 Research Design and Approach

This study employs a cross-sectional design aimed at offering an in-depth understanding of the drivers and socioeconomic conditions of migrant children in the coastal and river communities. A cross-sectional study is conducted at just one specific moment (typically over a brief period) and participants are interviewed in a single instance (Zuleika & Legiran, 2022). In a cross-sectional study, both the observation and the outcome are assessed simultaneously (Setia, 2016). They are conducted to evaluate how common a certain outcome of interest is within a specific population (Setia 2016; Zuleika & Legiran, 2022). In cross-sectional studies, either the whole group or a portion of it is examined. Consequently, participants are chosen according to specific inclusion and exclusion criteria (Setia, 2016). Depending on whether or not results are examined for possible correlations, they can be either descriptive or inferential (Pierre & Richardson, 1986). Although cross-sectional studies cannot demonstrate causality in the strict temporal sense, they can identify probable cause-effect pathways by detecting statistical

associations and strength of relationships between independent and dependent variables. In this study, the application of logistic regression modelling enabled the estimation of how various socio-economic and demographic factors increase or reduce the likelihood of a child migrating, thereby supporting inference on direction and magnitude of influence. This makes the design suitable for examining cause-effect patterns within a real-life social context where controlled experimentation is neither ethical nor feasible.

Given the complexity of child migration, a mixed approach was adopted in this study. Johnson et al. (2007: p 123) describes mixed-methods research as “the kind of research where a researcher or team of researchers combine components of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (For example, gathering and interpreting data from many sources including observations, surveys, interviews and existing documentation) in order to provide confirmation and to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem or phenomenon”. In supporting the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches, Sharan (2002) indicated that mixed methods provide a tool for comprehending complicated situations because there are several constructions and interpretations of reality.

Even though the quantitative method has the capacity to connect variables in numerical patterns for potential generalization and interpretation it has been criticized for providing insufficient insight into the participants’ underlying emotions and motivations (Plano Clark, 2017). Conversely, the qualitative approach uses "unique steps in data analysis and presentation and gathers data from manifold sources (such as interviews, audio-visuals, observations, documents, etc.) at participants’ natural setting" (Creswell, 2013, p. 234). But its main downside is that, in spite of how much time it takes, it cannot generalize results. Notwithstanding these limitations, the beauty of the qualitative approach lies in its capacity to recreate the participants' stories through text and image, revealing the complex hidden facets of their life, such as their motivations, beliefs, and experiences (Bryman, 2016).

Additionally, it is asserted that the interpretivist philosophical perspective serves as the foundation for the qualitative approach, whereas the positivist worldview underpins the quantitative approach. While the former holds that objective research and prediction of human behaviour is possible, as is the case in laboratories (Castro et al., 2010; Mikkelsen, 2005), the latter contends that because social reality is complicated and defies strict generalizations, researchers should instead try to emphasize people's subjective viewpoints (Bryman, 2016). This divisive nature of both paradigms tends to support the claim made by critics that it is impossible to combine the two schools of thinking in a single study. Notwithstanding the intellectual chic of these arguments, Kitchin and Tate (2013) refute the idea that the two paradigms could be seen as complementary elements of an intellectual investigation rather than as diametrically opposed. Based on these lines of reasoning, a mixed method was chosen for this study because it permits convergence, triangulation, or integration in single research despite its cost and time-consuming nature (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teye, 2012). This has enhanced the overall validity and reliability of the research findings because triangulation increases the overall rigor of the study by using many data sources and research techniques (Moon, 2019). In addition, the claim that the mixed methods approach is appropriate for a study involving marginalized groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) guided the choice of this technique and is appropriate for the current study on child migration.

However, following scholars such as (Creswell, 2011 and Bryman, 2016) sequential exploratory mixed method approach was used in this study due to limited data on the topic from the study area. According to Creswell (2011), sequential exploratory strategy is the collection and analysis of qualitative data followed by the collection and analysis of quantitative data. Priority is given to the qualitative aspects of the study. The purpose of this strategy is to use quantitative data and results to assist in the interpretation of the qualitative

findings (Teye, 2012). The respondents for the quantitative sample include the respondents for the qualitative sample.

The sequential exploratory mixed methods in this research involves a first phase of qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by a second phase of quantitative data collection and analysis that builds on the results of the qualitative phase (Creswell, 2013). This is followed by triangulation and integration of results in order to build a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of the drivers and socio-economic implications of child migration (Plano Clark, 2017). It is accepted here that child migration is a social phenomenon that may be observed and measured in the actual world. This includes observable outcomes of child migration such as children physically moving to different regions, as well as concrete events, data and policy. Despite the fact that the sequential exploratory mixed method is both time and resource consuming, grants from both Building the Next Generation of Academics in Africa (BANGA-Africa) and Enhancing Doctoral Training in the Humanities (ENDOTH) supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their financial support helped the researcher to employ 12 research assistants to help in the data collection.

3.5 Population and Sampling

Population is used in research to denote the universe of units or elements from which a sample is selected for an enquiry (Bryman, 2016). The population for this study is difficult to define and estimate due to the paucity of data on migration stock and flows in rural areas of Ghana (Reed et al., 2010). Nonetheless, the population include child migrants (all persons, less than 18 years of age, who move from one's place of residence (origin) to any of the four communities (Dzemeni, Keta and Kpando and Aflao). Since the appropriate sampling technique for conducting research on child migration depends on factors such as the research design, population size and available resources (Atanga et al., 2021), a sample frame was identified at the qualitative stage to assist in the sampling process. A sample frame, also known

as sampling frame is a list or database that contains all the elements of the population from which the sample is selected (Lohr, 2012). The selection of the sample frame is a key component which serves as the foundation of the sample design and the final sampling of the target population (Atanga et al., 2021). In quantitative studies, there are different sampling frames and the choice is dependent on the purpose of the study. The common examples of frame include electoral register, school enrolment lists, telephone numbers, census data and membership list. In this study, the listing of elements (students) was employed due to lack of data on the population and the complex nature of the study. This involves compiling a comprehensive and detailed list of all eligible child migrants from the selected schools. The listing was done by the head teachers in collaboration with some teachers. Table 3 provides the sample frame from which the participants were sampled from.

Table 2: List of Migrants in the Study Communities (Sample Frame)

Community/School	Males	Females	Total
Aflao			
Aflao Border Basic School	537	569	1106
Avoeme Basic School	268	287	555
Kopeyia Basic School	388	426	814
Viepe R/C Basic Sch.	225	255	480
St. Peter & Paul Basic Sch.	155	170	325
Sub- total (Aflao)	**1573**	**1707**	**3280**
Keta			
Bishop Herman Basic School	165	182	347
Ketasco Basic School	355	360	715
Dzelukope E. P. Basic School	242	238	480
Keta R. C. Basic Sch	256	251	507
Kedzi A.M.E Zion Sch	225	235	460
Sub-total (KETA)	**1243**	**1266**	**2509**
Dzemeni			
Tsanakpe DA Basic Sch	200	283	483
Dzemeni RC Basic Sch	527	542	1076
Dzemeni E.P Basic Sch	443	493	936
Ansuariyah Islamic Basic School	182	153	335
Tongor Ahor Basic School	136	101	237
Sub-total (Dzemeni)	**1488**	**1572**	**3060**

Kpando – Torkor			
Kpando- Torkor M/A JHS	60	68	128
Togorme MA Basic Sch	113	95	208
E.P Basic School	265	306	571
Kpando- Torkor R/C	136	166	302
Global Evangelical Basic School	80	116	196
Sub-total (Kpando- Torkor)	**654**	**751**	**1405**
TOTAL (Sample Frame)	**4958**	**5303**	**10254**

Source: Field work (2024)

3.6 Sampling and Sample Size for the Survey

At the second level (quantitatively), stratified sampling procedure was used in sampling the respondents for the study due to the heterogeneous nature of the population. Stratified sampling is a sampling technique that involves dividing a population into subgroups or strata based on some relevant characteristics and then using random sample to select from each stratum (Cohen et al., 2017 and Singh & Masuku, 2013). This technique ensures that the sample is representative of the population and can be useful in the research in this case on child migration in the Volta region. This study divided the population into the following strata based on the characteristics of migrant children: community (2 coastal and 2 riverine), age (6-9, 10-13, 14-17), gender and type of migration. Simple random sampling was then used to sample the respondents from each stratum to give every participant equal chance of being selected. A systematic sampling technique was then employed by selecting every n^{th} participant from the list of the population using the formular k=N/n. Where k= sample interval, n= Sample size and N= Sample frame. Thus 10254/ 560= 18 then using the lottery method I selected from 1 to 18, and the number selected became the starting point which in this case was 5. Every 18th person was selected

For the survey, 424 participants were sampled using probability sampling (stratified, simple random, and systematic) among four groups according to factors like age, gender, ethnicity and educational attainment. According to Teye (2012), it is practically impossible to interview or question the entire population due to budgetary constraint, time and spread of the population.

In this study, 424 respondents out of the total population of 10,254 (N=10254) were sampled. The choice of the sample size was based on +/-5 % precision level and confidence interval of 95% (Yamane, 1973). The reason is that the Yamane method provides a simplified formula to calculate sample sizes from a population. The mathematical illustration for the Yamane method used for the study is

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where 'N' = sample frame (10254), 'n'= sample size and 'e'= margin of error which in this case is (0.05%). The 95% confidence interval was chosen for this study because the study deals with human beings where accuracy of information is subject to biases unlike the physical sciences with high degree of certainty.

n= 10254/ (1+10254 (0.05)2

n= 4007/ (1+ 10254 (0.0025)

n= 10254/26.6

n= 385

Accounting for a 10% non-response rate, the total number of migrant participants was calculated as follows: 306 + (0.10 × 385) = 424. However, the sample size was adjusted to 560 as recommended by (Adjei Mensah, 2023; Babbie, 2020 and Bryman, 2012). It is worth nothing that similar studies (Laarbik, 2017; Abdulai, 2018; Lomotey, 2018), were conducted with adjusted sample sizes. The choice of this sample size was informed by the fact that snowballing was employed to include some respondents that were not part of the list given by the schools. Some of these respondents were contacted at the market, seashore and many more. Table 4 shows the number of children that were allocated to the selected basic schools in the Volta Region of Ghana. The number of respondents was based on the proportion to the population of the selected basic schools in the Volta Region of Ghana.

Table 3: The number of respondents allocated to the selected basic schools in the Volta Region of Ghana

Basic School	Population	Sample
Aflao Border Basic School	1106	46
Avoeme Basic School	555	23
Kopeyia Basic School	814	34
Viepe R/C Basic Sch.	480	20
St. Peter & Paul Basic Sch.	325	13
Bishop Herman Basic School	347	14
Ketasco Basic School	715	30
Dzelukope E. P. Basic School	480	20
Keta R. C. Basic Sch	507	21
Kedzi A.M.E Zion Sch	460	19
Tsanakpe DA Basic Sch	483	20
Dzemeni RC Basic Sch	1076	44
Dzemeni E.P Basic Sch	936	39
Ansuariyah Islamic Basic School	335	14
Tongor Ahor Basic School	237	10
Kpando- Torkor M/A JHS	128	5
Togorme MA Basic Sch	208	9
E.P Basic School	571	23
Kpando- Torkor R/C	302	12
Global Evangelical Basic School	196	8
Total	10254	424

Furthermore, since the main focus is on child migrants, 75.7% (424) of the sample was allocated to child migrants while 24.3% (136) was allocated to non -migrants to provide the basis for comparison. The non- migrants were added as a control group. Without a comparison group, it would have been difficult to determine whether the challenges, outcomes and behaviours observed among migrant children were a direct result of migration or were conditions that also existed among children who remained in their communities of origin. The comparison therefore strengthened the validity of the findings and helped to clearly isolate the unique effects of migration on children. Subsequently, as indicated on Table 5, a proportionate representational computation was performed to redistribute the sample (560) among the research communities. Empirically, the allocation of the sample to migrant children and non-migrants was based on the observed proportion of the two groups in the study area. Where

migration is widely practiced and migrant children are significantly more prevalent. Studies conducted in Volta Region migrant-sending and receiving communities indicate that child migrants often form the majority of the child labour force in fishing, market trading and border-related activities (Babanawo,2021).

Table 4 Distribution of Sample

Communities	No. of Migrant Children(N)	Original Sample (n)	Adjusted Sample(n)
Aflao	3273	(3273÷10254) × 385=123	123÷385 × 560 = 179
Keta	2509	(2509÷10254) × 385 = 94	94÷385 × 560 = 137
Dzemeni	3067	(3067÷10254) × 385= 115	115÷385 × 560 = 167
Kpando-Torkor	1405	(1405÷10254) × 385 = 53	53÷385 × 560 = 77
Total	**1054**	**385**	**560**

Source: Field data (2024)

3.7 Methods of Data Collection

3.7.1. In-depth interviews

In- depth interviews were used to gather qualitative data. They are the convenient ways in which researchers' access and narratives through which people describe their world (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The locations for the interviews in this study include homes, market centres, workplaces and schools depending on where and when it was convenient to the participant. Both English and Ewe were used, albeit depending on the respondent's preference and competence. All the study objectives have qualitative dimensions that were examined through in-depth interviews.

According to Merriam (2018), in-depth interview at the personal level is an open-ended and discovery-oriented method to obtain detailed information from a stakeholder. Smith (2018) asserted that in-depths interview is good choice for getting qualitative data in cases where it

would be logically difficult to get the participant to respond to the questions or when the topic is highly sensitive. Creswell & Creswell (2017) note that in-depth interviews are excellent choice for exploratory research especially in situations where there is paucity of information on the study. Even though Maxwell (2012) argued that participants in depths interview may give answers that are not acceptable or hide information that is sensitive leading to biases or compromise the accuracy of the data, this study agrees with Cohen et al. (2017) and Creswell (2011) that using in-depth interview at the first level of exploratory sequential is appropriate since contextual sensitivity is critical in the study of child migration. Comprehensive interviews offer an in-depth comprehension of the distinct cultural, social and economic circumstances surrounding child migration within coastal and riverine communities (Merriam, 2018; Cohen et al., 2017).

In terms of sampling for the qualitative data, purposive and snowballing techniques were employed to select participants. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher aims to strategically select participants in research such that, those selected are relevant to the research questions that the research seeks to answer (Bryman, 2016). In this case, the researcher identified individuals that have experienced child migration or have knowledge about the drivers and socio-economic implications of child migration in the Volta Region. This sampling technique ensured that data were obtained from relevant and knowledgeable participants who can provide in-depth information on the research topic (Denscombe, 2010).

Snowball sampling on the other hand, involves identifying initial participants who meet the criteria for the study and using them as informants to identify other participants who qualify for inclusion and these people in turn identify other respondents (Bryman, 2016). This strategy was useful in this study because there was no sampling frame and some aspect of the population was difficult to contact. Denscombe (2010) cautions that the snowball method works well for

gradually assembling a sample of a manageable size, particularly when applied in a small-scale study. It also has an advantage of accumulating numbers, using the multiplier effect of one person nominating another two or more potential members for recruitment into a study. Snowball sampling is particularly useful in small-scale exploratory studies and perfectly compatible with purposive sampling where there is no sampling frame and allows the researcher to identify and establish contacts with appropriate participants (Sharma, 2017). The sample size for the qualitative study encompassed 30 migrant children and 15 stakeholders due to their willingness and availability. However, in accordance with the qualitative research approach, this was determined based on the point at which data saturation was achieved (see Guest et al., 2020; Polit & Beck, 2008). Details and number of in-depth interviews are shown on Table 5

Table 5: Categories of respondents and issues discussed

Categories of sample	**Sex**		**Issues discussed**
	Male	Females	
Migrant children	14	16	Prevalence of child migration, experiences of child migration, challenges of migrant children, socio- economic conditions of migrant children, drivers of child migration, implications of child migration
Parents of child migrants	2	1	Household condition: Broken homes, death of parents, economic condition of the family
Teachers (Heads and Classroom teachers)	2	2	Educational opportunities and challenges: School condition, access to education, educational aspiration, educational gaps between source region and destination
Community leaders	1	1	Perception of local communities on child migration, availability and utilization of community resources
Other Key Informants	3	3	Access to healthcare services, barriers to healthcare access by child migrants, inclusion of migrant children into the community

Source: Author's Construct (2024)

3.7.2 Focus group discussion

Focus Group Discussions (FGD) are qualitative research technique that involve guiding a group of participants in a discussion about a particular research topic in order to gather data (Krueger & Casey, 2015). FGDs are invaluable research tools because they enable researchers to investigate and comprehend the viewpoints, experiences, and opinions of participants in a group setting (Morgan, 1996). FGDs in this study function as a triangulation and data validation tool because it helps the researcher to cross-verify data from individual interviews through group discussions (Plano Clark, 2017). This is consistent with Bryman (2016) that participants can provide a more comprehensive and trustworthy grasp of the research issue by confirming, disputing, or adding to the information provided during interviews individual interview and the quantitative data. It has been proposed that conducting three to six focus groups can validate a study because over 90% of the issues in a study may be covered (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In this study, four (4) FGDs were conducted with migrant children. Two from the coastal communities and another two from river communities. To supplement the answers from the children, two discussions were arranged for parents of migrant children at Dzemeni and Keta between 5 to 10 persons formed the groups for interrogation. In effect, the expected participants include children and parents.

3.7.3 Informal conversation of interview

According to Teye (2012), informal discussions are interviews conducted with natives without the assistance of interview guides. Participants in the conversation include teachers, children, some religious people, opinion leaders and assembly members. Even though this method can be affected with bias, it has been found to be able to cover areas that other more organized techniques are unable to (Teye, 2012). Although structured interviews yield valuable data, unstructured discussions (either face to face or on phone in the language convenient to the participants, which capture personal experiences, emotions and narratives) offered a deeper

depth of understanding to the problem of child migration.

3.7.4 Observation

According to Kearns (2021), observation is using the senses of sight, smell, touch, or hearing to gather information from the surroundings. Although observation is a crucial component of Geography, Kearns (2021) observed that it has not received the necessary attention for the creation of data. To ensure adequate participation, the researcher conducted interviews and participant observations during field visits, documenting the data in the field notebook and taking pictures and videos. Unobstructive observation strategies were also carried out. Specifically, physical settings in the communities such as markets, lorry stations, schools and domestic settings were observed. In addition, living and working conditions including nature of employment, level of exploitation as well as housing and sanitation conditions were observed. At Aflao, cross border migration was critically looked at. The researcher accomplished this by placing himself at strategic locations to watch the activities undertaking by the migrant children.

3.7.5. Survey

A survey is a quantitative research technique that seeks to collect information on particular variables or topics of interest in a systematic manner from a predefined group of respondents using standardized instruments, such as questionnaires (Dillman et al., 2014). In this research, questionnaire was the main instrument for collecting quantitative data. Both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions were used in this study. The questionnaire was designed digitally and coded using the Kobo Collect portal which is a component of the Kobo Toolbox toolkit for gathering field data. The Kobo software which was developed by Harvard Humanitarian Initiative in collaboration with Brigham and Women's Hospital and USAID offers a free open-source solution for gathering mobile data using laptops, tablets, and other mobile devices (Lakshminarasimhappa, 2022).

3.8 Field Activities

Fieldwork for this study was carried out between May to August 2024, covering both the coastal and riverine communities. The timing of the fieldwork coincided with the peak periods of economic activities in these communities, particularly fishing and trading seasons along the coast and the Volta Lake. Conducting fieldwork during these periods provided the opportunity to directly engage migrant children and their families in their natural work and living environments.

Data collection activities were undertaken at different times of the day to suit the availability of respondents. Morning sessions (6:30 am – 10:30 am) were used mainly to observe and engage children involved in early fishing activities and market vending. Afternoon sessions (12:00 pm – 3:30 pm) were ideal for household visits, interviews with parents and caregivers, and key informant discussions. Evening sessions (5:00 pm – 7:30 pm) were reserved for engaging participants who were only available after work, especially adolescent migrants and community leaders. Both weekdays and weekends were utilized for data collection. Weekdays allowed contact with school-going participants and teachers, particularly during class breaks and after closing hours. Weekends, on the other hand, were useful for engaging migrant children who worked during the week and for conducting Focus Group Discussions when participants were more relaxed and available. This flexible engagement schedule ensured minimal disruption to participants' daily routines and economic activities.

In addition, community entry protocols were observed, beginning with introductory visits and courtesy calls to chiefs, assembly members, opinion leaders, and school authorities. These engagements facilitated trust-building and eased access to households and migrant children. Informal interactions, casual conversations, and on-site observations complemented formal interviews and surveys, enabling a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the migrant children within the study communities.

Table 6 The phases of data collection

Phase 1: Personal interview and pretesting of questionnaire.	**Phase 2: Focus group discussion:**
Purpose: To investigate and comprehend the factors that influence child migration in the coastal and riverine areas of Volta Region In-depth interviews to pilot test survey questions and refine the survey instruments before deploying them on a larger scale. This will ensure the survey is clear, relevant, and well-received by participants. (2 weeks)	Purpose: to reveal different views on child migration that may not emerge in one-on-one interviews since group dynamics can stimulate discussion. Also, to validate findings of the in-depth interview, unconscious biases or assumptions held by participants and to understand peer influence in child migration. (2weeks).
Phase 3: Expert interview	**Phase 4: Survey**
Purpose: To get specialized knowledge, insights, perceptions and expertise on the complexities of child migration that may not be readily available in literature or general interviews (2 weeks)	560 participants from the four (4) communities in the Volta Region Purpose: to generate quantifiable results on the nature of child migration in terms of prevalence, characteristics and socio-economic conditions. Also, to examine the socio-economic implications of child migration on the migrant, their families and the receiving communities (6weeks)

Source: Author's construct (2023)

3.9 Data Analysis

The qualitative data underwent a rigorous process of manual transcription to ensure accuracy and maintain the nuances of the respondents' answers. This was followed by a comprehensive thematic analysis using NVivo 14. Through NVivo's node structure, which allows for hierarchical organization of themes and subthemes, the researcher systematically coded and categorized the interview transcripts. The study followed Braun and Clark six stages of analysis which include; familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report. The thematic analysis approach was specifically chosen for its flexibility and ability to identify patterns within the data without being constrained by pre-existing theoretical frameworks, making it particularly suitable for exploratory qualitative research. The analysis was enriched by incorporating supplementary data collected through field observations, informal conversations with community members and photographic documentation of relevant settings and contexts. These multiple data sources were triangulated to enhance the validity and depth of the findings. As noted by Gatt et al. (2020) and Sampson (2018), this integrated approach to qualitative and quantitative methods provides robust evidence for understanding social causation mechanisms. The quantitative component of the study utilized SPSS version 27 for statistical analysis. The software facilitated both basic and advanced statistical operations crucial for addressing the research questions. The analysis strategy employed a two-pronged approach: descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the distribution of selected the socio-demographic characteristics of households. Categorical variables were presented using frequencies and percentages, while continuous variables were summarized using means and standard deviations. The main dependent variable was migration status. Bivariate and multivariable logistic regression analyses were conducted to examine the association between migration status and various independent variables. For the bivariate

analysis, the Chi-square test (Pearson or Fisher's exact test, as appropriate) was used to assess associations in cross-tabulations and to compare proportions of independent variables across migration status groups. Statistical significance was determined at a p-value ≤ 0.05.

Given that bivariate analysis does not account for potential confounders, a multivariable logistic regression model was fitted to further explore the associations between migration status and demographic, socio-economic, parental, and living condition variables. Variables with a p-value ≤ 0.20 in the bivariate analysis were included in the multivariable model. In the multivariable analysis, Adjusted Odds Ratios (aORs) with corresponding 95% confidence intervals and p-values were reported. A p-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant in the multivariable logistic regression analysis.

The research also tested three main hypotheses using logistic regression analysis and Mann-Whitney U test for the third hypothesis: first, the drivers of child migration, second the influence of social networks on migration decisions and finally, socio-economic impacts of child migration. These statistical techniques were chosen for their ability to predict categorical outcomes and handle multiple independent variables simultaneously. The findings were visualized through a combination of clear, informative graphs and detailed tables to effectively communicate the statistical results and patterns discovered in the data.

3.10 Reliability and Validity of Data

In qualitative research, reliability means that the findings are consistent and trustworthy over time regardless of the researcher or context (Rose and Johnson, 2020). In quantitative research, it is emphasized that measurements remain stable and consistent over time (Bryman, 2016). To ensure that the primary data in this thesis are both valid and reliable, several steps were taken. Below is an explanation of how the study maintained high standards drivers of rigor and data quality.

Standardization of Instruments: To ensure consistency across various respondents and settings, all data collection tools were standardized. This involved using a consistent questionnaire and interview guide, both carefully designed and reviewed to guarantee uniformity in how surveys and interviews were conducted.

Training of Data Collectors:

The researcher personally conducted all qualitative in-depth interviews and the four focus group discussions. However, for the quantitative work, a team of data collectors (12 people) were recruited and provided with comprehensive training. The training focused on the study's objectives, the correct use of Kobo collection tools, and standardized protocols for interacting with respondents. This thorough training ensured uniformity in data collection and equipped the data collectors to use the tools effectively and engage professionally with participants.

Inter-Rater Reliability:

To ensure reliability in the analysis of qualitative data, inter-rater reliability measures were implemented. Two additional researchers with expertise in the fields of migration studies independently analysed a subset of the data to verify the coding and interpretations made by the primary researcher. All discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively, refining the analysis process and ensuring a consistent application of the analytical framework.

Pilot Testing:

The reliability of 10-item measurement scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, a widely accepted measure of internal consistency. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .880, indicating high internal consistency reliability. This value falls well within the range considered "good" to "excellent" in social science research, where coefficients above 0.8 are generally regarded as demonstrating strong reliability. Further supporting the robustness of the instrument, it was observed that the Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items was .887, very close to the non-standardized alpha. This similarity suggests consistent performance

across all items in the scale, with minimal variance discrepancies. The achievement of such high reliability with a relatively concise 10-item scale speaks to the efficiency and well-designed nature of the instrument. These reliability findings provide strong evidence that the instrument consistently measures the intended construct across the items. The high internal consistency suggests that the scale items are closely related and are likely tapping into the same underlying concept. This level of reliability enhances the confidence in the instrument's ability to produce consistent and dependable results in this research context. In addition to the overall reliability analysis previously discussed, the item-total statistics table 3.10 provides a more detailed examination of each item's contribution to 10-item scale measuring prevalence of child migration in the community.

3.11 Ethical Consideration

Research involving human participants is often intrusive and involves questions of rights and responsibilities (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011; UNODC 2010; Spencer et al., 2021). Construction of the instrument for this study was done in consultation with experts and with approval from the Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH), University of Ghana with reference number (ECH 217/ 23-24) on 2nd May, 2024. As such all ethical guidelines for human experimentation was strictly adhered to. Access to children to participate in the study was sought from the appropriate authorities for example; permission to enter schools was made at the District Directorates of Education after which heads of the institutions were adequately informed. Moreover, every effort was made to protect the best interests of the children by ensuring that participation in the research was not harmful to them. In this regard, the objectives of the research were explained to them and there was a brief write-up on the questionnaire seeking consent and reiterating the need for objectivity, anonymity and confidentiality of the responses provided. Conscious efforts were made to observe the rights of the child under the Ghana Children's Act 1998 (Act 560), which requires the protection of the best interests of children,

informed consent and data protection. As such, pseudonyms were used throughout the study to make it difficult for the identity of the respondents to be discovered. Also, all individual participants were informed of their rights of withdrawal from the study once they felt their confidentiality have been compromised.

3.12 Challenges Encountered in the Study

There were practical challenges encountered during the data collection exercise and they varied with respect to the various stakeholders in the study communities. For instance, in Aflao and Dzemeni, it was difficult locating and engaging the migrant children because they were scattered all around, busy with various economic activities. The reason for this was that majority of the interviews were conducted on market days. In view of this, the investigator had to vary the time so that proper targeting was possible. The author went early in the morning and then also in the evening around 4.00pm to 6.00pm. There was also bureaucracy in reaching stakeholders such as health workers, directors of education, social welfare officers and this led to incomplete stakeholder interviews. The researcher has to relied on snowballing to reach subsequent managerial-level stakeholders.

The expectations of study participants was another challenge I encountered. Majority of respondents desired financial benefit before participating in the study since they thought the study was a government project. However, after the researcher explained the purpose of the study and proof of studentship, they willingly participated. Closely associated to that was ethical considerations. It was difficult obtaining consent from parents or guardians. In some cases, parents wanted to be present before the children were interviewed to prevent them from divulging sensitive information about them. To avoid such social biases, the study used probing questions and follow-up prompts to encourage detailed responses, The discussion of some migration experiences was emotionally traumatic, particularly for girls who were abused.

In such cases, a female community health nurse who was part of the enumerators was engaged to interrogate such victims.

3.13 Summary

This chapter presents the methodology of the study and it is divided into three main sections The first section focused on the philosophical underpinning and the research approach of the study. The study is grounded in the critical realism, allowing the study to explore both the observable and the underlying drivers of child migration. The second section elaborated on the research design which includes sequential exploratory mixed-methods, combining cross-sectional and correlational features to completely address the research issues. The third portion addressed the research methods, including data sources, data collection procedures, sampling, instrumentation, data analysis and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER FOUR

PATTERNS AND DYNAMICS OF CHILD MIGRATION IN THE VOLTA REGION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the extent of child migration in the Volta Region with emphasis on the prevalence and the characteristics of child migration. The chapter aims at providing a groundwork for understanding the baseline conditions and patterns associated with child migration in the region. Thus, it examines the demographic and socio-economic profiles of migrant children and the communities involved in this research. The analysis relied on both qualitative and quantitative data to interrogate the nature of child migration. It ends with the testing of the first hypothesis for the study.

4.1 Prevalence of Child Migration

The findings from multiple data sources, including focus group discussions, interviews with migrant children, expert insights and observations suggest that child migration is deeply entrenched in the social structure of both coastal and riverine communities in the Volta Region. The responses indicate that child migration is not merely an occasional occurrence, but an established norm widely accepted and perpetuated within these communities. The qualitative data revealed that children often at a very tender age migrate for various reasons including limited educational infrastructure and economic opportunities. The general lack of resistance to this practice within the communities underscores its normalization. Community members, parents and educators acknowledge the migration of children as an inevitable and sometimes necessary aspect of life. This widespread acceptance is consistent with the principle of flexibility and adaptability in the SNT that since migration connections evolve over time and across space it can be generally accepted by communities due to an expansion in the economic, social and political conditions (Boujija et al., 2022; Ryan & Dahinden, 2021). It also raises

important questions about the socio-economic conditions that drive child migration and the systemic structures that reinforce it (Zaami, 2020).

Further analysis of qualitative narratives highlights the community's role in perpetuating migration. Testimonies from focus group participants and experts indicate that child migration is not just tolerated but actively facilitated. A participant from Aflao described how children move freely across borders without restrictions emphasizing the perceived legitimacy of the practice:

> *"Oh, movement of children into this community is common and accepted and there is nobody that can stop it. We just cross the border freely and no one can stop us. It is generally accepted. We are all involved. They come to us and we also come to them. Our parents have approved it for us because for some of them they cannot even take care of us so once we leave, they are happy"* (A member of FGD, Aflao).

Similarly, an expert from Dzemeni pointed out that child migration is strategically timed with farming seasons underscoring its economic underpinnings:

> *"The busing of children into this community is not something new to anybody in this community. We normally go to the North or Kpasa areas to bring them especially during the farming season for cheap labour. Everybody is taking part and around March and April if you see cars coming with children you will be surprised. More so, this community is a settler community so we are all migrants hence the liberty*" (A 53-year-old man, Dzemeni).

These quotes suggest that child migration is an accepted norm in the study communities. A reflection on this shows that the movement of children is without any restriction because adults who are supposed to prevent them rather encourage the behaviour due to cheap labour. This observation deviates from the cultural norm of Ghana on migration. This finding confirms Cebotari (2020) who reported that migration is temporal due to vulnerability and opportunities

available. Similarly, Guba (2019) reports that agricultural improvement serves as coping strategy for rural- rural migration in Northern Ghana.

In the coastal communities, child migration is associated with economic hardship and environmental threats, particularly coastal erosion and tidal flooding which have disrupted local livelihoods. In Keta, frequent tidal waves have destroyed homes, market spaces and farmlands, contributing to instability in household income sources. As a result, children are often encouraged or willingly decide to migrate to other regions to engage in trading, head-porting, domestic work, food vending, hair braiding and petty commercial activities. Similarly, in Aflao, the proximity to the Togo border facilitates cross-border child migration, mainly for small-scale commerce in markets and households. Children frequently move between Aflao and Lomé (Togo) making mobility common and culturally normalized. In the riverine communities, the prevalence of child migration is equally high, but the pattern differs. Here, children typically migrate to support fishing-related labour, including net pulling, fish processing, offloading boats and selling fish in open markets.

The survey as captured on Figure 4 reinforces the qualitative insights showing that child migration is widely recognized within the communities. A significant majority of respondents (56%) "Strongly Agree" that they have observed children migrating into their communities. 38.3% on the other hand agree that there was an influx of migrant children in their communities. This high level in agreement recorded suggests that child migration is embedded in the study communities. The minimal disagreement (3.3%) and neutrality (2.5%) further confirm that child migration is a widely acknowledged phenomenon within the study area. The social acceptance of child migration suggests that it is perceived as structural rather than an individual issue, reflecting the broader socio-economic and cultural factors that sustain the practice as postulated by SNT (Poole, 2021; de Haas, 2021 & Amfo et al., 2022)

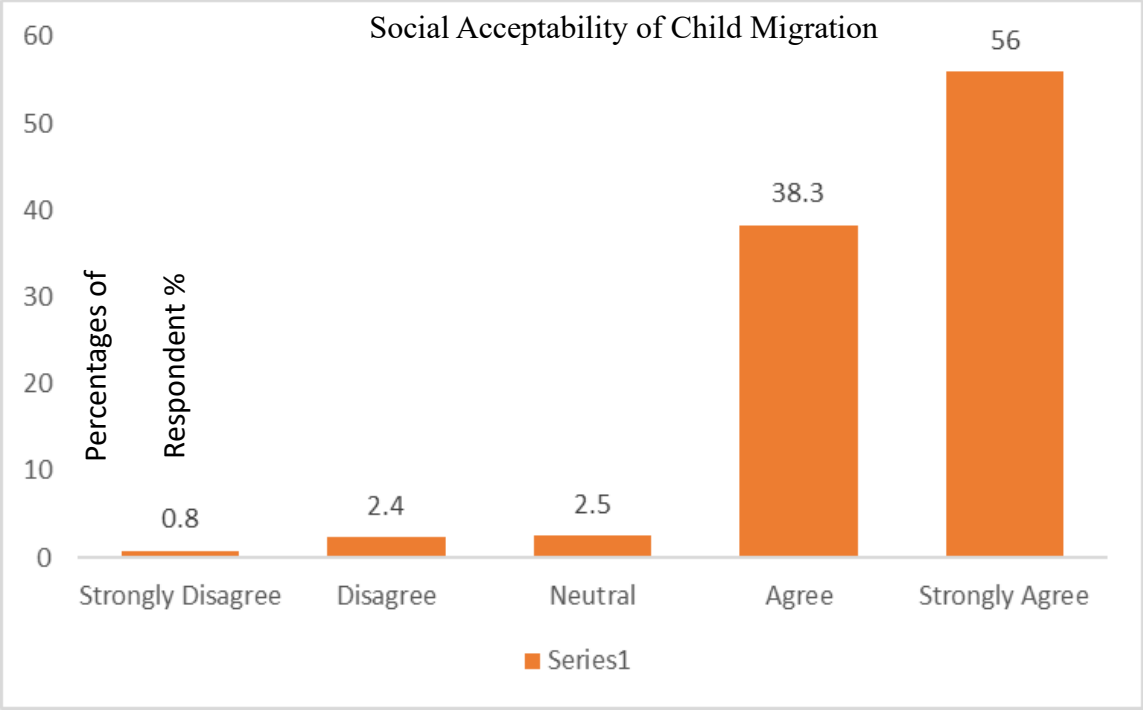

Figure 4: Observed influx of similar children into the community

Source: Fieldwork, 2024.

A deeper examination of cultural perceptions reveals that child migration is often regarded as an integral part of community identity. From Figure 5 half (54%) of respondents "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that child migration is culturally regulated. Drawing on the NCMT, this finding implies that migration is not only a socio-economic response, but also, a practice deeply rooted in the historical and cultural narratives (Virtue et al., 2022 and Gheasi et al., 2023). However, the relatively large proportion of neutral responses (38%) suggests variations in personal perceptions, indicating that while migration is generally accepted, it may not be equally valued by all community members. The small proportion of disagreement (8%) reinforces that although migration is a widely held norm, it is not entirely uncontested. This study therefore, argues that child migration particularly in rural the Ghanaian contexts is not merely a response to individual poverty, but a structural mechanism for household resilience and mobility

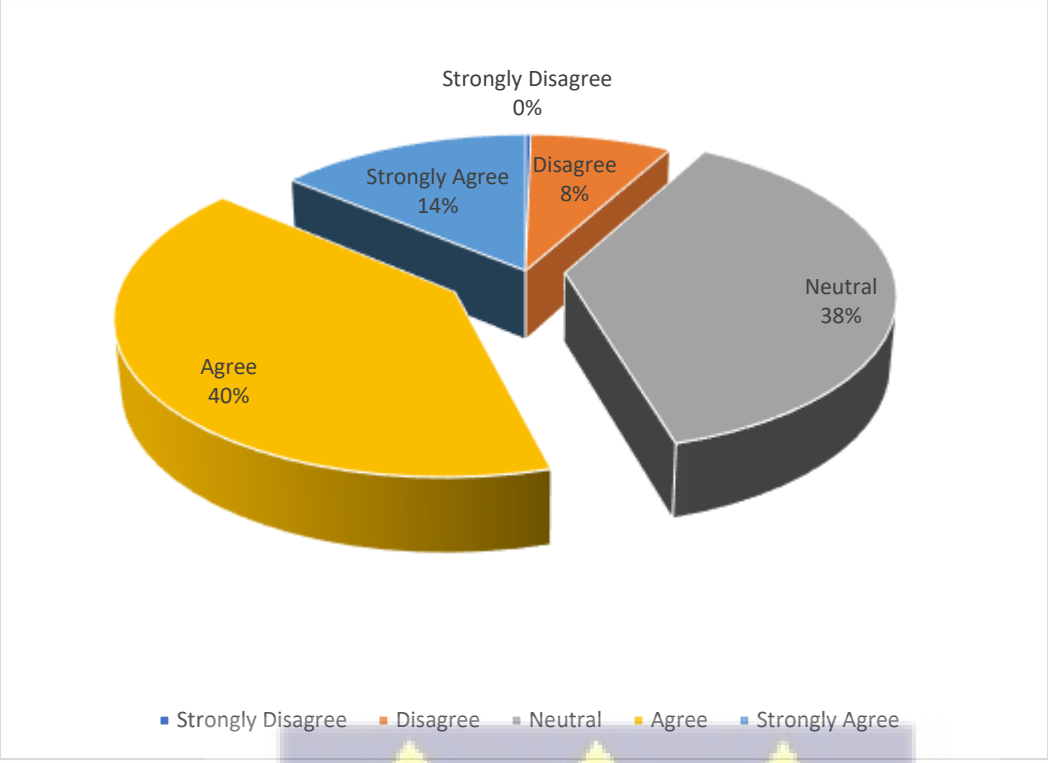

Figure 5: Child migration culturally acknowledged

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

These findings resonate with findings by Zakari et al. (2022) and Belloni (2021) who argued that child migration often functions as a coping strategy for households facing economic hardship and limited access to public services. Atiglo et al. (2022) also identified fishing and farming economies as significant magnets for child migrants, especially in riverine and coastal communities a pattern that mirrors the evidence from Dzemeni and Kpando-Torkor. On environmental impact, Babanawo (2021) highlights environmental vulnerabilities such as coastal erosion and tidal flooding in Aflao-Keta area as contributing to displacement and increased child migration, underscoring how environmental and economic pressures are intertwined. Studies by Koomson et al. (2023) and Franchino-Olsen (2021) also document how communities tend to normalize exploitative child labour practices when such practices provide perceived economic benefits, which aligns with the community wide acceptance observed in this study.

In conclusion, the prevalence of child migration in the Volta Region cannot be viewed merely as a demographic trend or a collection of isolated cases. Instead, it represents a complex social institution deeply woven into the fabric of community life. These findings suggest that addressing child migration requires more than regulatory enforcement; it demands a nuanced, community-sensitive approach that considers the intricates web of social, economic, and cultural forces sustaining the practice.

4.2 Child Relocation and Cross-border Migration

Another theme that emerged from the textual data is "child relocation" which encompasses both internal and cross-border migration. The results indicate that child relocation is a systematic and recurring phenomenon within the study areas. Based on the principle of flexibility and adaptability of the SNT (Bilecen &Lubbers, 2021), the study discovered that child relocation is not merely an isolated event, but it is a deeply embedded socio-economic strategy. As postulated by De Haas (2021) and Poole (2021), migration is influenced by a combination of employment opportunities and income disparities. Consequently, responses from this study clearly show that migration decisions are shaped by broader structural forces, including economic constraints, educational aspirations and social networks that facilitate the movement. The response showed the structured nature of child migration as noted by a respondent that: *"My father came and rent for me before going back to Benin. I have no problem playing with my friends because I can speak Ewe just like them."* (International migrant, Aflao).

It is clear from the above quote that child relocation is inextricably a household decision-making linked to social ties. This is consistent with Veronese et al. (2021) that linguistic, cultural and social networks help children integrate into host communities, reducing psychological and social effects of migration. Her argument about embedded social contexts of migration reflects the key principle of the SNT (Tutlani & Kumar, 2024).

4.3 Independent child migration

Findings from the qualitative data show that child migration has become a salient topic of discussion, perception and observation within the study areas. Community narratives highlight the presence of unaccompanied migrant children in markets, schools and seasonal migration patterns, supporting Tamanja's (2016) assertion that child migration is a widely acknowledged and recurrent subject of discourse. This view is supported by a key informant:

"I will say about 80% of the children that come here stay on their own. Initially you will see them moving with people, some with their siblings but later when you meet them in the market or school, they will tell you 'I am on my own" (55-year-old educationist, Kpando Torkor).

This response show that independent child migration has become a visible and widely recognized phenomenon, reinforcing the argument that it is not a marginal issue, but a mainstream concern. It also suggests that the phenomenon has a social significance which is woven into local discourses, possibly shaping the perceptions and responses to child migrants. Apart from this, it was discovered that seasonal labour demands and peer influence are critical motivators for independent child migration. When asked when, where and how the children come on their own, a key informant responded:

"During the farming season both boys and girls are bused in their numbers to the overbank to go and work on the farm. They mostly come from the Northern region and with no adults. Some schools are even closed down due to this movement because the number that move is very huge" (An educationist, Dzemeni).

The quotation above demonstrates that the movement of unaccompanied migrants follow predictable and structured patterns. Given the NCMT which focuses on individual rational choices Gebreyesus &Tadesse (2021), the narratives demonstrate that independent child migration is not only observed, but also deeply embedded in community discussions; reinforcing its prevalence as a social and economic reality. These accounts contradict Hashim

(2005) which portrays child migration as chaotic and exploitative describing migrant children as passive victims rather than strategic actors. The results however, agree with other scholars that independent migration mostly follow predictable patterns which are influenced by seasonal labour demands and socio-economic conditions that drive children into autonomous migratory paths (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2020; Luo et al., 2020).

4.4 Characteristics of child migration

The demographic profile of migrant children in the region reveals significant patterns in age distribution and caregiving responsibilities. These findings suggest that child migration is not a random occurrence, but a structured phenomenon shaped by socio-economic and familial strategies.

4.4.1 Age dynamics and caregiving roles by child migrants

An analysis of the age distribution among migrant children indicates that the majority fall within the 5 to 17-year-old range. A notable trend is the prevalence of older children (14–17 years) migrating with younger siblings (5–9 years), highlighting a form of "child-headed migration." In these instances, the older children assume primary caregiving roles, a responsibility typically reserved for adults. Child-headed migration refers to a form of mobility in which a child, without the accompaniment or direct supervision of an adult guardian, initiates and undertakes the process of migration either alone or while assuming responsibility for younger siblings. In this context, the child is not merely a passive traveller but acts as the primary decision-maker, caregiver and household head throughout the migration process. This phenomenon is reinforced by a first-hand account from community members:

"We often encounter groups of siblings where the eldest, sometimes as young as 14, takes on a parental role. They work to support their younger brothers or sisters, sacrificing their own education and childhood in the process" (A 63-year-old man-Dzemeni).

It is clear from the quote above that there is a new trend of "child-headed migration" where parental responsibilities are transferred to children. The result shows that older siblings assume the role of de facto guardians, managing both financial and emotional support of their younger counterparts. The findings of this study align with a growing body of literature that explores the rise of child-headed households and caregiving roles among children in contexts of poverty, migration and crisis (Bryceson & Vuorela 2020; Mkhavele et al., 2024 and Rupande, 2014). Further, in a similar study at Uganda, Buzaare et al. (2023) note that older children due to abandonment or the death of parents, become heads of households and are responsible for the welfare of their siblings. These children rely on social networks and informal income-generating activities to navigate adversity. Agere and Agere (2020) also emphasized that in the absence of functional adult caregivers, children in child-headed households develop agency and coping mechanisms to manage their household duties, even though they are frequently left vulnerable due to inadequate institutional support. These studies collectively affirm that caregiving roles taken on by children are not isolated or context-specific, but form part of a broader regional trend in response to socioeconomic instability, family breakdown, and migration pressures.

A reflection of this using the SNT shows that the caregiving roles assumed by older migrant children are embedded within social expectations and community structures (Munshi, 2020, Ryan & Dahinden, 2021; Piguet, 2018 and Takasaki, 2022). When adult caregivers are absent, networks of siblings become the functional unit of survival, with elder siblings stepping into roles traditionally reserved for parents (Apatinga et al., 2022, Obeng- Odoom, 2020 and Ryan, 2023). This study therefore, argues that phenomenon of "child headed migration" is sustained by social norms and peer modelling once caregiving by children becomes a visible and accepted strategy, it reinforces itself within the migration system based on strong and weak model of the SNT.

4.4.2 Gender dimensions of child migration

While previous studies revealed that cultural norms and gendered roles particularly in patrilineal societies, tend to favour male migration (Tamanja, 2016), findings from this study reflect a shift toward gender parity in child migration. It was for instance observed that both boys and girls are now involved at comparable rates driven by similar socio-economic pressures and opportunities. A participant highlighted this shift that:

"I will say it's very common here because many children that is both boys and girls have come from different towns to come and stay here and sometimes both boys and girls sleep at the same place and do the same work" (Child migrant, Dzemeni).

This observation supports Cebotari (2020), who argues that child migration is a widespread phenomenon with no significant gender bias. From the standpoint of SNT (Ager et al., 2018 & Amfo et al., 2022), the study discovered that migration is often normalized within communities leading to its continued prevalence and the lack of formal interventions to address its implications. Additionally, the research highlights an evolving normative shift in societal beliefs regarding gender and education as established by the NCMT (Gheasi et al., 2023 and De Haas, 2021). The exposure to the positive outcomes of girls' education has led to a re-evaluation of traditional norms that previously prioritized boys' education. Consequently, more girls are engaging in educational migration compared to boys in many schools. A parent shared:

"If I see how women have made it in politics, health, education and so forth and so on, I want all my girls to go to school for me. So, I have asked all of them to live the village for school" (59-year-old woman, Keta).

This quotation shows that child migration experiences cut across genders with education becoming a key driver for girls' mobility. Another noteworthy observation from the qualitative data is the gendered reliance on social networks to facilitate migration. Girls were found to be

more likely to have pre-existing contacts at their migration destinations than boys. This is consistent with Awumbila et al. (2017) who noted that in the Volta Region, strong family bonds significantly influence the migration patterns. Unlike in the Northern Region, where migration tends to be more autonomous, migrants in the Volta Region often rely on extended family members as initial points of contact before establishing independence (Bohnenkämper et al., 2024, Yeoh et al., 2020). Furthermore, a significant shift is evident as more girls migrate for both economic and educational opportunities compared to boys. This is consistent with the findings from the Ghana Statistical Service (2021) that female migration (52.5%) now surpasses male migration (47.5%).

Figure 6: A female migrant child in Aflao

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

These findings suggest a structural transformation in migration dynamics with increased female participation. This trend contradicts the results of Mago (2023) who posited that child migration is predominantly male-driven, demonstrating that both genders now participate in migration under similar socio-economic conditions. Consistent with the qualitative data, the survey portrayed a similar pattern of migration as shown on Table 7 below:

Table 7: Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of study participants

Characteristics	Frequency (N=424)	Percentages (%)
Gender		
Male	176	41.5
Female	248	58.5
Age, years		
6-9	137	32.3
10-13	181	42.7
14-17	106	25.0
Education (Grade Level)		
Primary	242	57.1
JHS	182	42.9
Ethnic Group		
Ewe	245	57.8
Asante/Akyem/Guan	35	8.3
Ga/Dangme	22	5.2
Northerners (Kokomba/Dagomba/Kusasi/Mamprusi)	51	12.0
Foreigners (Togolese, Nigerian, Nigerien, Malian)	71	16.7
Employment Status		
Unemployed	361	85.1
Employed	63	14.9
Religion		
No religion	23	5.4
Christianity	264	62.3
Islam	92	21.7
Traditional	45	10.6
Residential Status		
Rural	256	60.4
Urban	168	39.6
Living status		
Alone	28	6.6
Guardian	43	10.1
Relatives	29	6.8
Parents	292	68.9
Employer	32	7.6

Source: Field work 2024

A total of 424 children from selected basic schools in the study communities met the inclusion criteria and completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 100%. Majority of participants were female (58.5%). Additionally, more than one-third (42.7%) were within the

10–13-year age group, and over half (57.1%) were in grades 1–3. More than half of the participants (57.8%) identified as Ewe, while the over three-fourth (85.1%) were unemployed. Furthermore, six out of ten (60.4%) resided in rural areas, and 68.9% lived with their parents. This profile of the study participants suggests how vulnerabilities such as rural residency, poverty and family problems contribute to child mobility. The predominance of younger children (aged 6-9) suggests early exposure to child migration, which is consistent with other studies that children begin to migrate at increasingly younger ages due to economic necessity and family conditions (Abbay et al., 2025, Darko- Gyeke et al., 2020 and Luo et al., 2020). Drawing on the NCMT, the study reflects the rural- urban dynamic cited in migration literature, where inadequate resources in rural areas drive movement toward urban centres (Awumbila et al., 2012; Codjoe et al., 2020 and Owusu, 2024).

Table 8 presents the parental characteristics of the study participants. These characteristics include the age of the mother and father, educational level of both parents and their employment status. The majority of participants' mothers were younger than 40 years (54.7%), while over half (57.0%) of the fathers were aged between 40 and 49 years. More than one-fourth of the mothers (26.4%) had completed secondary education and approximately three out of ten participants (30.4%) had fathers who had completed primary education. Additionally, more than half of the participants' mothers (59.0%) and fathers (59.2%) were employed.

Table 8 Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Parents of Study Participants

Characteristics	Frequency (N=424)	Percentage (%)
Mother's age		
Less than 40	232	54.7
40-49	140	33.0
50 and above	52	12.3
Father's age		
Less than 40	58	13.7
40-49	242	57.0
50 and above	124	29.3

Mother's Educational Status		
No Education	108	25.5
Primary	105	24.8
JHS/JSS	60	14.1
Secondary (SHS/SSS/Vocational/Technical)	112	26.4
Tertiary	39	9.2
Father's Educational Status		
No Education	31	7.3
Primary	129	30.4
JHS/JSS	56	13.2
Secondary (SHS/SSS/Vocational/Technical)	134	31.6
Tertiary	74	17.5
Mother's Employment Status		
Unemployed	174	41.0
Employed	250	59.0
Father's Employment Status		
Unemployed	173	40.8
Employed	251	59.2

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The results depict the critical socio- economic dimensions that underpin the phenomenon of child migration. For instance, on the age dynamic, the study showed that most parents were within the economically active age range. However, this does not translate into economic stability. While the fairly young age may indicate a period of economic transition in the household, reliance on child labour or migration may be considered as a coping strategy. This is in harmony with (Rupande, 2014) who opines that children are more vulnerable to migration because younger parents in low- income settings lack sufficient economic resilience. Although, half of the parents indicated that they are employed, the qualitative reports show that most of the employments are seasonal, low-paying and informal.

"Yes, I am working, but it is not regular. I farm during the rainy season and sell firewood when I can. It's not enough to take care of all the children, so we let the older one go to Accra to help his uncle." (38-year-old mother, Dzemeni).

This quote expresses the unreliable nature of employment that compels families to resort to child migration as a survival strategy. This observation supports the argument of Msuya (2017) and Imamov & Semenikhina (2021) that employment in rural and peri-urban communities is insufficient to meet household needs, and this consequently leads to migration as a coping strategy. The study also explores relationship between the demographic and socio-economic characteristics and migration status of study participants. As shown on Table 9, The age group of the participants was significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, the highest proportion of migrants (35.2%) was among participants aged 13–15 years, while the lowest (32.2%) was among those aged 9–12 years. The grade level of participants was also significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). Table 9 further shows that the proportion of participants who were migrants was 49.4% among those in grades 4–6, compared to 50.6% among those in grades 1–3.

Table 9: Relationship between demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of study participants and migration status.

Characteristics	**Migration Status**				
	Non-migrant N (%)	**Migrant N (%)**	**Total N (%)**	**Pearson Chi-square**	**p-value**
Gender				0.6112	0.434
Male	69 (44.0)	107 (40.1)	176 (41.5)		
Female	88 (56.0)	160 (59.9)	248 (58.5)		
Age, years				**37.0087**	**<0.001**
6-9	95 (60.5)	86 (32.2)	181 (42.7)		
10-13	43 (27.4)	94 (35.2)	137 (32.3)		
14-17	19 (12.1)	87 (32.6)	106 (25.0)		
Education (Grade Level				**12.4875**	**<0.001**
Primary	107 (68.2)	135 (50.6)	242 (57.1)		
JHS	50 (31.8)	132 (49.4)	182 (42.9)		
Ethnic Group				6.4965	0.165
Ewe	94 (59.9)	151 (56.6)	245 (57.8)		
Asante/Akyem/Guan	11 (7.0)	24 (9.0)	35 (8.3)		
Ga/Dangme	12 (7.6)	10 (3.8)	22 (5.2)		
Northerner	13 (8.3)	38 (14.2)	51 (12.0)		
Foreigner	27 (17.2)	44 (16.4)	71 (16.7)		

Employment Status				**6.0130**	**0.014**
Unemployed	125 (79.6)	236 (88.4)	361 (85.1)		
Employed	32 (20.4)	31 (11.6)	63 (14.9)		
Religion				0.8505	0.837
No religion	10 (6.4)	13 (4.9)	23 (5.4)		
Christianity	94 (59.9)	170 (63.7)	264 (62.3)		
Islam	35 (22.2)	57 (21.3)	92 (21.7)		
Traditional	18 (11.5)	27 (10.1)	45 (10.6)		
Residential Status				**10.5448**	**0.001**
Rural	79 (50.3)	177 (66.3)	256 (60.4)		
Urban	78 (49.7)	90 (33.7)	168 (39.6)		
Living status				7.0875	0.131
Alone	14 (8.9)	14 (5.2)	28 (6.6)		
Guardian	20 (12.7)	23 (8.6)	43 (10.1)		
Relatives	8 (5.1)	21 (7.9)	29 (6.8)		
Parents	100 (63.7)	192 (71.9)	292 (68.9)		
Employer	15 (9.6)	17 (6.4)	32 (7.6)		

Source: Fieldwork 2024

It can be inferred from the above results that there is a statistically significant relationship between age and migration status, and this is indicative that children are more likely to migrate as they become older, especially in early to mid-adolescence (10–13 years). This can be attributed to social pressures from their families, a developing sense of independence, or financial necessity (Tamanja, 2012; Young et al., 2023). This result tallies with earlier studies which identified early adolescence as a crucial period for child migration due to the desire for independence (Schewel, 2018). Interestingly, there is a significant correlation between employment status and unemployment ($p = 0.014$), with a higher percentage of migrants experiencing unemployment. This could be a reflection of the unstable economic conditions that children face before or after migration, which are frequently characterized by informal or exploitative work conditions (Olsson, 2023; Gheasi et al., 2023; Serbeh and Adjei, 2020). Additionally, based on the standpoint of the NCMT (Olsson, 2023), the results indicate a significant correlation ($p = 0.001$) between migration and residential status with a greater percentage of migrants coming from rural regions. This finding is consistent with (Awumbila,

2012) who pointed out that rural poverty, limited access to quality education and inadequate social amenities are push factors for child migration. In contrast, variables like living status, religion, ethnicity, and gender did not exhibit statistically significant correlations. It can therefore, be argued that child migration decisions in this context are more influenced by structural and developmental factors more than cultural issues.

As shown on Table 10, the study presents the relationship between parental characteristics of participants and their migration status. The results show that mother's age was significantly associated with the migration status of participants ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, the highest proportion of migrants (44.2%) was among participants whose mothers were aged 40–49 years, while the lowest proportion (14.2%) was among those whose mothers were aged 50 years and above, as shown on Table 10. Similarly, the father's age was significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). The highest proportion of migrants (59.6%) was among participants whose fathers were aged 40–49 years, while the lowest (8.6%) was among those whose fathers were aged less than 40 years.

The mother's level of education was also significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). The highest proportion of migrants (35.6%) was among participants whose mothers had no formal education, while the lowest (6.0%) was among those whose mothers had completed tertiary education. Furthermore, the mother's employment status was significantly associated with migration status ($p = 0.003$). The proportion of participants who were migrants was 53.6% among those whose mothers were employed, compared to 46.4% among those whose mothers were unemployed, as shown in Table 10. The father's employment status was significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). The proportion of participants who were migrants was 50.6% among those whose fathers were employed, compared to 49.4% among those whose fathers were unemployed.

Table 10 Relationship between parental characteristics of study participants and migration status of study participants

Characteristics	Migration Status				
	Non-migrant N (%)	Migrant N (%)	Total N (%)	Pearson Chi-square	p-value
Mother's age				**52.3203**	**<0.001**
Less than 40	121 (77.1)	111 (41.6)	232 (54.7)		
40-49	22 (14.0)	118 (44.2)	140 (33.0)		
50 and above	14 (8.9)	38 (14.2)	52 (12.3)		
Father's age				**15.9509**	**<0.001**
Less than 40	35 (22.3)	23 (8.6)	58 (13.7)		
40-49	83 (52.9)	159 (59.6)	242 (57.0)		
50 and above	39 (24.8)	85 (31.8)	124 (29.3)		
Mother's Educational Status				**45.0659**	**<0.001**
No Education	13 (8.3)	95 (35.6)	108 (25.5)		
Primary	40 (25.5)	65 (24.3)	105 (24.8)		
JHS/JSS	26 (16.5)	34 (12.7)	60 (14.1)		
Secondary	55 (35.0)	57 (21.4)	112 (26.4)		
Tertiary	23 (14.7)	16 (6.0)	39 (9.2)		
Father's Educational Status				7.8012	0.099
No Education	9 (5.7)	22 (8.2)	31 (7.3)		
Primary	59 (37.6)	70 (26.2)	129 (30.4)		
JHS/JSS	19 (12.1)	37 (13.9)	56 (13.2)		
Secondary	41 (26.1)	93 (34.8)	134 (31.6)		
Tertiary	29 (18.5)	45 (16.9)	74 (17.5)		
Mother's Employment Status				**8.7033**	**0.003**
Unemployed	50 (31.9)	124 (46.4)	174 (41.0)		
Employed	107 (68.1)	143 (53.6)	250 (59.0)		
Father's Employment Status					
Unemployed	41 (26.1)	132 (49.4)	173 (40.8)	**22.2662**	**<0.001**
Employed	116 (73.9)	135 (50.6)	251 (59.2)		

Source: Fieldwork 2024

From the NCMT standpoint, which posits that migration is driven by economic differentials (Karimi & Wilkes, 2023; Manyerere, 2020; Stark, 1991; and Todaro, 1969), the relationship between parental employment status and migration is significant (mother's status $p = 0.003$ while father's status, $p < 0.001$). The higher percentage for unemployed parents implies that children from low-income families can move out in pursuit of better financial prospects. This

is consistent with the findings of UNICEF (2019) and Adepoju (2022) that poor economic conditions at the household level serves as a "push factor" for migration decisions. Additionally, the statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) relationship between mothers with no education and high child migration supports Anarfi and Agyei (2009) account of the role of socioeconomic vulnerability in fuelling child migration. Arguably, parents who have less education are not able to support their children financially or facilitate opportunities for them and this can push the children to migrate to more developed communities.

Based on the tenet of strong and weak ties and social capita of the SNT (Bruceson & Vuorela 2020, Swanson & Torres, 2016), the study records a telling relationship between parental and migration status of participants reflecting a generational dynamic in social capital and support networks. For instance, the highest migration rates were found among participants whose parents were between the ages of 40 and 49, possibly as a result of parents in this age range being more economically and socially active and thus, having wider networks from which children tap into to migrate. According to scholars such as Munshi (2020) and Quinn et al. (2018), these networks improve the possibility of migration while lowering its cost and risks. This result contradicts the general notion that child migration is common among parents above sixty.

4.5 Summary

This chapter examines the patterns and dynamics of child migration in the Volta Region by focusing on the prevalence, demographic and socio- economic characteristics of migrant children and their families. The study discovered that child migration is a widespread and normalized phenomenon which is embedded in the social and economic structures of the study area. As a result, the study notes that migration is not regarded as a deviant behaviour but rather as a strategic response to poverty, limited access to education and inadequate livelihoods. On the patterns of child migration, the data revealed different forms of child migration which

include child relocation and cross- border movement and independent child migration. The study discovered an emerging pattern such as child- headed migration where older siblings assume caregiving responsibilities which challenge earlier notions of children as passive migrants. The chapter also revealed a shift in gender dynamics with increasing female participation in migration for both work and education. It was discovered that girls rely more on pre-existing social networks and this challenge the notion that migration is male- dominated. The quantitative results show that most migrant children are aged between 13–15 years. The study also discovered statistically significant relationships between migration status and factors such as educational level, age, residential status and parental characteristics (age and employment). Overall, the chapter revealed that child migration is a phenomenon influenced by social norms, family dynamics and economic difficulties rather than an individual incident.

CHAPTER FIVE

DRIVERS OF CHILD MIGRATION IN THE VOLTA REGION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results and analysis on the driving forces of child migration in the Volta region. It examines the underlying factors such as economic hardships, educational opportunities, and family dynamics. Additionally, the chapter explores how social networks, including family connections, peer groups, and community ties, influence the paths and outcomes of child migration.

5.1 Drivers of Child Migration

Child migration in the Volta Region is influenced by a complex interplay of economic, educational, familial, social, and bereavement factors, creating a web of push and pull dynamics. Results from both qualitative and quantitative data provide insight into these determinants highlighting the structural and situational elements that drive child migration.

5.1.1 Economic Factors: Survival Needs

Child migration in the Volta Region is primarily driven by severe economic hardship faced by local families. Generally, households struggling with poverty, unstable finances and limited opportunities for sustainable income often see their children migrate (both within the country and internationally) hoping to find better economic prospects (Karimi & Wilkes, 2023). Hence, drawing on the NCMT, the results have shown that these challenging circumstances lead parents to view migration as a survival strategy compelling them to make tough choices about their children's futures. An opinion leader articulated this reality:

"In many households here, there simply isn't enough to go around. Parents often feel they have no choice but to send their children away, hoping they'll find better opportunities elsewhere".

(Opinion leader (Kpando- Torkor).

Based on the principle of wage differentials, poverty, demand and supply of labour by the NCMT (Olsson, 2023; Hejduková & Kureková, 2020) the study shows that economic hardship is a key driver of child migration in the Volta Region. This also reflects empirical findings on migration across West and Central Africa that poverty, malnutrition and wage differential between regions are the main cause of migration (Janssen and Marchand, 2020; Awumbila et al., 2014). Moreover, from the NCMT standpoint the study revealed that child migration when initiated or supported by households often emerge as a strategy to survive under conditions of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity (De Haas, 2021; Poole 2021, and Karimi & Wilkes, 2023). Similarly, Janssen and Marchand (2020) observe that labour migration especially among youths and children is historically rooted in alternative livelihood strategy in West Africa and often considered as a rational response to persistent economic constraints. Furthermore, based on the viewpoint of the NCMT (Mankiw, 2021), the research shows that intra-regional migration among minors is deeply embedded in household survival strategies particularly in rural and economically marginalized communities. This is consistent with Dako-Gyeke et al. (2020) that adolescents in West Africa migrate independently due to overwhelming poverty and lack of income generating opportunities in their home communities. The findings also mirror the paradox of unemployment in the NCMT (De Haas, 2021; Blessed- Sayah & Griffiths, 2024) that economic factors such as financial insecurity, low employment prospects and aspirations for better living conditions are dominant push factors in child s migration. Based on these, it can be proposed that migration cannot be regarded as deviant behaviour, but as a practical response to socio-economic exclusion.

Beyond economic hardship, the study identifies additional socio-economic stressor that contribute to child migration. Based on the theoretical principle of flexibility and adaptability of the SNT, (Piguet 2018, Bilecen and Lubbers 2021), the study discovered that parental illness or disability frequently necessitates child migration as children seek employment or alternative

support systems for their ailing family. However, the findings from FGD and expert interviews highlight another significant factor which is parental irresponsibility and neglect. In many cases, fathers abandon their financial responsibilities/obligations, resulting in family breakdowns and consequently migration by their children. For instance, a child migrant noted that:

"What motivated me to move from my town to this place was the behaviour of my father. He will not provide and he was chasing women as well. He has refused to look after us" (Migrant child in an FGD, Aflao).

This quote underscores how some parents fail to provide the basic needs such as financial and emotional supports to their families. It also confirms the neglect of some parents for their families, especially their children. This results in the families feeling unloved and eventually moving out of their homes.

A testimony by a key informant from one of the riverine communities corroborated that of the migrant child when the former was of the view that:

"We've encountered numerous cases where children leave home due to neglect or even abuse by their parents. Some parents, overwhelmed by their circumstances, fail to provide the care and support their children need." (47year old man, Dzemeni*).*

This quotation also suggests that child abuse and neglect have a linkage to parental inability to cope with challenges in the home which is a common cause of child migration.

Figure 7: A migrant child selling at Dzemeni market

Source: Field work (2024)

The findings, which highlight parental neglect, and especially the shirking of responsibility serves as a key driver of child migration and this resonates with the empirical findings from West Africa and the broader Sub-Saharan Region (Makanju & Khan, 2020; Vanore et al., 2021). Consistent with the assumption of the paradox of unemployment in the NCMT (De Sherbinin et al., 2022), the study notes that socio-economic and family pressures on children play a critical role in child exodus, although these are often under-examined push factors in child migration literature. This is reiterated by Amoah (2020) that perceived parental neglects especially emotional abandonment and the lack of financial support is a central factor in children's decision to migrate. Although many children did not label their experiences as outright neglect, their narratives reflected a sense of dissatisfaction with parental care and a

desire to escape environments they assumed were marked by instability, irresponsibility or abuse. This is consistent with De Sherbinin et al. (2022) that the health status of parents especially fathers and their negligent including abandonment and infidelity is a strong driver of child migration. Chiweshe (2023) similarly revealed that family neglect, domestic abuse and parental incapacity (due to illness or addiction), are catalysts for young people seeking refuge elsewhere. Based on these, this study opines that children are often forced into self-directed migration when the family unit fails as an economic support system due to parental absence. Thus, migration becomes a compensatory action not initiated by collective strategy of family households.

5.1.2 Educational Factors

The pursuit of better educational opportunities emerged as one of the most frequently cited reasons for child migration. In light of the principle of spatial inequalities according to the NCMT (Dunwoodie et al., 2025 and Mankiw, 2021), the study found that educational migration is primarily driven by the limited availability of educational facilities in children's places of origin particularly, the absence of Junior High Schools (JHS) and Senior High Schools (SHS) in the places of origin of the child migrants. This structural deficiency compels parents and children to view migration as a necessary step for continuing education beyond the primary level reflecting the high value placed on education as a pathway to future success and economic stability. The following testimony below underscores this argument:

"About half of the population of the students in this school are child migrants that come from different places because there is no JHS where they are coming from"". (A Headteacher, Aflao).

This quote suggests that the lack of access to local education drives children to relocate to areas with better school systems. This finding is similar to the claims of Garvik & Valenta (2024) and Kyereko & Faas (2024), who also indicated that constrained educational opportunities at

home are a consistent push factor for migration. The authors further argue that young people often engage in "stepwise migration,". This aligns with the testimonies of children in this study who move from smaller villages to towns like Keta and Aflao to continue their education. Similarly, Salahu-Deen and Towoju (2024) emphasized that poor educational infrastructure coupled with economic hardship remains critical factor shaping child migration patterns in sub-Saharan Africa. These studies confirm the principle of the NCMT that education is one of the strongest aspirations among migrants particularly for those from marginalized communities.

5.1.3 Environmental Hazards

Environmental hazards both natural and man-made are significant drivers of child migration in the Volta Region (Klöpf & Wehner, 2024). Consistent with the tenet of risk diversification in the NCMT, (Fields, 2005, Trabitzsch et al., 2023), the study discovered that coastal flooding particularly in Keta and the socio-economic disruptions caused by the Akosombo Dam spillage have led to widespread displacement forcing families especially children to migrate in search of stability and resources. As observed by Fernández et al. (2024), this study highlights that environmental disasters directly undermine livelihoods leading to forced migration. A fisherman described the impact of flooding on his household in the statement below:

"The sea has taken our land and destroyed my boat. I can't work, so my children have to leave to stay with relatives elsewhere" (58 years old Fisherman, Keta*).*

This testimony underscores how environmental hazards separate families as children are often sent away to seek refuge and sustenance elsewhere. Again, based on the principle of strong and weak ties of SNT (Amfo et al., 2022; Granovetter, 1973), the study notes that critical consequence of environmental hazards is their impact on food security. The study discovered that submerged farmland and water contamination from the Akosombo Dam spillage aggravate food insecurity prompting families to relocate to areas with more stable access to food and other resources.

A mother shared her experience:

"We were asleep and just noticed that water entered our room and washed away all our possessions including our crops. We couldn't go to the farm neither grow anything. That is where I had to move with my children to this place. My husband and his brother are still there."

(A 64year old woman, Keta).

Figure 8: Effects of coastal flood at Keta

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

These experiences can also be supported by field observation as shown in Figure 8 where infrastructure including homes are destroyed due to coastal flooding. Both narratives and field observation explicate how environmental disasters create multiple layers of vulnerability for affected families compelling migration as an adaptive response to lost livelihoods deteriorating living conditions and persistent economic instability. Supporting this view, Osei-Amponsah et al. (2023) indicated that climate-induced migration must be understood through the lens of social transformation. The scholars argue that environmental disasters such as flooding and crop failure compound social and economic vulnerabilities particularly for children. Further empirical evidence from De Longueville et al. (2020) demonstrates that rural communities perceive climate-related anomalies such as unpredictable rainfall as direct threats to food security and long-term survival.

5.1.4 Bereavement

As established by the SNT through the principle of kinship ties (Tamanja 2012), bereavement and particularly, the death of parents or guardians is a significant driver of child migration in the Volta Region. The study discovered that the loss of a primary caregiver often disrupts children's lives compelling them to seek alternative living arrangements with extended family members or to migrate independently in search of livelihoods. A reflection on this using the SNT espouses that bereavement does not only aggravate economic vulnerability, but also leads to emotional distress forcing children into precarious living and working conditions (Dillman et al., 2014).

According to a child migrant said: *"when my mother died, there was no one to take care of me, so my uncle brought me here to live with him"* (JHS 2 boy, Kpando-Torkor).

This narrative highlights the dual burden of bereavement; the immediate emotional loss and the accompanying economic distress. As established by the Social Network Theory (Dillman et al., 2014), the absence of a stable caregiver forces children into premature adulthood where they must contribute to household income to ensure survival. As indicated by other scholars such as Maa et al. (2023) and Mago (2023), the study identifies a phenomenon that is termed "bereavement-induced role reversal", referring to the situation where children assume adult responsibilities following the death of a breadwinner. This premature transition often compels children to migrate in search of employment opportunities to sustain their siblings and dependents (Martinez, 2019).

A participant illustrated this shift by stating that:

"*My aunt came for me after my father died but things were not easy. I have to sell in the market before we can eat"* (a female migrant child, Dzemeni).

This testimony underscores how bereavement does not only physically displace children, but also fundamentally alters their developmental trajectory. Instead of progressing through a

traditional childhood and educational pathway, the bereaved children are thrust into financial responsibilities often at the expense of their personal growth and long-term stability. This is consistent with Weitzman and Smith-Greenaway (2020) who established that bereavement within families can significantly reshape household dynamics and expose survivors especially children and women to new vulnerabilities. Although their research focused on the death of children and its implications for family stability, it emphasizes the broader ripple effects of bereavement in high mortality contexts like Ghana. Thomas (2021) discovered that bereaved individuals particularly those without strong support networks face increased psychosocial stress and are often forced to make significant life changes including relocating. This mirrors the experiences of children in this study who migrate after the death of a parent and begin working to support themselves or others.

5.1.5 Abuse and family circumstances

According to the SNT's principle of social influence and information flow (Gebreyesus & Tadesse, 2021), physical, emotional and sexual abuse frequently result in an unbearable family environment emerging as a significant factor promoting child migration. The findings from this study suggests that an exposure to domestic violence disrupts children's psychological well-being, fostering a sense of insecurity. Participants' narratives indicate that children who experience abuse within the family settings are often forced into untenable situations where migration becomes their only means of escaping oppression. The following testimonies illustrate the impact of abuse on child migration:

> *"I was forced to run away from my uncle whom I stayed with in Accra because he most of the time slept with me before giving me money to go to school. This normally happens when his wife leaves to her shop early in the morning. I couldn't tell the wife because I was afraid"* (A class five pupil- Dzemeni).

Another participant recounted her experience of emotional abuse:

"The reason why I left my parents to this place is the behaviour of my mother. My mother is very abusive so any small thing we do she will start insulting and cursing us. She always insults us and asks us to go to our father's house knowing that my grandfather's house collapsed. The other day she said she doesn't know what she has done to God to have been given these useless children. So, when I finished my WASSCE, I run away to my friend and none of my parents know my whereabouts" (18-year-old SHS graduate, Aflao).

These accounts reflect how abuse strip children of their agency compelling them to seek autonomy through migration. In a related work, Dako-Gyeke et al. (2020) identified maltreatment and emotional abuse as direct triggers of independent child migration. They reiterate that children who feel emotionally rejected or physically threatened in their families are more likely to engage in early migration even without clear plans or destination. Schmidt (2022) also notes that while children do not explicitly cite abuse as the primary reason for migration, their narratives often reveal deeply traumatic family circumstances marked by sexual abuse, coercion, and emotional neglect. Similarly, Nebeife (2023) critiques traditional African child-rearing norms, arguing that adultism, that is the unchecked authority of adults over children often enables psychological, physical, and sexual abuse within families.

5.2 Statistical Analysis of the Drivers of Child Migration

Table 11 Crosstab of Migrant Status and Drivers of Child migration

Migrant Status * Which of these significantly influenced your migration Crosstabulation						
Count						
		Which of these significantly influenced your migration				Total
		Family Issues	Occupation of parents	Community and environmental factors	Educational factors	
Migrant Status	Migrant	103	95	59	143	400
	Non-Migrant	21	44	35	60	160
Total		124	139	94	203	560

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

Table 11 reveals a strong association between migrant status (migrant or non-migrant) and the factors influencing child migration. Among the 400 migrants surveyed, 143 respondents identified educational factors as the primary driver of migration making it the most frequently cited cause. Family issues followed with 103 migrants citing it as a significant reason while 95 migrants pointed to the occupation of parents. Lastly, 59 migrants attributed their migration to community and environmental factors. For non-migrant children, the most frequently cited issue was also educational factors (60 respondents), followed by the occupation of parents (44 respondents), community and environmental factors (35 respondents), and family issues (21 respondents). Overall, educational factors were identified as the most prominent driver across both groups, but with a significantly higher proportion among migrant respondents.

Table 12 Chi-Square Test for Migrant Status and Drivers of Child Migration

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.427a	3	0.006
Likelihood Ratio	13.135	3	0.004
N of Valid Cases	560		
0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 26.86.			

Source: Field work 2024

The Pearson Chi-Square (Table 13) value of 12.427 with a p-value of 0.006 indicates a statistically significant relationship between migrant status and the drivers of child migration. This result suggests that the reasons for migration differ significantly between migrant and non-migrant children. The Likelihood Ratio test, with a value of 13.135 and a p-value of 0.004, further confirms this significance reinforcing the conclusion that child migration is influenced by a combination of socio-economic and environmental factors.

The statistical findings reinforce the trends observed in qualitative data. Among the 400 child migrants, educational factors emerged as the leading cause of migration indicating that children frequently relocate to access better schooling opportunities. This corroborates earlier findings that limited access to Junior High Schools (JHS) and Senior High Schools (SHS) in rural areas compels children to migrate for education. Family issues were the second most cited driver of migration with children often leaving home due to parental neglect, abuse, or family instability. The occupation of parents was another notable factor as children from families engaged in unstable or low-income occupations were more likely to migrate in search of better opportunities. Community and environmental factors, though less frequently cited, still played a role in migration decisions particularly in areas affected by environmental hazards such as flooding and economic downturns.

The significant chi-square test results highlight distinct differences in the motivations for migration between migrant and non-migrant children. While education remains a dominant factor across both groups, the higher incidence of migration among children facing family instability and economic hardship underscores the multifaceted nature of migration drivers. The statistical analysis confirms that child migration in the Volta Region is driven primarily by educational aspirations, family instability, economic conditions, and environmental factors. The significant relationship between migrant status and these drivers underscores the structural challenges that compel children to migrate. These findings highlight the need for policy interventions that address educational accessibility, family support systems, and economic stability to reduce the necessity of migration among vulnerable children. Efforts to improve school infrastructure, strengthen child welfare programs, and enhance economic opportunities for low-income families would be critical in mitigating forced child migration. The data-driven insights provided in this study underscore the complexity of child migration and the importance of multifaceted policy approaches in addressing its root causes.

5.3 Living conditions of study participants

Apart from the qualitative results, the survey analysed living condition of participants as a driver of child migration and this is captured on Table 13. The conditions explored include the access to healthcare services, type of housing, safety and security, food intake, access to clean water, access to toilet facilities, access to electricity and the number of people living in a room. Over half of the participants (56.4%) reported having good access to healthcare services. Additionally, more than one-third (39.4%) lived in compound houses, and over half (63.0%) reported living in unsafe and insecure environments. About 45.5% of the participants ate twice a day, while more than three-fourths (75.5%) had no access to clean water. Furthermore, 65.8% lacked access to toilet facilities. Slightly over half (56.8%) had access to electricity, and nearly half (48.5%) lived in a room with more than three people.

Table 13 Living Conditions of Study Participants

Variable	frequency (n=424)	percentage (%)
access to healthcare services		
Poor	185	43.6
Good	239	56.4
type of housing		
Kiosk	58	13.7
compound house	167	39.4
Flat	41	9.7
single room	115	27.1
self-contained	43	10.1
safe and secure environment		
unsafe and insecure	267	63.0
safe and secure	157	37.0
food intake (meals per day)		
Once	142	33.5
Twice	193	45.5
Thrice	89	21.0
access to clean water		
No	320	75.5
Yes	104	24.5
access to toilet facilities		
No	279	65.8
Yes	145	34.2

access to electricity		
No	183	43.2
Yes	241	56.8
number of people sharing same bedroom		
One	91	21.5
Two	56	13.2
Three	71	16.8
above three	206	48.5

Source: Field work 2024

Relationship between living conditions and migration the status of study participants

Table 11 presents the relationship between the living conditions of participants and their migration status. Access to healthcare services was significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). The proportion of participants who were migrants was 41.2% among those with good access to healthcare services, compared to 58.8% among those with poor access, as shown in Table 14. A safe and secure environment was also significantly associated with migration status ($p = 0.007$). The proportion of migrants was 32.2% among participants living in safe and secure environments, compared to 67.8% among those in unsafe and insecure environments, as shown in Table 10. Food intake was significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, the highest proportion of migrants (44.6%) was among participants who ate twice per day, while the lowest (14.6%) was among those who ate three times per day, as shown in Table 14.

The access to clean water was significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). The proportion of migrants was 14.6% among those with access to clean water, compared to 85.4% among those without such access, as shown in Table 14. Access to toilet facilities was also significantly associated with migration status ($p < 0.001$). The proportion of migrants was 27.3% among those with access to toilet facilities, compared to 72.7% among those without access, as shown in Table 14. Access to electricity was significantly associated with migration

status ($p < 0.001$). The proportion of migrants was 41.6% among those with access to electricity, compared to 58.4% among those without access.

Table 14 Relationship between living conditions of study participants and migration status of study participants

Characteristics	Migration Status				
	Non-migrant N (%)	Migrant N (%)	Total N (%)	Pearson Chi-square	p-value
Access to healthcare services				**67.4649**	**<0.001**
Poor	28 (17.8)	157 (58.8)	185 (43.6)		
Good	129 (82.2)	110 (41.2)	239 (56.4)		
Type of housing				4.2336	0.375
Kiosk	21 (13.4)	37 (13.9)	58 (13.7)		
Compound house	53 (33.8)	114 (42.7)	167 (39.4)		
Flat	18 (11.4)	23 (8.6)	41 (9.7)		
Single Room	46 (29.3)	69 (25.8)	115 (27.1)		
Self-contained	19 (12.1)	24 (9.0)	43 (10.1)		
Safe and secure Environment				**7.1802**	**0.007**
Unsafe and Insecure	86 (54.8)	181 (67.8)	267 (63.0)		
Safe and Secure	71 (45.2)	86 (32.2)	157 (37.0)		
Food intake (meals per day)				**25.7213**	**<0.001**
Once	33 (21.0)	109 (40.8)	142 (33.5)		
Twice	74 (47.1)	119 (44.6)	193 (45.5)		
Thrice	50 (31.9)	39 (14.6)	89 (21.0)		
Access to clean water				**38.3430**	**<0.001**
No	92 (58.6)	228 (85.4)	320 (75.5)		
Yes	65 (41.4)	39 (14.6)	104 (24.5)		
Access to toilet facilities				**15.0675**	**<0.001**
No	85 (54.1)	194 (72.7)	279 (65.8)		
Yes	72 (45.9)	73 (27.3)	145 (34.2)		
Access to Electricity				**68.5054**	**<0.001**
No	27 (17.2)	156 (58.4)	183 (43.2)		
Yes	130 (82.8)	111 (41.6)	241 (56.8)		
Number of people sharing same bedroom				3.1066	0.375
One	29 (18.5)	62 (23.2)	91 (21.5)		
Two	18 (11.5)	38 (14.2)	56 (13.2)		
Three	31 (19.7)	40 (15.0)	71 (16.8)		
Above Three	79 (50.3)	127 (47.6)	206 (48.5)		

Source: Field work 2024

The results clearly show that children from families lacking access to basic amenities are more likely to migrate. Based on the NCMT which postulates that migration is mostly driven by the individual or household- level cost benefit analysis aimed at maximizing income and utility (De Haas, 2010; Karimi & Wilkes, 2023; Todaro, 1969; Stark & Bloom, 1985), the results show that poor living conditions are seen as a proxy for deprivation and poverty; thus, migration is considered a rational response to economic and infrastructural insufficiencies. The study further notes that environmental insecurity and health vulnerability act as indirect push factors in child migration. This is consistent with the report of UNDESA (2018) that children living in unsafe communities are encouraged to relocate by parents and guardians who fear for their well- being.

On the principle of economic rationality postulated in the NCMT (Awumbila et al., 2014, Boivin & Decary- Hetu, 2022; Chavykina & Pakhomov, 2023; and Harris & Todaro, 1970), the finding revealed a strong correlation between food intake and migration status, that is children who eat only once or twice a day were disproportionately represented among migrants. This highlights how food insecurity can serve as core driver of migration decisions.

5.3.1 Multivariable logistic regression analysis of factors associated with migration among study participants

Table 15 presents the results of both the crude and adjusted odds ratios for demographic, socio-economic, parental, and living condition factors that were significantly associated with migration among children attending selected basic schools in the Volta Region of Ghana. The multivariable logistic regression model was statistically significant, with a Wald Chi-square value of 251.90 ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the model appropriately explains the factors influencing migration. Compared to children aged 9–12 years, those aged 13–15 had 2.3 times higher odds of migrating (aOR = 2.3, 95% CI: 1.1–4.9, p = 0.033), while those aged 16–18 had 6.6 times higher odds (aOR = 6.6, 95% CI: 2.6–16.7, $p < 0.001$). Children who were employed

had 70% lower odds of migrating compared to those who were unemployed (aOR = 0.3, 95% CI: 0.1–0.6, p = 0.004). Children living in urban areas had 50% lower odds of migrating compared to those in rural areas (aOR = 0.5, 95% CI: 0.3–0.9, p = 0.029).

Children of mothers aged 40–49 had 4.6 times higher odds of migrating compared to those with mothers under 40 (aOR = 4.6, 95% CI: 2.2–9.6, p < 0.001), and children of fathers aged 40–49 had 2.9 times higher odds compared to those with fathers under 40 (aOR = 2.9, 95% CI: 1.2–7.1, p = 0.022). Compared to children whose mothers had no formal education, those whose mothers had completed JHS/JSS had 80% lower odds of migrating (aOR = 0.2, 95% CI: 0.1–0.6, p = 0.005); those whose mothers had completed secondary education had 70% lower odds (aOR = 0.3, 95% CI: 0.1–0.7, p = 0.008); and those whose mothers had completed tertiary education had 80% lower odds (aOR = 0.2, 95% CI: 0.1–0.6, p = 0.004).

Children of employed mothers had 60% lower odds of migrating (aOR = 0.4, 95% CI: 0.2–0.8, p = 0.008). Children with good access to roads or transportation had 70% lower odds of migrating (aOR = 0.3, 95% CI: 0.1–0.5, p < 0.001). Compared to children who ate once daily, those who ate three times a day had 70% lower odds of migrating (aOR = 0.3, 95% CI: 0.1–0.8, p = 0.010). Furthermore, children with access to clean water had 50% lower odds of migrating (aOR = 0.5, 95% CI: 0.2–0.9, p = 0.038), and those with access to toilet facilities had 60% lower odds (aOR = 0.4, 95% CI: 0.2–0.8, p = 0.005). Finally, children living in households with electricity had 70% lower odds of migrating (aOR = 0.3, 95% CI: 0.1–0.6, p < 0.001).

Table 15 Multivariable logistic regression analysis of factors associated with migration among study participants

	Crude Odds Ratio		Adjusted Odds Ratio	
Characteristics	OR (95% CI)	p-value	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Age, years				
9-12	Ref		Ref	
13-15	**2.4 (1.5-3.8)**	**<0.001**	**2.3 (1.1-4.9)**	**0.033**
16-18	**5.1 (2.8-9.0)**	**<0.001**	**6.6 (2.6-16.7)**	**<0.001**
Grade Level				
1-3	Ref		Ref	
4-6	**2.1 (1.4-3.2)**	**<0.001**	1.8 (0.9-3.3)	0.060
Employment Status				
Unemployed	Ref		Ref	
Employed	**0.5 (0.3-0.9)**	**0.015**	**0.3 (0.1-0.6)**	**0.004**
Residential Status				
Rural	Ref		Ref	
Urban	**0.5 (0.3-0.8)**	**0.001**	**0.5 (0.3-0.9)**	**0.029**
Mother's age				
Less than 40	Ref		Ref	
40-49	**5.8 (3.5-9.9)**	**<0.001**	**4.6 (2.2-9.6)**	**<0.001**
50 and above	**3.0 (1.5-5.8)**	**0.001**	1.6 (0.6-3.9)	0.348
Father's age				
Less than 40	Ref		Ref	
40-49	**2.9 (1.6-5.3)**	**<0.001**	**2.9 (1.2-7.1)**	**0.022**
50 and above	**3.3 (1.7-6.3)**	**<0.001**	2.6 (0.9-7.0)	0.068
Mother's Educational Status				
No Education	Ref		Ref	
Primary	**0.2 (0.1-0.4)**	**<0.001**	0.5 (0.2-1.3)	0.156
JHS/JSS	**0.2 (0.1-0.4)**	**<0.001**	**0.2 (0.1-0.6)**	**0.005**
Secondary	**0.1 (0.0-0.3)**	**<0.001**	**0.3 (0.1-0.7)**	**0.008**
Tertiary	**0.1 (0.0-0.2)**	**<0.001**	**0.2 (0.1-0.6)**	**0.004**
Mother's Employment Status				
Unemployed	Ref			
Employed	**0.5 (0.4-0.8)**	**0.003**	**0.4 (0.2-0.8)**	**0.008**
Father's Employment Status				
Unemployed	Ref			
Employed	**0.4 (0.2-0.6)**	**<0.001**	0.9 (0.5-1.7)	0.742
Access to healthcare services				
Poor	Ref		Ref	
Good	**0.2 (0.1-0.3)**	**<0.001**	**0.3 (0.1-0.5)**	**<0.001**
Safe and secure Environment				
Unsafe and Insecure	Ref		Ref	

Safe and Secure	**0.6 (0.4-0.9)**	**0.008**	0.7 (0.4-1.3)	0.244
Food intake (meals per day)				
Once	Ref		Ref	
Twice	**0.5 (0.3-0.8)**	**0.004**	0.8 (0.4-1.6)	0.510
Thrice	**0.2 (0.1-0.4)**	**<0.001**	**0.3 (0.1-0.8)**	**0.010**
Access to clean water				
No	Ref		Ref	
Yes	**0.3 (0.1-0.4)**	**<0.001**	**0.5 (0.2-0.9)**	**0.038**
Access to toilet facilities				
No	Ref		Ref	
Yes	**0.4 (0.3-0.7)**	**<0.001**	**0.4 (0.2-0.8)**	**0.005**
Access to Electricity				
No	Ref		Ref	
Yes	**0.2 (0.1-0.3)**	**<0.001**	**0.3 (0.1-0.6)**	**<0.001**

Source: Field work 2024

The results show that children between the ages of 13 to 15 and particularly those between the ages of 16 and 18, have higher likelihood of migrating than their younger counterparts between the ages of 10 and 13. This is attributable to the strong correlation between migration and age. This pattern indicates a developmental threshold at which children begin to take on more agency in making decisions about their livelihood. This finding is consistent with the what is established in the studies of Punch (2007) and Hashim (2005) who also discovered that older children in sub-Saharan Africa frequently travel in search of freedom, money or to meet their families' expectations. According to the NCMT viewpoint, (Hejduková & Kureková, 2020; Borjas, 1989, 1990), this age gap can be explained as a logical response to economic opportunity, where older children are more physically capable and employable, which raises the anticipated returns of migration.

Consistent with the assumption that employment prevents migration, (Cebotari, 2020, Manyerere, 2020), the results indicate that children who were employed had a reduced probability of migrating. This clearly shows that employment opportunities in rural areas can prevent rural urban migration. Similarly, the results from the data show that children in urban areas were much less likely to migrate than those in rural areas. This spatial disparity reflects

the variations in the availability of resources and opportunities between rural and urban communities, reinforcing the NCMT's propositions that migration serves as a response to geographic disparities in development (Ewers, 2007). The results further revealed that food consumption had a substantial impact on migration decisions. The study discovered that children who ate three times daily had lower migration rate, highlighting the importance of household food security in migration decisions. This finding resonates with Baffoe et al. (2021) that in contexts of extreme deprivation, child migration may occur as a coping strategy to reduce the burden on the family or to allow the child to contribute to family sustenance.

In contrast to the qualitative results, findings from the first hypothesis revealed that the variable occupation of parents is a predictor of child migration. This hypothesis investigates whether there is a statistically significant relationship between key driving factors and the actual occurrence of child migration. Specifically, it seeks to determine if the occupation of parents, family issues, educational factors and the influence of community and environmental factors identified as the four principal drivers in this context are meaningfully associated with the likelihood of the children migrating. To assess this relationship, a binary logistic regression analysis was employed. This statistical technique is appropriate for evaluating the influence of multiple independent variables on a binary dependent outcome in this case, whether or not child migration occurs. The subsequent tables present the results of the analysis.

Table 16 Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	390.180	4	.000
Block	390.180	4	.000
Model	390.180	4	.000

Source: Field work (2024)

The table 16 shows whether the model with the predictors included is statistically significant. The model is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) indicating that the predictors collectively improve the model's ability to explain child migration compared to a model with no predictors.

Table 17: Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	279.882	0.502	0.719

Source: Field work 2024

The model summary shows the goodness of fit using the -2 Log Likelihood and the R^2 values, indicating the variance explained by the predictors. With a Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.719, the model explains approximately 71.9% of the variance in child migration suggesting a strong model fit.

Table 18: Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	Df	Sig.
1	0.012	2	.994

Source: Field work, (2024)

The Hosmer and Lemeshow test evaluate how well the model fits the data. The high p-value ($p = 0.994$) indicates good model fit as there is no significant difference between observed and predicted values.

Table 19: Classification Table

Observed	Predicted		Percentage Correct
	Migrant Status = Yes	Migrant Status = No	
Migrant Status = Yes	379	45	89.4
Migrant Status = No	31	105	77.2
Overall Percentage			86.0

Source: Field work (2024)

The classification table shows the accuracy of the model in predicting the categories of the dependent variable (Migrant Status: Yes/No). The model correctly predicts 89.4% of migration cases and 77.2% of non-migration cases with an overall accuracy of 86.0% showing strong predictive power.

Table 20 Variables in the Equation

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for Exp(B)
Family Issue as Driver (1)	-22.197	3700.144	0.000	1	.995	0.000	0.000 – NA
Occupation of Parents (1)	-2.230	1.525	2.138	1	.144	0.107	0.007 1.630
Community and Environmental Factors (1)	21.589	3700.144	0.000	1	.995	2,376,197,742.403	NA – NA
Educational Factors (1)	-2.145	0.373	33.070	1	.000	0.117	0.057 – 0.242
Constant	1.718	0.237	52.529	1	.000	5.571	3.502 – 8.861

Source: Field work 2024

Table 20 provides the coefficients, standard errors, Wald statistics, p-values, and odds ratios (Exp(B) for each predictor variable. Educational factors are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), with an Exp(B) of 0.117 indicating that educational factors reduce the odds of child migration by approximately 88.3%. Other variables (family issues, occupation of parents, and community/environmental factors) are not statistically significant and do not have a meaningful impact on child migration in this model.

The logistic regression analysis tested the relationship between various drivers of child migration (family issues, occupation of parents, community and environmental factors, and educational factors) and the occurrence of child migration. The findings are as follows: Educational factors emerged as statistically significant ($p = 0.000$), with an odds ratio (Exp(B))

of 0.117. Educational factors are the only driver with a significant effect on child migration. The negative B coefficient suggests that improved educational opportunities or the emphasis on education reduces the likelihood of child migration. Specifically, with an odds ratio of 0.117, the odds of migration decrease by approximately 88.3% when educational factors are considered. This supports the alternative hypothesis (H1) that there is a significant relationship between educational factors and the occurrence of child migration.

Family issues proved not statistically significant (p = 0.995), with an odds ratio (Exp(B)) of 0.000. Family issues do not significantly affect the likelihood of child migration as indicated by the very high p-value and an odds ratio close to zero. This means family issues do not play a meaningful role in the decision to migrate supporting the null hypothesis (H0) for this variable. Regarding the occupation of parents, the results were not statistically significant (p = 0.144) with an odds ratio (Exp(B)) of 0.107. Thus, the occupation of parents does not significantly impact child migration (p > 0.05) as reflected in the non-significant result. This also supports the null hypothesis (H0) that there is no meaningful relationship between parents' occupation and child migration. Community and environmental factors showed no statistical significance (p = 0.995), with an odds ratio (Exp(B)) of 2,376,197,742.403. Although this variable has a very high odds ratio, it is not statistically significant (p > 0.05), likely due to instability in estimation. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H0) for this driver, as it does not show a significant relationship with child migration.

In a nutshell, the analysis leads us to reject the null hypothesis (H0) for educational factors, which have a significant negative relationship with child migration. This suggests that increased access to or emphasis on education reduces the likelihood of migration among children. However, we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H0) for family issues, occupation of parents, and community and environmental factors. These variables do not show significant relationships with the occurrence of child migration in this model. The results partially support

the alternative hypothesis (H1) as only educational factors significantly affect the occurrence of child migration. This finding implies that addressing educational needs could be an effective strategy to reduce child migration, while other factors (family issues, parental occupation, community, and environmental factors) do not show a significant impact on migration decisions in this study.

The logistic regression results reveal that among the four tested predictors: educational factors, family issues, occupation of parents and community/environmental conditions only educational factors significantly influence child migration. This empirical finding aligns with findings of multiple studies highlighting the centrality of education in shaping child migration decisions. For instance, Kyereko and Faas (2024) found that limited access to post-primary education in rural areas drives educational migration among children in Ghana. Their study further discovered that children often relocate to urban or peri-urban areas with better educational infrastructure, treating migration as an investment in human capital. Similarly, Salahu-Deen and Towoju (2024) emphasized the role of educational aspiration in youth mobility, noting that children from marginalized communities often migrate to have access to schooling that is unavailable in their home areas. The finding that family issues, parental occupation and environmental/community factors were not statistically significant is consistent with the findings of Dako-Gyeke et al. (2020) who also established that even though abuse and neglect are frequent in migration narratives, they do not always emerge as the primary, or measurable predictors when combined with other structural drivers such as access to education.

5.2 The Role of Social Networks in Migration Decisions

Migration decisions are rarely made in isolation, but rather, they emerge from complex interactions within established social networks predominantly family and peer relationships. This section examines how these social connections shape and facilitates child migration patterns with focus on the distinct roles played by family networks and peer influences.

5.2.1 Family Influence in Migration Initiation

The empirical evidence from child migrants revealed that migration is frequently orchestrated within the family network, with parents or guardians making arrangements that facilitate their movement (de Sherbinin et al., 2022). Some respondents in Keta and Kpando-Torkor confirmed that

"My father gave my aunt's number to the driver so that upon arrival, the driver can locate my aunt. So, I will say my father was the main architect behind our coming here (Child Migrant, Keta).

This account demonstrate that migration is rarely an individual decision, but it is rather embedded in pre-existing social structures where families act as facilitators of movement.

Previous studies by Dako-Gyeke et al. (2020), Navarro-Pérez et al. (2021) affirm that family networks play a central role in structuring child migration in Ghana. These studies have all shown that young migrants had prior arrangements made by family members who provide contact numbers and accommodation demonstrating that migration is a socially organized process not just an individual decision to escape from hardship. The Social Network Theory as a theoretical framework for this study sheds light on the complex interaction between family and migration patterns highlighting how migration pathways are sustained and facilitated through pre-existing interpersonal connections (Swanson & Torres, 2016). The results from Kpando-Torkor for example supports this assertion as it was discovered that networks reduce the social and economic costs of relocation for vulnerable children as parents are found to arrange for their children migratory process. However, the role of family influence is not always positive. Exert testimonies in this study suggest that in some cases, child migration is not a reflection of opportunity but rather a consequence of family neglect and socio-economic hardship. According to an educator at Kpando-Torkor,

"Most of the parents are irresponsible, so they just come and rent for them and go back. Once in a while, before they come back".

This quote is suggestive that migration operates along a continuum for some children. It is a strategic move for better economic or educational prospects while for others, it represents a form of forced displacement due to parental abandonment or incapacity to provide care. This finding aligns with Cebotari and Dito (2021) who argued that family disintegration can serve as both a cause and a consequence of child migration perpetuating cycles of vulnerability. While families often facilitate migration as a strategic move for children's improvement, this study reveals that in some instances, family involvement stems from neglect, irresponsibility, or an inability to provide adequate care. These conditions reflect deeper patterns of family disintegration and align with emerging literature that complicates the idea of migration as solely an opportunity-based decision (Amoah, 2020; Cebotari and Dito, 2021). This goes further to buttress the points of Bhati & Jasti (2024) that children from broken homes are more vulnerable to risky forms of mobility often migrating in the absence of meaningful support structures.

5.2.2 Peer influence and social connectivity in migration

While family networks often dictate the initial decision to migrate, peer networks significantly influence how migration unfolds in practice (Boivin Decary- Hetu, 2022; Maviza, 2020). From the viewpoint of SNT (Massey & Taylor, 2004), this study finds that peer connections reinforce migration as a socially acceptable and normalized strategy for economic survival. A response from one of the respondents highlight how peer networks mobilize potential migrants*:*

"Their friends who come here connect them. So, people from this place go to their places and meet with opinion leaders who mobilize them for the work and they are paid" (A community leader, Dzemeni).

This result is significant as it supports Dako-Gyeke et al.'s (2020) view that peer pressure and social networks are significant enablers of adolescent migration. According to the tenets of social influence in SNT (Bhabha, 2019), while families may initiate migration, peers often shape how it unfolds by providing knowledge on the destination and emotional reassurance. Studies by Maâ et al. (2023) on "peer-to-peer" intermediation in West Africa found that peer migrants often act as intermediaries mobilizing others through informal recruitment or information-sharing. While their work focuses on irregular migration systems, it demonstrates how peer networks reinforce migration pathways and shape decision making even in highly regulated contexts. Similarly, Popyk (2021) and Cronin et al. (2024) discovered that peers provide cultural guidance and also serve as social buffers in new environments supporting the position of this research that networks from friends affect integration of migrants into destination areas.

5.2.3 Relationship between social networks and child migration outcomes

This section presents an empirical analysis of the relationship between social networks and child migration outcomes using logistic regression modelling. The objective of this analysis is to interrogate whether family connections, community ties, peer influence and social support significantly influence the likelihood of child migration. The study is guided by the alternative hypothesis (H1) that there is a significant relationship between social networks and child migration outcomes. Given the critical role of social structures in shaping migration decisions, this analysis seeks to determine whether social networks function as facilitators or constraints in the migration process. Using the binary logistic regression model, the study examines the extent to which social network factors serve as predictors of migration behaviour among children. The data set consists of 560 observations, with migration status as the dependent variable (Yes = 1, No = 0). The independent variables include family connections, which capture the role of familial relationships in shaping migration decisions community ties, which

examine the impact of the broader social networks on child migration outcomes, peer influence, which assesses the extent to which socialization with peers influences migration decisions; community support, which evaluates the perceived level of material and social support available within host communities and informational guidance, which measures the role of migration-related advice and preparatory information received from family and friends. The model fit was assessed using classification accuracy, Wald statistics and goodness-of-fit tests, including the Omnibus Tests, Cox & Snell R^2 and Nagelkerke R^2 to determine the predictive power of social networks in child migration.

Prior to introducing the independent variables, a baseline binary logistic regression model (Block one) was estimated, including only the constant term. This model correctly classified 75.7 percent of the cases, indicating that in the absence of predictors, migration status already deviates significantly from random probability. The classification results for the baseline model are presented in Table 21

Table 21 Classification Table for Baseline Model (Block One)

Yes (Migrants)	424	0	100.0%
No (non-migrants)	136	0	0.0%
Overall Accuracy	—	—	**75.7%**

Source: Field Data (2024)

The Wald statistic for the constant term (-0.916, $p < 0.001$) confirmed that migration status differed significantly from random chance providing a strong basis for further modelling.

The inclusion of social network variables in Block 1 provided additional explanatory power with family connections emerging as a significant predictor of child migration. The binary logistic regression coefficients, standard errors, Wald statistics, significance levels and odds ratios for each predictor are presented in Table 22

Table 22 Logistic Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.(p-value)	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)	95%CI for Exp(B)
Family Connections	0.742	0.216	11.748	0.001	2.099	1.371 – 3.213
Community Ties	0.237	0.207	1.308	0.253	1.268	0.842 – 1.911
Peer Influence	0.065	0.191	0.117	0.732	1.068	0.735 – 1.551
Community Support	0.047	0.218	0.046	0.830	0.954	0.622 – 1.464
Informational Guidance	0.221	0.224	0.966	0.326	0.802	0.518 – 1.241
Constant	1.916	0.565	11.505	0.001	0.147	0.049 – 0.439

Source: Field Data (2024)

The Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients indicate that the model significantly improves upon the baseline model with a chi-square value of 13.678, degrees of freedom of 5, and a p-value of 0.018. This is presented in Table 23.

Table 23: Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

Test	Chi-square (χ^2)	df	Sig. (p-value)
Omnibus Test	13.678	5	0.018

Source: Field Data (2024)

The pseudo-R-squared values, including Cox & Snell R^2 of 0.024 and Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.035, suggest modest explanatory power, indicating that additional factors beyond social networks contribute to migration outcomes.

The regression analysis revealed that family connections were statistically significant predictor of child migration, with a p-value of 0.001 and an odds ratio of 2.099. This finding suggests that children with strong family networks in migration destinations are twice as likely to migrate as those without such connections. In contrast, community ties, peer influence, community support and informational guidance were not statistically significant predictors of

child migration. The p-value for community ties was 0.253, suggesting that broader community networks do not directly impact migration decisions. Peer influence was similarly non-significant, with a p-value of 0.732, suggesting that socialization within peer groups does not strongly determine child migration choices. Community support, with a p-value of 0.830, contradicted assumptions that perceived community support influences migration likelihood. Informational guidance, while intuitively relevant, had a p-value of 0.326, indicating that while guidance may be available, it does not necessarily translate into migration decisions.

The findings provide partial support for the hypothesis that social networks influence child migration outcomes, as family connections emerged as the only statistically significant predictor. In the light of the SNT, the results suggest that family networks play a decisive role in shaping child migration outcomes while other social network variables such as community ties, peer influence, community support, and informational guidance do not exhibit statistically significant effects. These findings offer a nuanced support to the idea that while social networks broadly facilitate migration, not all components of social connectivity equally influence the decision to migrate (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020). Additionally, Navarro-Pérez et al. (2021) highlight that adolescent migration is often not initiated autonomously, but coordinated by families with the help of relatives or adult contacts in the receiving community. Their comparative study underscores the fact that the quality and strength of family networks directly shape children's access to migration opportunities and their ability to settle in new environments. On the other hand, the non-significance of peer influence and informational guidance echoes the findings of Maâ et al. (2023) that while peer-to-peer intermediation is useful for logistical support, it is rarely the determining factor in migration initiation especially for children.

5.3 Summary

This chapter examined the drivers of child migration in the coastal and river communities of the Volta Region. The study revealed that child migration is primarily driven by economic hardship, educational ambitions, environmental disasters, bereavement and abusive. On economic hardship the study discovered that child migration is a household survival strategy, especially when there is food insecurity, poverty or parental illness or neglect. In addition to economic sorrow, inadequate access to post-primary educational facilities in rural areas significantly influenced the decision of children to migrate.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF CHILD MIGRATION

6.0 Introduction

Child migration in the Volta Region presents a complex dynamic, impacting the socio-economic well-being of migrant children, their families, and the receiving communities. This expanded analysis provides deeper insights into these effects with a focus on lived experiences and perspectives from migrants, experts, and community members. Quotes are explicitly labelled to highlight their source. The quantitative analysis provides both descriptive and inferential statistics highlighting the disparities between migrant and non-migrant children in areas such as nutrition, living arrangements and socio-economic well-being. The findings aim to foster a deeper understanding of the socio-economic dynamics of child migration, emphasizing the need for interventions to mitigate challenges and promote equitable development for all stakeholders.

6.1 The effects of child migration on migrant children

Child migration significantly influences the socio-economic outcomes of migrant children, offering both opportunities and challenges. While migration may provide access to better resources and prospects, it also introduces the profound disruptions particularly in education and labour participation.

6.1.1 Access to Education

A key theme on the socio-economic dimensions of child migration from the qualitative data was education. Based on the principle of spatial inequalities in the NCMT (Mankiw, 2021), this study highlights the geographical limitations of educational access in the study area. While children may gain access to Junior High Schools through migration, Senior High Schools/ Tertiary Education remain largely out of reach in these rural communities especially in the river communities. A migrant child from Kpando-Torkor illustrated noted that:

"*In my hometown, there was no Junior High School. Here, I can go to school and learn like other children but when I complete, I have to go to different town for SHS"*.

This quote reflects a clear infrastructural gap since there was a lack of JHS in the participants' hometown. These insights support the argument of Zhang et al. (2022) that education-driven migration largely serve the immediate needs rather than facilitating long-term academic progression. Contrary to previous research that portrays migration as a gateway to higher education (Jacobs, 2022; Kwilinski et al., 2024; and Mbah, 2017), this study argues that migration to rural communities only addresses short term educational gaps, but does not necessarily create pathways for tertiary education or economic mobility. The study revealed a shift in priorities for many migrant children where work becomes a necessity and education is relegated to a secondary role. The contrast between the child's enthusiasm for school before migration and the reality of economic demands at their destinations underscores the disruption to their learning journey. The quote below from an opinion leader buttresses this point:

"Many of these children are bright and eager to learn but their circumstances make it nearly impossible for them to keep up. Education is not prioritized in their new environment and that's a tragedy. Some of them miss classes on market days because they have to sell at the market to make money to support themselves" (61year old opinion leader, Keta).

This quote describes the cumulative effects of irregular school attendance. Despite the Government's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy which aims at providing free and high-quality education to all children (Salifu et al., 2018), the study reveals that many migrant children drop out of school due to economic survival pressures. Some children abandon education altogether to avoid the social and mental stress of retaking their exams after frequent absenteeism. A 17-year-old migrant child from Aflao illustrated this assertion with the quote below:

"I wanted to continue school but my boss said I would lose my job if I took too many days off. Now, I just work every day because I don't want to go back to my village empty-handed." (17-year-old, Aflao).

This statement above highlights the limited agency migrant children have in shaping their educational futures as their economic realities dictate their choices. An older sibling of a migrant child recounted the emotional consequences of dropping out when she said:

"*I see my brother working hard and it makes me sad. He was so good at maths but now he doesn't even talk about school. It's like he's given up on his dreams"* (25-year-old woman, Dzemeni).

This testimony emphasizes the long-term emotional and psychological impacts of disrupted education affecting not just individual children, but also, their families. The study reveals that although education is often cited as a reason for child migration, the reality is far more complex. Based on the principle of imperfect local markets (including education) as rooted in the NCMT (Oso et al., 2022), the study discovered that many children migrate to access education, but structural barriers including poverty and work responsibilities undermine the long-term educational benefits of migration. This is consistent with previous studies such as Salahu-Deen and Towoju (2024) which identified education as a key factor in youth migration from Sub-Saharan Africa. This study therefore, argues that migration often addresses immediate gaps in basic education, but does not necessarily lead to upward mobility or long-term academic achievement.

6.1.2 Living Conditions and Health

In addressing the issue of living condition and health as socio- economic condition of migrant children, key themes that emerged include inadequate housing and poor sanitation, food security, limited health services, safety and security as well as teenage pregnancy. Despite the ongoing governmental efforts to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which

seeks to ensure safe, affordable and adequate housing for all by 2030, the study reveals that migrant children continue to live in highly precarious conditions. Economic hardships have forced many into makeshift housing constructed from mud, wood, or corrugated iron sheets while others resort to sleeping in open spaces such as seashores and marketplaces making them particularly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions like storms and flooding especially in coastal areas such as Keta and Aflao.

As enshrined in the tenets of SNT (Mishra et al., 2020; and Ong, 1999), the study identifies overcrowding as one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges affecting migrant children. Households in communities such as Aflao and Dzemeni frequently accommodate multiple families and friends within single rooms. The lack of privacy in these environments poses multiple risks including exposure to inappropriate adult behaviours such as sexual activities, which affect children's psychological well-being negatively. This supports Agbodza's (2016) view that the failure of successive governments to provide adequate sanitation facilities particularly in fishing communities where residents rely on the Volta Lake leads to social stigmatization among migrant children. The dire nature of these living conditions is confirmed by a JHS 2 pupil in Keta who narrated that:

"We sleep on the floor because there are no beds. There's no light, so we use candles at night. The room smells because we can't open the windows and when it rains, the water leaks through the roof."

This insight underscores the unmet expectations of migration where children seeking better opportunities find themselves in equally if not more challenging environments. Instead of an improved quality of life, many migrant children are forced into living conditions that expose them to greater health risks, social marginalization and emotional distress. In addition to poor housing conditions, the study reveals significant barriers to healthcare access for migrant children. Even though many of the participants possess National Health Insurance Scheme

(NHIS) cards, the key challenge remains the distance to healthcare facilities, poor infrastructure and unreliable transportation which make timely medical attention difficult to obtain. A community health nurse described the implications of this challenge:

> *"NHIS is not an issue because almost all of them have it but the main problem is the distance from their place to where the facility is located. As a result, they depend on herbal medicine. In terms of delivery, we get more home deliveries than hospital or clinic births because some of them use canoes, and before they reach the facility, they have already delivered"* (Community Health Nurse, Dzemeni).

This response from the Community Health Nurse (CHN) highlights a critical and often overlooked barrier to healthcare access in rural communities thus, geographical inaccessibility rather than the lack of health insurance coverage. While the availability of the NHIS is a major achievement in the health sector, this quotation underscores that proximity to healthcare centres remains a significant limitation especially for vulnerable population children. This is consistent with the findings of the GSS (2021) which showed that despite rising NHIS registration, utilization of health services remains unequal, especially in the rural areas.

The qualitative result further show that some participants depend on traditional remedies and home births which pose health challenges particularly for pregnant adolescent girls who lack access to skilled prenatal and postnatal care. A home visit report from a community health nurse illustrated the dire consequences of inadequate healthcare access in the narrative below:

> *"I visited a 17-year-old pregnant girl to advise her on the need to attend antenatal care regularly and check if she had done the scan she was instructed to do. Upon checking her records, I realized her blood level was low. I counselled her on proper nutrition to improve her blood levels and ensured she took her prescribed medication"* (Community Health Nurse, Dzemeni).

The narrative above by the CHN highlights critical aspects of maternal and adolescent health, particularly in resource-limited settings. It clearly shows the preventive approach of early interventions in reducing long-term complications for both mother and child. This finding aligns with the works of earlier scholars like Young et al. (2023) who indicated that limited access to prenatal care, poor nutrition and reliance on unskilled birth attendants increase the risk of complications

Figure 9: A Nurse with a pregnant migrant child

Source: Field Work (2024)

These findings are consistent with Kwankye et al. (2021) who found that overcrowding, lack of sanitation and exposure to exploitation are prevalent in child migrant settings across Africa. The study further indicates that migrant children particularly those in the informal settlements lack access to clean water, toilets and safe sleeping arrangements. These challenges contribute to their psychosocial vulnerability, especially when the shelter arrangements lack privacy and security. Makanju and Khan (2020) found that environmental and infrastructural deficits

including the absence of healthcare infrastructure and sanitation directly deteriorates the quality of life of migrants regardless of their age.

The quantitative data reinforces the qualitative findings by providing measurable evidence of housing disparities and highlighting key themes such as housing inadequacy, overcrowding and socio- economic vulnerability. This is evident from the graph

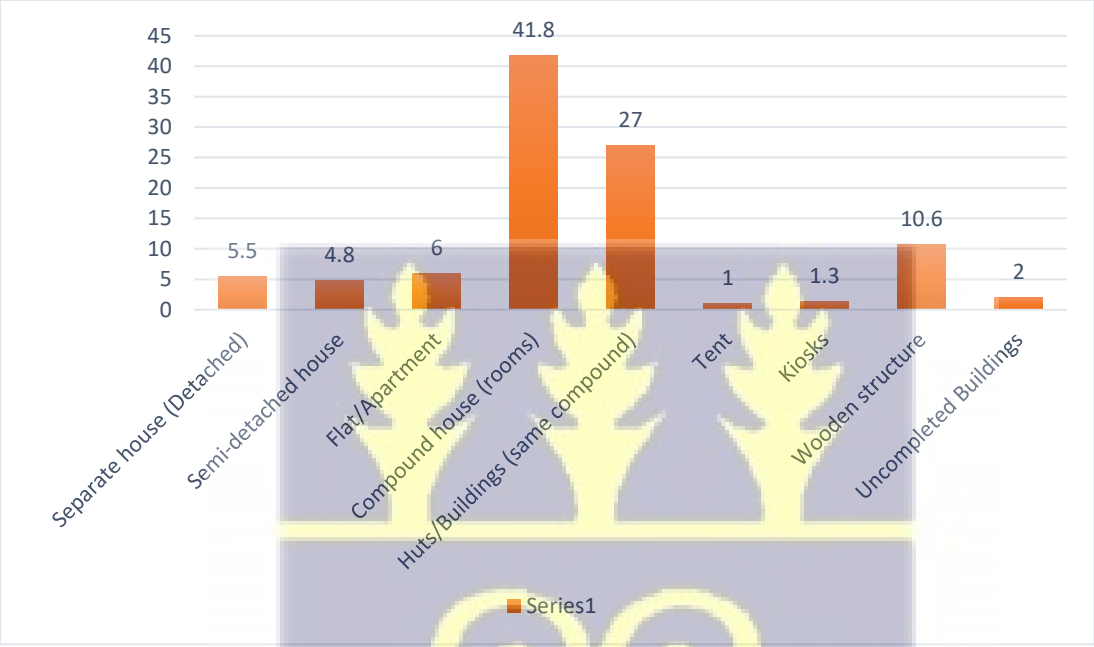

Figure 10: Type of Housing

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

The graph provides a breakdown of the types of housing accessible expressed as percentages of the total population surveyed. The most common type of housing is the compound house (rooms) where 41.8% of respondents reside. This suggests a strong prevalence of communal or shared living arrangements. Similarly, huts/buildings within the same compound account for 27.0% of housing further highlighting the popularity of clustered or traditional housing structures. Wooden structures make up 10.6% of the housing indicating a significant reliance on inexpensive or temporary construction materials. Modern housing options such as flats/apartments are relatively uncommon with only 6.0% of the population living in such

arrangements. Separate houses (detached) and semi-detached houses are even less prevalent at 5.5% and 4.8%, respectively. This may reflect limited access to standalone housing options or a preference for shared spaces. A smaller proportion of the population lives in transient or less permanent housing. Tents and kiosks account for 1.0% and 1.3% of the housing types respectively while uncompleted buildings house 2.0% of respondents. These figures could indicate the presence of socio-economic challenges among certain segments of the population. Overall, as established by the tenets of the SNT, the data reveal that the majority of migrants reside in shared or communal housing such as compound houses or huts/buildings within the same compound. The lower percentages for modern housing and temporary structures reflect varying levels of access to housing resources and economic conditions across the surveyed group. Simple descriptive statistics agree with the qualitative results. The predominance of shared and low-quality housing types such as compound houses, huts, wooden structures and kiosks illustrates housing challenges faced by many in the study areas resonate with the findings of Kwankye et al. (2021), who reported that communal housing and overcrowded arrangements are a defining feature of child migrant experiences in urban and peri-urban areas There is a significant difference between the living condition of children who migrated and those who did not.

The third hypothesis aims to interrogate whether there is a statistically significant difference in the living conditions of children who have migrated compared to those who have not. This comparison is central to understanding the socio-economic consequences of child migration and whether the experience of migration correlates with improved or worsened living standards for children. Given that the assumption of normality in the dataset was violated, the Mann-Whitney U test a non-parametric alternative to the independent samples t-test was employed to evaluate this hypothesis. The result is presented below.

Table 24 Mann-Whitney U Test Comparison of Living Conditions of Migrant and Non-Migrant Children

Test	Group	N	Median	Mean Rank	U	Z	Sig.
Living	Migrants	424	3.50	274.33	29534.0	1.431	0.154
Condition	Non-Migrants	136	3.50	295.91			

Source: Field Work (2024)

Table 24 presents the results of the Mann-Whitney U test, which was used to address the questions as to whether there is a statistically significant difference in the living conditions of children who have migrated and those who have not. The analysis included 424 migrant children and 136 non-migrant children. Both groups reported an identical median living condition score of 3.50, suggesting no apparent difference in central tendency. The mean rank for migrant children was 274.33, while non-migrant children had a slightly higher mean rank of 295.91, indicating a marginal trend toward better living conditions among non-migrants. However, the Mann-Whitney U statistic was 29,534.0, with a Z-value of 1.431 and an associated p-value of 0.154. Since this p-value exceeds the conventional alpha level of 0.05, the result is not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, indicating that there is no significant difference in the reported living conditions between children who migrated and those who did not. This suggests that migration, in this context, does not seem to substantially alter the children's living conditions.

The results support Amoah (2020) who also established that although migrant children do not interpret their experiences as parental neglect, they still report low levels of happiness and dissatisfaction with their living conditions. Amoah's study reinforces the idea that child migration does not automatically lead to improved well-being. Similar studies by Kwankye et al. (2021) and Makanju and Khan (2020) indicate that the benefits of migration are often offset

by the poor conditions awaiting migrants in destination communities, hence migration aspirations and the actual living environments frequently results in intergenerational cycles of poverty.

6.1.3 Economic Vulnerability

Migrant children frequently engage in low-wage labour intensive jobs to survive (Agbodza, 2016; and Bwambale et al., 2021). These include farming, fishing, domestic service, or working as porters in the market, which can provide immediate income, but mostly inadequate to cover their necessities and limit their long-term opportunities. Contrary to the labour laws of Ghana (Act 651, 2003), the jobs that migrant children engage in are typically characterized by exploitative working conditions, long hours and minimal or no legal protections. The study unravels the incidence of wage discrimination based on age and gender which can be attributed to the informal labour markets that migrant child found themselves.

A participant shared;

> "*I work on a farm planting crop. It's hard work, but they say I'm too young to earn the same as the adults. I don't think it's fair but I can't argue"* (Migrant child, Dzemeni).

This highlights the discrimination and power imbalances migrant children face in the workplace. This is in line with the NCMT (Hansen et al., 2010) and Wasche et al., 2017) as it underscores the nature of labour exploitation faced by migrant children. The migrant families, particularly, those without documentation or formal residency status, are often excluded from government welfare programs such as subsidies, healthcare or social security (Bryant et al., 2021; Tonah, 2007). This lack of safety net increases their economic vulnerability as noted by a respondent in the narrative below:

"Child labour laws exist, but enforcement is weak especially in informal sectors. Migrant children are often invisible in these systems making them easy targets for exploitation" (38-year-old man at Aflao Border).

Figure 11: A migrant child selling traditional artifact during school hours

Source: Field work (2024)

The findings reveal a disturbing reality where migrant children are routinely absorbed into the informal economy where they perform low wage but physically demanding jobs under exploitative conditions. While such works offer immediate income, they generally lack legal protections and often violates Ghana's Labour Act (Act 651, 2003). This aligns with studies such as Anurioha (2024), Busquet et al. (2021) and Odijie (2020) who also established that child labour persists due to poverty, social norms that normalize children's economic roles and ineffective enforcement of the labour laws.

These findings are consistent with those of Anurioha (2024) and Amoah (2020) that indicated that economic precarity is a primary outcome of migration where children are often expected to earn their own upkeep through informal or exploitative work. The study links this vulnerability to the lack of formal guardianship and exclusion from social protection programs. Based on the high correlation between migration and child employment, this study confirms that migration decisions are tied to economic survival.

6.1.4 Safety and security

As captured on the conceptual framework of this study, observations from the field show that migrant children are frequently confronted with the physical strain of carrying heavy loads, risk of accidents in crowded spaces and exposure to different forms of pollutants. As enshrined in the NCMT (De Haas et al., 2019), the economic hubs are often poorly regulated due to high activity levels and corruption coupled with porous border at Aflao and the lack of police station at Dzemeni and Kpando-Torkor make monitoring and addressing of child exploitation in these fast-paced environments very difficult. A participant revealed that:

"A man in the neighbourhood keeps bothering me when I go to fetch water. I try to avoid him, but it's scary because I don't know what he may do" (A participant, Kpando- Trkor).

This reflects the gendered risks that migrant girls in particular face in unsafe environments. It also highlights the vulnerability of migrant children to theft and physical harm.

A caregiver also indicated:

"*We do our best to protect them but we can't be with them all the time. They are exposed to so many dangers and it's heart-breaking" (A 47-year-old woman, Dzemeni).*

This statement underscores the limitations of host families in ensuring the safety of migrant children. The study further revealed that the porous border and the transient status of Aflao in particular and the limited presence of law enforcement and insufficient implementation of child protection laws permit exploitative practices to flourish. The migrant children are often seen as

easy targets because they lack support systems. Their safety is a major concern that needs more attention. In the light of the SNT (Munshi, 2020; and De Haas et al., 2019), the findings in this research reveal that migrant children face substantial safety and security risks stemming from unsafe living environments, weak institutional oversight and gender-based vulnerabilities. The responses from participants point to threats such as theft, harassment and exposure to hazardous work environments particularly in economic hubs like Aflao and Dzemeni where there is limited law enforcement or it is entirely absent. This is echoed in previous studies such as Fargues et al. (2020) that migrant children traveling within West and Central Africa face consistent risks due to poor infrastructure and the lack of state protection. Studies by Khutso et al. (2021) conducted in Southern Africa show that young female migrants are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment due to the lack of housing privacy.

6.1.5 Access to water

Even though access to portable water is a fundamental human right (Grönwall & Danert, 2020), lived experiences of migrant children in the study area reveal significant challenges in obtaining this basic resource. The Volta Lake is a major source of water for many migrant households in the riverine communities like Dzemeni and Kpando-Torkor. Although this water supply is readily available, pollution and environmental degradation frequently reduce its quality. A child participant's response at Dzemeni throws more light on this assertion;

"*We fetch water from the lake every morning, but sometimes, it looks dirty because it is always polluted by animals and human activities. My mother boils it, but it doesn't always taste good"* (A 17-year-old girl, Dzemeni).

This narration heightens the use of untreated water which can result in waterborne diseases like cholera and diarrhoea especially in young children. Access to potable water in the coastal communities of this study is hindered by saline intrusion and coastal erosion which affect groundwater quality. A participant from Keta explained:

"We don't have taps at home. I walk a long distance to fetch water from a well but sometimes it's salty, and we can't use it to wash" (A child migrant, Keta).

This observation threatens the achievement of the SDG goal 6 target 6.1 which seeks to provide universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030 (United Nations, 2023). The quantitative findings also validate the qualitative results as seen below.

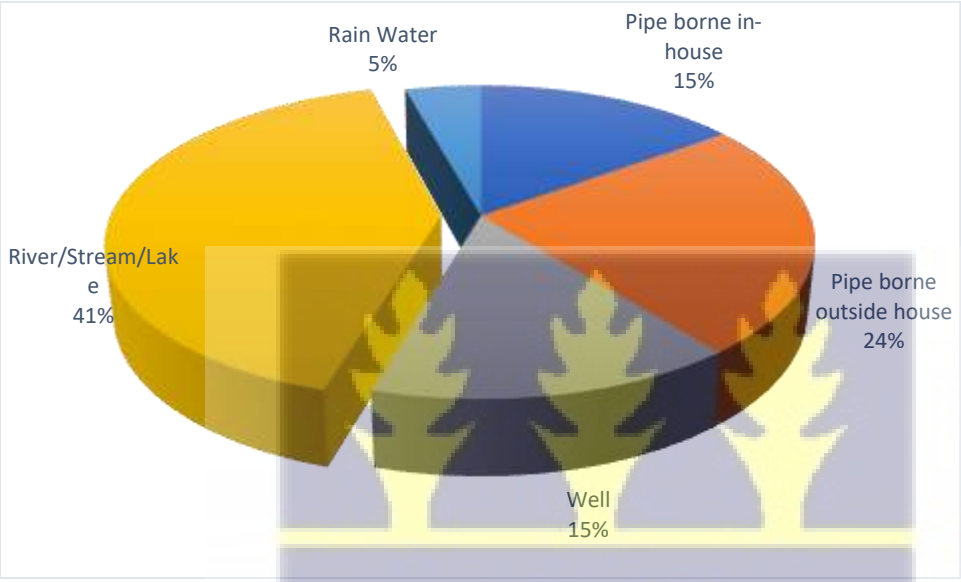

Figure 12: Sources of drinking water for child migrant

Source: Field data (2024)

The most common source of drinking water for households in the receiving communities is river/stream or lake used by 41%. This reliance on natural water sources suggests limited access to more reliable and safer water supplies for a significant portion of the population. The next most common source of water is pipe-borne water outside the house utilized by 24% of respondents. This indicates that while some child migrants have access to piped water, it is not available within their homes requiring additional effort to obtain.

Pipe-borne water in-houses is accessible to 15.0% of the population, representing a smaller group with a more convenient and likely a safer source of drinking water. Similarly, wells are used by 15%, which may vary in quality and convenience depending on the specific context.

Finally, rainwater serves as the primary source of 5% for respondents, reflecting a less common but still notable reliance on seasonal or collected water sources. Overall, the data suggest that a majority of child migrants (41%) depend on natural water bodies for drinking, potentially raising concerns about water quality and health. The access to piped water, whether in-house or outside, is available to a smaller proportion (39% combined) indicating a mix of accessibility challenges and infrastructural limitations.

The findings from this study reveal that migrant children in communities like Dzemeni and Kpando-Torkor, face significant barriers to accessing safe and clean water. Many rely on untreated natural sources such as the Volta Lake, polluted by human and animal activities, while others in coastal communities contend with saline-intruded wells and distant water points. These challenges do not only threaten their health, but also reflect broader infrastructural inequalities and marginalization. This reality hinders the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6.1, which aims to ensure a universal access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030 (UNHCR, 2019). The persistent reliance on contaminated or distant water sources demonstrates that this global goal remains far from materialization for vulnerable groups such as migrant children. Research by Blessed-Sayah and Griffiths (2024) supports this finding that children in migrant or displaced households have limited access to piped water and sanitation facilities. The consequence is a high prevalence of waterborne illnesses like cholera and diarrhoea which disproportionately affect children in informal or underdeveloped settlements (Gwija, 2021 and Krutova et al., 2021). Likewise, Barinov and Sugakov (2024) argue that water scarcity in African communities is not solely due to natural shortages, but often stems from poor infrastructure and weak institutional coordination.

The results reinforce the idea that vulnerable populations, including children in informal settlements are structurally excluded from equitable water access which results in both health and dignity challenges. Amoah (2020) indicates that poor access to basic amenities like clean

water severely compromises migrant children's health, school attendance and overall well-being. The findings mirror the assumption of adaptability in social network theory (Bilecen & Lubbers, 2021) that water collection responsibilities often falling on children, can take hours and place them at risk of physical exhaustion further deepening their vulnerability in their host communities. Although the postulation of kinship ties enables relocation according to Tamanja (2012), they do not necessarily provide access to essential services like clean water. This study opines that the overreliance on informal support systems can lead to shared water use from unsafe sources (e.g., lakes, rivers) depicting how networks can aggravate rather than alleviate vulnerability when the required formal infrastructure is absent.

6.1.6 Social Integration

While the SNT assumes that interpersonal relationships and pre-existing social ties such as family members or peers facilitate smoother transitions into new environments (Apatinga et al., 2020), this study revealed that adapting to a new community is often challenging for migrant children. It shows that the child migrants lack autonomy and their migration is influenced by largely external factors and without social networks they experience isolation and loneliness. Such struggles align with the global patterns where migrant youths experience delayed social adjustment especially when entering communities with different social norms or linguistic backgrounds. This is consistent with Rapholo (2020) that migrant youths, particularly those in vulnerable situations often face social exclusion and discrimination from both institutions and community members which limit their access to education, peer relationships and social mobility. in the same vein, Kyereko and Faas (2021) found that migrant students in Ghanaian schools often struggle with integration due to cultural and linguistic diversity confirming that exclusion is not limited to informal settings but is also present in formal education systems.

6.2 The Impact on Families

This sub-section examines the socio-economic implications of child migration on migrant families. On the basis of available evidence that the impact is multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative dimensions. On the positive side, child migrants provide economic contributions that can significantly reduce a family's dependency ratio. Conversely, these economic benefits are counterbalanced by the emotional challenges of separation and the psychological strains inherent in such migration.

6.2.1 Economic Contributions to Family

The data showed that migrant children regularly send money back home to support their families. Their remittances are not merely augmented income, but often serve as a primary economic lifeline for some households. The economic contributions of these young migrants often sustain the entire household underscoring the significant responsibility placed on them. As a 66-year-old woman in Kpando-Torkor asserted that:

"My son sends us money every month. It is not much, but it helps us buy food and pay for school fees for his siblings. Without his help, we would struggle to even put food on the table."

Moreover, many families rely on the financial support provided by migrant children viewing it as a critical support for survival. Thus, remittances by migrant children become the economic lifeline for some households. A senior migrant child from Dzemeni narrates that:

> *"I send a significant portion of my earnings back home to support my siblings. However, when I'm unable to send money on time, my parents call me expressing their financial distress and concern about not having enough food"* (18-year-old girl, Dzemeni).

This testimony shows how migration can bring tangible benefits to families fostering a sense of pride and gratitude. Figure 13 illustrates a migrant family and their housing conditions,

visually revealing the economic challenges that compel families to rely on their children's work for financial support.

Figure 13: Migrant family and their accommodation at Keta

Source: Field Work (2024)

The economic contributions of child migrants to their families in the Volta Region as revealed by this study, underscore a critical and often an overlooked dimension of migration. Child migrants are not merely passive dependents, but active contributors to household survival according to the NCMT as articulated by (Mago, 2023; King & Kuschminder, 2022; Stark & Bloom. 1985; and Poole, 2021). This aspect reflects a shift in the traditional family roles where children rather than receiving support, become providers. This collaborate with the findings of Islam & Rokonuzzaman (2023) who also found that migration and remittances are statistically significant in sustaining households across several African countries, with remittance inflows having a direct impact on economic stability in poor families. Though their study focused more broadly on national-level data, the grassroots experiences captured in this research affirm these

macro-level trends particularly in contexts where adult migration opportunities are limited and children must assume the breadwinner responsibilities.

Moreover, Bikoué (2020) affirmed that remittances help reduce household poverty and stimulate local economies. In cases where remittances come from child migrants, this does not only contribute to the immediate survival of their families at the places of origin, but also creates small-scale transformations in family welfare such as paying school fees or making home repairs (Bikoué, 2020). From a psychological perspective, Veronese et al. (2020) show that when migrant children are unable to meet family expectations, it can affect their emotional wellbeing and perception of self-worth.

6.2.2 Parental Anxiety

From the standpoint of the SNT (Abbay et al., 2025), parents' anxiety encapsulates the profound emotional turmoil experienced by parents of child migrants when their children depart from their immediate care. While families view child migration as a necessary strategy or a potential pathway for improved opportunities (de Haas, 2021), their decision is invariably accompanied by deep-seated emotional distress and constant concern for their children's welfare. In line with other studies such as Cotton (2025), the study discovered that parents grapple with a dual perspective: the hope of providing a better future versus the immediate pain of separation. Their anxiety manifests in the persistent undercurrent of worry characterized by sleepless nights and constant communication attempts. The physical distance becomes a metaphorical chasm that amplifies their emotional vulnerability. Interview extracts reveal the unfiltered emotional landscape of parents facing such separations. Their narratives are a testament to the immense emotional sacrifice inherent in child migration.

One parent said:

"*Every night I lie down awake wondering if my son is safe, if he has enough to eat, or if he's being treated well. I want him to come home, but we need the money he sends"* (A 50-year-old woman, Keta).

This quote captures the internal conflict and psychological impact of migration on families. The finding from this study aligns with that of Cotton (2025) who posited that parents often grapple with continuous anxiety over their children's safety and well-being, even as they acknowledge the economic necessity of migration. This is also documented in the work of Veronese et al. (2020) that the longer the separation and the more challenging the conditions at the place of destination, the greater the impact on migrants' psychological well-being.

6.2.3 Emotional impact on siblings

Based on the standpoint of the Social Network Theory (Ryan & Dahinden, 2021), the study discovered that emotional impact of child migration extends deeply to the siblings left behind. Siblings experience a sense of loss that goes far beyond mere physical absence. The following interview extract reveals the depth of emotional experiences endured by siblings of child migrants. A younger sibling noted:

"*I miss my brother every day. He used to help me with homework and play with me. Now, I only see him during holidays, and it's not the same."* (A 23-year-old girl, Keta).

This quote reveals the emotional gap created by migration for younger children who rely on their older siblings for guidance and companionship. This illustrates how migration can shift household responsibilities creating new challenges for those left behind. This is consistent with Ryan & Dahinden (2021) who also established that siblings often bear the hidden costs of migration by taking on additional responsibilities at home while dealing with the emotional loss of their loved ones. In the light of SNT's principle of kinship ties (Krutova- Soliman et al., 2021; Lomotey, 2021), the study found that emotional toll of child migration is not confined to only migrants or their parents, but it also reverberates throughout the family unit, particularly

affecting siblings who are left behind. These individuals experience emotional distress and shift in household responsibilities. Veronese et al. (2020) and Navarro-Pérez et al. (2021) also made a similar observation that family separation triggered by migration creates psychological vulnerabilities among the remaining family members. The study reiterates that the absence of siblings who served as companionship can lead to an increased anxiety and a sense of struggle for the younger children. This study therefore, argues that migration often imposes emotional burden on the family members left behind especially when the migrant sibling previously played a leadership role within the household.

6.3 The impact of child migration on receiving communities

Child migration significantly influences the receiving communities presenting a complex array of impacts that can be categorized into positive and negative dimensions. The positive impacts include economic participation by child migrants and an enrichment of the social fabric through cultural diversity and interchange. Conversely, the negative impacts manifest as increased economic dependency, heightened pressure on public services and overcrowding in educational institutions. The receiving communities experience a nuanced transformation through migration. As established by the NCMT (Liu, 2022; Obeng-Odoom, 2020), economic participation by these young migrants contributes to a local economic dynamics potentially filling labour gaps or bringing new skills and perspectives.

6.3.1 Economic participation

As established by the NCMT (De Haas, 2010; Fade, 2022), migrant children play a pivotal economic role in receiving communities by strategically filling critical labour gaps and making substantial contributions across multiple industries. Through interviews and focus group discussions, the research found that child migrants were economically engaged in diverse sectors including fishing, crop production, small-scale trading and domestic work. Their participation significantly contributes to the expansion and economic dynamism of local

economic sectors in their receiving communities as postulated by the NCMT (Massey & Parrado 1998; Massey & Taylor; Olsson 2023). A local business owner stated that:

"Every year, we count on the arrival of young workers to help with our busy season. If they don't come, it's hard to find people willing to do these jobs. We've been using these migrant children for years because it's affordable and they're reliable" (A 61-year-old man, Dzemeni).

This dependency highlights how communities have built their economies around the availability of cheap migrant labour. However, it also shows the precarious nature of economic systems that heavily depend on child labour. This finding is consistent with other studies conducted on local economies across other developing countries. For instance, Janssen & Marchand (2020) and Dème et al. (2021) have shown that intra-regional migration is largely economically motivated with children forming part of the household strategies to maximize income and meet labour demands in receiving areas. Their analysis shows that children migrate to more developed coastal regions to fill seasonal or low-wage employment gaps an observation directly mirrored in the economic reliance documented in Dzemeni. This observation further buttresses the points of Ryan (2023) that in fishing communities, migrant labour has long supported food security and local economies, demonstrating a functional dependency on such workers albeit under exploitative conditions.

6.3.2 Economic dependency

The general vulnerabilities created by extensive dependence on child migrant labour represent a critical challenge for the receiving communities with far-reaching economic, social and ethical consequences. Based on the NCMT's principle of income diversification and risk reduction (Stark, 1991; Luo et al., 2020), receiving communities develop economic models that are fundamentally dependent on vulnerable low-cost labour which undermines sustainable economic development. This dependency prevents investment in local workforce development, technological innovation and skill enhancement (Schewel, 2018). The economic structure

becomes increasingly fragile built on the exploitation of young workers who lack protective mechanisms and long-term career prospects. This dynamic is consistent with other scholars on how informal economies exploit vulnerable populations to maintain low production costs and meet labour demands without investment in systemic development. According to Dème (2021), while migrant labour is often instrumental in supporting key economic sectors, an over-reliance on such labour can weaken broader economic resilience. Their study of artisanal fishing in West Africa collaborates with the principle of social influence by Gebreyesus & Tadesse (2021) and Mankiw (2021) of the SNT that asserts that dependence on low-wage, transient labour can discourage innovation and lead to structural stagnation, as employers prioritize cost-saving over long-term productivity improvements. Results from Dzemeni and Kpando- Torkor show that dependency can reinforce a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment both for the migrant children who are deprived of education and for the host communities that fail to invest in more sustainable economic models.

6.3.3 Cultural Integration

The integration of child migrants represents a nuanced social process that goes beyond simple coexistence involving complex negotiations of identity, belonging and community dynamics. The receiving community must navigate these intricate social transformations balancing the potential for cultural enrichment with the challenges of managing diverse social interactions.

Enrichment of Social Fabric

The qualitative results from the study show that migrant children serve as critical catalysts for cultural diversity significantly enriching the social fabric and interpersonal dynamics of the receiving communities. This is because their presence introduces new perspectives, traditions and cultural experiences transforming the social landscape through nuanced cross-cultural interactions. A teacher explained:

"The children bring new perspectives and traditions to our classrooms. They teach us about their cultures and it makes our school a more vibrant place for everyone. We won this year's Cultural festival with the help of the children" (A 50-year-old educationist, Dzemeni).

This quote illustrates the positive impact of cultural exchange facilitated by migration. It also highlights the reciprocal benefits of cultural integration where both migrants and locals gain from shared traditions. A community leader also remarked:

"The migrants bring new energy to our town. Their presence reminds us that we are part of a larger world, and it encourages us to be more open-minded" (An opinion leader, Aflao).

This reflects the broader social benefits of migration, fostering inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding. It clearly shows that migrant children contribute to the enrichment of the social fabric in receiving communities by introducing cultural diversity and fostering cross-cultural exchange. These contributions not only enhance interpersonal dynamics but also lead to the broader social cohesion and inclusivity. This is supported by Kleist and Bjarnesen (2023) who also show that migrants help construct "migration infrastructural assemblages" where local and foreign cultural elements are blended to form dynamic social landscapes. In a similar vein, Dako Gyeke et al. (2020) and Mpofu (2020) assert that migration does not only transform the lives of migrants, but also enriches the host communities by introducing new cultural practices and social norms. In line with the SNT (McLean et al., 2023), the study disclosed that migrant children have become central to cultural festivals by introducing new cuisines and encouraged inclusive worldviews among their hosts. The SNT explains these dynamics by revealing that social integration occurs through informal networks of peers, schools and other local institutions that shape social acceptance. Migrant children, by interacting within these networks facilitate social inclusion and reinforce communal ties.

Social Tensions

Despite the potential benefits of cultural exchange, migration simultaneously generates complex social tensions within receiving communities. These tensions emerge from the challenges of integrating diverse cultural backgrounds competing for limited resources and navigating different social norms and expectations. This can be attributed to the fact that the indigenous people often see migrants as competitor for jobs and resources Ewers (2007). As a result, they are blamed for overcrowding and rising prices of goods and services. This is consistent with the assertions of O'Dell et al. (2023) that the negative perceptions that can arise in host communities mostly lead to discrimination against migrants. The quotation below sheds light on this assertion:

An expert noted:

Social tensions are inevitable in migration contexts, but they can be mitigated through community education and inclusive policies. Communities need to see migrants not as a threat but as contributors to their shared future (A 52-year-old man, Aflao). This perspective calls for proactive measures to address biases and foster harmony.

The findings on social tensions in receiving communities highlight the complexities of migration where economic and cultural exchanges coexist with challenges of integration and resource competition. Despite the potential benefits of cultural exchange, migration simultaneously generates complex social tensions within receiving communities. These tensions emerge from the challenges of integrating diverse cultural backgrounds, competing for limited resources and navigating different social norms and expectations. This can be attributed to the fact that the indigenous people often see migrants as competition for jobs and resources. As a result, they are blamed for the overcrowding and rising prices of goods and services. This is consistent with the work of Olumayowa (2020) where it is observed that

negative perceptions in host communities can lead to discrimination and exclusion of migrants due to perceived cultural differences and economic competition.

6.3.4 Strain on Resources

Despite the positive contributions of child migration, it simultaneously exerts significant pressure on the already limited resources of receiving communities. This resource strain manifests across multiple critical infrastructure and service sectors including educational institutions, healthcare facilities, housing and essential utilities like water resources. The increased population density resulting from child migration, thereby challenges the existing infrastructure's capacity to provide adequate services. Schools become overcrowded, stretching educational resources and potentially compromising the quality of instruction. Healthcare facilities experience heightened demand with limited capacity to serve an expanded population. It was also discovered that housing becomes increasingly competitive and basic utilities like water resources face additional strain.

A teacher also shared:

"Our classrooms are so full that it's hard to give each child the attention they need. Most of the children are pairing because we don't have enough desks" (A teacher, Dzemeni).

This reflects the challenges faced by educational institutions in accommodating growing student populations. The study further discovered that migration can lead to housing deficit. The following quote supports this result:

"*Housing is a big issue in our community. The migrants often end up in overcrowded and unsafe conditions because there aren't enough affordable options" (A 54-year-old man, Aflao).*

This statement underscores the broader infrastructural challenges caused by increased migration. It is evident from the results that migration can exert immense pressure on local infrastructure when receiving communities are not adequately equipped to handle sudden population influxes. This resonates with the results of Espectato et al. (2024) that migration

results in an increased competition over scarce resources and create tension in community resource use patterns. Similarly, Zarema (2021) and Ponizovsky (2012) emphasized that poorly managed migration intensifies demand on housing and sanitation systems making essential services inadequate for both migrants and host populations. This finding aligns with the challenges observed in the study area such as overcrowded schools, clinics and unaffordable or unsafe housing demonstrating a classic case of resource overstretch in vulnerable regions. In view of the NCMT, migration is not only an individual decision but a household strategy aimed at diversifying income sources (Marchetta, = 2013, Rafaely et al., 2023). However, when this strategy results in large-scale movement without supportive infrastructure, it unintentionally creates challenges in host communities.

6.4 Summary

This chapter explores the socioeconomic effects of child migration in the Volta Region. It revealed that although child migration gives families temporary access to education and income, it frequently results in interrupted education, poor living conditions, labour exploitation and limited access to essential services. While families benefit economically through remittances they received from their migrant children, they face emotional stress and role disruptions. For the receiving communities, the study revealed that even though child migration contributes to economic and cultural enrichment, it can result to pressure on public services, housing deficit and education infrastructure. Overall, this chapter discovered that while migration may address short-term needs, it often reinforces poverty and vulnerability and this call for targeted interventions to protect children and support both families and host communities.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the main findings of the study, the conclusions arrived at based on the study objectives, recommendations proposed by the study, the contributions of the study to knowledge and the areas that can be taken up in future studies on child migration. Contributions made by the study seek to strengthen existing knowledge of the literature by bringing to the fore the perspective of a developing country and also by providing another dimension to the problem of child migration.

7.1 Summary of key findings

The main purpose of this study was to explore the drivers and socio-economic implications of child migration in coastal and riverine communities of the Volta Region. It sought to understand why children migrate, the conditions they face and the impact of migration on both migrant children, their families and the receiving communities. The specific objectives of the study included (1) Analyse the patterns and dynamics of child migration in the Volta Region focusing on the prevalence, characteristics and broader socio-economic conditions (2) Examine the drivers of child migration in the Volta Region (3) Evaluate the complex socio- economic implications of child migration on the migrant child, their families and the receiving communities.

The study focuses on four key areas Aflao, Keta, Dzemeni, and Kpando-Tokor where child migration is particularly dominant due to economic activities, educational challenges, climate change and family instability (UNDESA 2020). A combination of empirical and theoretical perspectives was used to explore the drivers, impacts and social dynamics of child migration in the Volta Region. By employing a mixed-methods approach as a methodological orientation,

the study provides evidence-based insights on protecting vulnerable children, improving educational access and mitigating forced migration.

7.1.1 The dynamics of child migration

The first objective explored in this study was the prevalence and characteristics of child migration in the Volta Region, highlighting its deeply embedded nature within the social structure of coastal and riverine communities. Findings revealed that child migration is not just a sporadic event, but a normalized and widely accepted social practice. This normalization occurs due to socio-economic factors such as limited educational opportunities and economic hardship, prompting communities to perceive child migration as an inevitable and sometimes necessary coping strategy (Boujija et al., 2022; Ryan & Dahinden, 2021). Qualitative data showed active facilitation of child migration, particularly in alignment with seasonal economic demands such as farming, where children from other regions are systematically brought into communities for labour purposes. Such migration practices have broad community acceptance and are often encouraged due to perceived economic benefits (Quaye et al., 2020). The analysis also uncovered a notable demographic trend termed as "child-headed migration," where older children (14–18 years) migrate alongside younger siblings, assuming caregiving responsibilities typically reserved for adults. This indicates a shift in family roles and highlights significant socio-economic vulnerabilities within the migrating families. Additionally, the study identified structured internal and cross-border migration patterns, supported by robust social and familial networks (Veronese et al., 2020). Migration decisions were shown to be collectively managed by families, aiming at economic survival, risk diversification, and educational opportunities. The findings strongly agree with SNT, which emphasize migration as a household strategy influenced by socio-economic and relational dynamics (De Haas, 2021; & Poole, 2021). Overall, the chapter concludes that child migration in the Volta Region represents a complex and institutionalized socio-economic practice, sustained by an intricate

web of community norms, economic constraints, family structures and social networks. Addressing this issue requires nuanced interventions sensitive to the deep-rooted social, economic and cultural factors involved.

7.1.2 Factors shaping child migration

Chapter Five focused on the diverse and interrelated factors driving child migration in the Volta Region. The analysis revealed that child migration is primarily driven by economic hardship, where households facing poverty and limited employment opportunities perceive migration as a survival strategy. Families engage in migration to diversify their income sources and enhance economic resilience as postulated by the NCMT (Amfo, 2020). Educational factors emerged as significant drivers with migration often being motivated by inadequate educational facilities, particularly, the absence of pre-tertiary schools in children's home communities. Migration thus, becomes a necessary step for accessing continued education, reflecting the high value placed on education as a pathway to improved economic prospects (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020). Family dynamics, such as parental neglect, irresponsibility, illness and death, also significantly influenced migration decisions. The children often migrate independently due to family breakdowns, neglect and bereavement, assuming roles typically reserved for adults, which the study termed bereavement-induced role reversal. Social networks were critical in shaping migration patterns, with family connections notably influencing migration decisions. While other forms of social ties like peer influence and community support were found less significant, strong family networks emerged as essential for facilitating and supporting children's migration experiences. Additionally, experiences of abuse within the family contexts including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, compelled children to migrate, often independently, to escape oppressive environments. This highlighted migration as both a coping mechanism and a means of reclaiming autonomy. The chapter conclude that child migration in the Volta Region results from a combination of economic, educational, social and abusive

circumstances making migration a rational household-level strategy as well as an individual coping mechanism in response to adverse conditions.

7.1.3 Socio-economic implications of child migration

Chapter Six investigates the socio-economic impacts of child migration on the children themselves, their families and the receiving communities in the Volta Region. Anchored on SNT, the study aligned with previous studies such as King & Kuschminder (2022) and Aagaard (2021) that child migration significantly affects migrant children creating both opportunities and considerable challenges. In terms of educational impacts, this new study discovered that migration to rural communities only addresses short-term educational gaps, but not a pathway for tertiary education due to geographical limitations. Drawn from both qualitative and quantitative results, the study revealed that migrant children often face disrupted and irregular schooling, as financial responsibilities and economic survival take priority, resulting in compromised educational outcomes (Clark et al., 2020). Economically, the study discovered that the fact that child migrants commonly engage in informal and often exploitative labour due to necessity, rather than choice, significantly increasing their vulnerability. The research found a strong correlation between migration status and child employment, demonstrating that migrant children are substantially more likely to engage in economic activities compared to non-migrants, highlighting their increased economic vulnerability. Safety and security also emerged as critical concerns with migrant children frequently exposed to unsafe living conditions, physical threats, and inadequate protection. The data show that majority of respondents live in shared apartments with compound houses (rooms) being the most common (41.8%), followed by huts/buildings (27.0%). Modern housing such as flats/apartments are rare (6.0%). This results in the vulnerability of migrant children, exposing them to theft, physical harm and gender-specific risks which is compounded by inadequate law enforcement and porous borders. The research further notes that migration places immense pressure on local

infrastructure such as schools and housing, which struggle to accommodate the increased population. Overcrowding and resource overstretch were prevalent, especially at Aflao and Dzemeni, emphasizing the inadequacy of existing community infrastructure to manage the influx of migrants effectively. From the survey, the number of people sharing a single bedroom range from 2 to 7 and on average 3.91 people share the same bedroom with a standard deviation of 1.258. This shows a high degree of crowding in bedrooms although the extent of sharing varies across different households. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive interventions addressing educational continuity, economic security, improved safety and security measures, and better infrastructural support in migrant-receiving communities.

In the context of the family, it became evident that child migration exerts a dual impact on families by providing financial support, while simultaneously imposing emotional anxiety on parents and siblings of migrant children. Economically, child migrants play an essential role in reducing household dependency burden through remittances which often serve as the primary financial support for meeting basic needs such as food, education and housing. Conversely, migration of children results in emotional challenges. Families experience the strain of separation with parents enduring persistent anxiety over their children's safety and well-being and siblings facing feelings of loss and increased household responsibilities. Finally, the study discovered that child migrants fill labour gaps in the receiving communities in sectors such as fishing, agriculture, small-scale trading and domestic work with approximately 74.5% being economically active. However, the influx of migrant children puts pressure on the social amenities such as water resources, healthcare facilities and educational facilities.

7.2 Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn based on the discussions and findings of this study. Regarding the first objective, which sought to analyse the dynamics of child migration in the Volta Region, the study concludes that child migration is pervasive and socially normalized

because it is culturally accepted and facilitated by social networks. Also, an emergent "child-headed migration" pattern reflecting children responsibility for initiating and managing their own migratory trajectories.

The study established that although some children migrate independently, others are influenced by family and social networks. It was further revealed that child migration is gendered, with boys predominantly engaging in economic activities such as fishing and farming, while girls often migrate to work in domestic service or trading. The study, therefore, concludes that child migration in the Volta Region is shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors which must be understood within a broader framework of rural-urban and cross-border migration.

For the second objective, which examined the drivers of child migration, the study identified economic hardship as the primary push factor, compelling children to migrate in search of better opportunities. Economic factors, predominantly, poverty and lack of employment opportunities were found to be the major triggers of child migration as children seek to contribute to household incomes or secure financial independence. Additionally, the study established that environmental factors, including climate change, coastal erosion and flooding, significantly contribute to child migration in the Volta Region, principally in the fishing communities where declining fish stocks have made traditional livelihoods unsustainable. Socio-cultural influences, such as peer networks, family expectations, and educational aspirations also emerged as important factors shaping migration decisions. The study thus, concludes that while economic hardship remains a major determinant of child migration, environmental and social factors also play a crucial role in influencing migration patterns. Addressing these drivers requires strategic interventions that will improve local economic opportunities and enhance resilience against environmental shocks.

Regarding the third objective, which focused on the socio-economic implications of child migration on migrant children, their families and receiving communities, the study arrived at several key conclusions. Firstly, migrant children often face multiple vulnerabilities, including poor living conditions, limited access to education, economic exploitation and exposure to health risks. While some children are able to secure employment and contribute financially to their families, others experience harsh working conditions, exploitation and abuse. The study also found that migration has mixed implications for families. On the one hand, remittances sent by migrant children provide economic relief to households. On the other hand, migration often leads to family disintegration, emotional distress and weakened social support systems. In receiving communities, child migrants contribute to the local economy, particularly in the informal sectors such as fishing, trading and domestic service. However, their presence also places additional pressure on social services and resources. The study concludes that the socio-economic implications of child migration are far-reaching with both positive and negative effects. While migration may offer economic benefits, the risks and vulnerabilities faced by migrant children necessitate stronger protective measures and policy interventions.

Findings on the role of social networks in child migration provide further insights into the factors influencing migration paths and outcomes. The study found that social networks including family members, friends and community contacts play a crucial role in facilitating migration. Many children migrate based on information and support from relatives and friends who have previously migrated highlighting the role of chain migration in perpetuating the phenomenon. The findings also showed that social networks provide critical support for migrant children assisting them in securing employment, accommodation and social integration in new environments. However, in some cases, these networks also expose children to risks such as trafficking, sexual abuse and labour exploitation. The study thus, concludes that social networks act as both enablers and risk factors in child migration. Strengthening

social protection systems and implementing community-based interventions can help mitigate the risks associated with migration while ensuring the well-being of migrant children.

Overall, this study highlights the complexities of child migration in the Volta Region, demonstrating that it is driven by a combination of economic, environmental and socio-cultural factors. While migration can serve as a pathway to economic mobility, it also presents significant risks and challenges for children, their families and the receiving communities. The study underscores the need for a holistic policy approach that addresses both the root causes of the movement and the vulnerabilities faced by migrant children. Policies aimed at improving rural economic opportunities, enhancing educational access, strengthening child protection frameworks and regulating informal labour markets are essential in addressing the challenges associated with child migration. Future research should further investigate the long-term impacts of child migration on educational attainment, social mobility and the overall well-being. This would be helpful in formulating more effective policy interventions and support mechanisms for migrant children.

7.3 Policy Recommendations

I. The government through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development should revise LI. 2411 to prioritize rural economic development by creating sustainable livelihood opportunities in the source region. Investments in agricultural modernization, skill training programs and small-scale business development initiatives should be enhanced to provide alternative income sources for families, thereby reducing the economic push factors that drive child migration.

II. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) should revise the National Climate Change Policy (2013) to integrate climate adaptation strategies with child protection measures such as climate-resilient

infrastructure, investing in sustainable fishing practices and providing relocation support for communities facing severe environmental degradation. Long-term mitigation measures that address the adverse effects of climate change on vulnerable populations should be critically considered.

III. The researcher has also recommended that community-based interventions such as child and family livelihood empowerment programme be introduced to regulate migration pathways ensuring that child migrants are directed towards safer environments. This includes the establishment of local migration monitoring committees and strengthening community-based child protection structures.

IV. To address challenges at the receiving communities, policies should focus on improving social services for migrant children in urban centres and other migration destinations. This includes increasing access to free basic education and providing affordable housing options. Local governments should collaborate with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and social welfare agencies to establish support systems that enhance the well-being of migrant children.

V. The Ghana Police Service and the Ghana Immigration Service in collaboration with social welfare departments should establish specialized units to monitor and address child migration-related issues. Furthermore, local governments should enhance birth registration and documentation processes to ensure that child migrants can access social services and legal protection.

VI. Government agencies, NGOs such as Compassion International and Prolink, traditional authorities, and international development partners must work together to develop comprehensive interventions that address both the drivers and consequences of child migration. Stakeholder engagement forums should be institutionalized to promote dialogue, knowledge sharing and coordinated action. Additionally, periodic impact

assessments should be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of migration-related policies and programs.

VII. The study also recommends that child protection services should establish a targeted child-headed migrant support and identification programmes that proactively screens, registers and monitors children who migrate independently or act as heads of migrant units. This programme should include community-based surveillance systems using trained local focal persons (e.g., teachers, health workers, market leaders) to identify vulnerable child migrants early. Once identified, these children should be linked to integrated support services, including temporary safe accommodation, psychosocial counselling, access to education and skills training and case management services that is tailored to their unique caregiving responsibilities.

VIII. Finally, it is recommended that public awareness campaigns on child migration be intensified. Sensitization programs should be carried out in both source and receiving communities to educate families and children on the risks and realities of migration. Schools, religious institutions and community-based organizations should be actively involved in these campaigns to ensure widespread awareness

7.4 Contribution of the study to theory and methodological development.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the existing discourse on child migration by integrating perspectives from the Neo-Classical Migration Theory (NCMT) and the Social Network Theory (SNT). Neo-Classical Migration Theory posits that migration is primarily driven by economic disparities between regions (De Haas,2010; O'Dell et., 2023) was validated through findings demonstrating economic incentives as critical motivators for child migration. The research also advances understanding by highlighting limitations of the NCMT emphasizing the need to consider family decisions and social networks thereby providing a more comprehensive theoretical framework. Simultaneously, the study enhances SNT (De Haas et

al., 2019; and Wellman, 2018) by illuminating the critical role of family ties and community networks in facilitating and sustaining child migration, highlighting how these networks influence not only the decision to migrate, but also, the experiences and outcomes of the migration process.

The study also gives empirical insights into the drivers of child migration by validating and expanding existing models. The qualitative results as well as the logistic regression have shown that educational, economic, environmental and family conditions are predictors of child migration. It also expands the knowledge base of child welfare in child migration discourse by revealing the socio- economic vulnerabilities migrant children face. Empirically, the Mann-Whitney U Tests indicated that the living conditions of migrant children are significantly worse than their non- migrant counterparts.

Additionally, the study contributes methodologically by adopting a mixed-methods approach which combines qualitative and quantitative research designs to provide a holistic exploration of child migration. This approach allowed for a nuanced analysis of the drivers, characteristics, and socio-economic implications of child migration. Specifically, qualitative methods offered deep insights into the lived experiences, family structures and community dynamics, while quantitative analysis provides robust evidence on the prevalence, patterns and correlations between migration and socio-economic variables. Furthermore, the study also advanced knowledge by operationalizing and clearly defining complex variables such as child-headed migration, bereavement-induced role reversals and economic vulnerability among migrant children. These operationalizations facilitated precise measurement and analysis enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Lastly, the research's geographical focus on coastal and riverine communities in the Volta Region fills an important methodological gap in the existing literature which has predominantly concentrated on urban-rural and north-south migration patterns. By bringing attention to rural

and peri-urban migration dynamics in under-researched settings, the study provides methodological clarity and robust evidence that can guide future research and policy interventions aimed at improving child welfare and socio-economic outcomes in similar contexts. This research therefore, serves as a groundbreaking investigation of child migration in coastal and riverine communities in the Volta Region, a context that has been under researched in Ghana.

7.5 Future research prospects

The study has uncovered several key issues that warrant further exploration in future research, particularly in Ghana and other developing countries. One potential area of future research is the interrelationship between climate change and child migration patterns. While this study has established that environmental factors, such as coastal erosion and flooding contribute to child migration in the Volta Region, future studies could delve deeper into the long-term effects of climate-induced displacement on children's well-being, education and economic opportunities. Such research should employ climate migration models and geospatial analysis to track migration patterns over time and assess how communities adapt to environmental changes. This will contribute to a clearer understanding of migration as a coping mechanism in climate-vulnerable regions.

Another area for future research is the role of digital technology and social media in child migration decisions. This study found that social networks play a crucial role in shaping migration trajectories, but the increasing penetration of mobile phones and social media in rural communities suggests that digital platforms may be influencing migration choices. Future studies could explore how online interactions, exposure to migration success stories and recruitment through digital means impact migration decisions among children and youth. This will provide insights into the evolving nature of migration dynamics in the digital era.

Further research is also needed on the integration experiences of migrant children in urban centres and cross-border migration trends. While this study examined the socio-economic implications of migration, it did not extensively analyse how migrant children adapt to urban environments, access essential services and navigate social and economic opportunities in receiving communities. Future studies could focus on educational and labour market outcomes for migrant children, identifying challenges and best practices for ensuring their successful integration. Additionally, considering the proximity of the Volta Region to neighbouring Togo, there is a need for research on cross-border child migration, exploring issues of legality, protection frameworks and transnational support systems for migrant children.

The study also suggests further investigations into the impact of migration policies and interventions on child migration trends. While Ghana has a national migration policy there is limited empirical research on its effectiveness in addressing child migration. Future studies could assess how migration policies at national, regional and local levels influence migration decisions and whether existing frameworks provide adequate protection for child migrants. A comparative analysis between Ghana and other African countries with similar migration patterns could provide valuable insights for policy improvements.

Lastly, future studies should explore the psychosocial impacts of migration on child migrants and their families. While this study has identified emotional distress and family separation as significant concerns, more in-depth research using longitudinal and ethnographic methods is needed to understand the long-term mental health effects of migration on children. Future research could assess how experiences of migration shape children's identity, social relationships and overall well-being, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the human impact of child migration.

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APPENDIX 1

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Profile

Interviewer:

Community/district: ……

Date: …….

Time started: …….

Time ended:

Type of migrant:

Gender: Male; Female.

Age…….

1. **A. Prevalence of child migration**
   i. How common is the phenomenon of child migration
   ii. Is it common to either sexes or only one particular sex?
   iii. Does child migration involve internal of international migrant children in this community?

B1. Characteristics of child migration -Experiences

iv. Did you migrate into the community alone, family, friends or any other person?
v. Can you share any positive or negative experiences you had during the migration?
vi. How did you feel during the migration?
vii. Were there any significant events or milestones for you (the child) during the migration?
viii. How do you feel about the new environment?
ix. How did you adapt to the new environment – school, community, culture, language?
x. Is there any other experience you would like to share with us?

B2. Characteristics of child migration- Challenges of Migrant Children (Child)

xi. What are the main obstacles or difficulties that you encountered
   a. during the journey
   b. upon arrival
   c. after settling down
xii. How do these challenges impact your emotional well-being?

xiii. In your experience, what role do external factors (such as community attitudes or government policies) play in alleviating these challenges?
xiv. Can you provide examples of coping mechanisms or resilience strategies you employ to overcome challenges?
xv. Is there any other challenge you would like to share?

C. **Socio- economic conditions**

xvi. Can you describe your current living conditions and accommodation?

xvii How do the living conditions compare to your previous location?

xviii. Are there any specific challenges you face in terms of housing and sanitation?
xix. What livelihood options are available and utilized by child migrants?
xx. How do you manage to survive here as a child migrant?
xxi. What do you do for a living here at your destination?

2. Drivers of child migration

i. What motivated you to migrate from your town/village?
ii. What prompted your family to migrate?
iii. Can you describe the role of your family in your decision to migrate?
iv. What economic challenges or opportunities prompted you to migrate?
v. How did you move out of your town/village?
vi. To what extent did the availability or lack of educational opportunities for children influence your decision to migrate?
vii. In what ways have environmental factors contributed to your migration?
viii. What processes did you go through in moving out of your town/village to this place?
ix. Will you still want to move to another place, stay here or return to your origin and why?

3. Socio- economic Implications of Child Migration on: the Migrant Child, their Families and the Receiving Community

Section 1: Socio-Economic Implications on the Migrant Child

i. How has moving to this new place affected your ability to go to school?
ii. Can you share any changes in your education since you moved?
iii. How do you access healthcare in this new community, and has it changed since you moved?
iv. Are there any differences in how you take care of your health now?
v. Tell me about your living situation here. How is it different from where you lived before?
vi. What do you like or dislike about where you live now?
vii. Can you share what you enjoy doing here and if you've made new friends?
viii. How have your daily activities changed since you moved?

Section 2: Socio-Economic Implications on Your Family

1. Did you migrate here alone or with your family?
2. How do you stay connected with your family, and how do they support you?
3. Have there been changes in how your family supports each other since you moved?

4. In what ways has your family's income or economic situation changed because of the move?
5. Are there new opportunities or challenges for your family?

Section 3: Socio-Economic Implications on the Receiving Community

1. How has the school and making friends been different in this new community?
2. How welcoming has the community been to you?
3. Are there community activities or events you've participated in since you arrived?
4. How do you see yourself being involved in the community in the future?

Social Network

1. How did networks with friends and family members affected your migration in terms of information and payment for transportation
2. How did you (the child) interact with others (peers, adults) during the migration?
3. How did these networks with other migrants affect your economic survival at the destination?
4. How did your peers within this community influenced your decision to move to this community
5. What roles did your family members play in supporting or discouraging your migration?

APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE

Section A

Demographics

1. Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ]
2. Age: 9 – 12 [ ] 13 – 15 [ ] 16 – 18 [ ]
3. Education Non formal [ ] Basic [ ] Secondary [ ]
4. Mode of transportation Walking [ ] Public Transport Private Transport [ ] Others [ ] Specify _____
5. Ethnicity Ewe [ ] Akan [ ] Others [ ] specify _____
6. Nationality Ghanaian [ ] Others [ ] Specify_____
7. Town/ community of origin
8. Period of migration: Less than a year [ ] between 1-3 years [ ] more than three years [ ]
9. Duration of stay in destination town

Section B

Characteristics of Child Migration

10. Type of child migration: Internal [ ] International [ ]
11. Distance migrated _____miles / km
12. Duration of migration _____ days / months
13. Have you migrated to other places before? Yes [ ] No [ ]
14. If yes, which town(s) did you migrate to before this place?
15. Means of transportation to current destination
16. Are you living alone or accommodated by someone?

Section C

Prevalence of Child Migration (Migrant child)

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

SN	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1	I have noticed other children like me coming to live in this community				

2	I often see new children arriving from other places				
3	Children from different places often come to stay with families here				
4	**I know friends who have moved to live here in the past year**				
5	People in this community talk about children from other places coming here				
6	Community members are aware of the increase in child migration				
7	Sometimes children like me are on the news or talked about in our community				
8	**Child migration is a commonly recognised part of the culture here**				
9	**Local authorities often address issues related to child migration**				
10	I think more children have come to live here compared to a few years ago				

Drivers of Child Migration

Which of these significantly influenced your migration

Your family's Income [ ]
The occupation of your parents [ ]
Community and environmental factors [ ]
Educational factors [ ]
Government and policy factors [ ]

Section D
Socio Economic Conditions of Child Migration on the Migrant Child

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking **Yes** or **No** to the following questions

SN	Statements	Yes	No
1	I have access to affordable healthcare services when I need them		
2	I / My family has enough money to meet our basic needs		
3	I have opportunities to go to school and learn		
4	I feel safe and secure in my current living situation		
5	I have friends and support in the community where I live		
6	I can participate in recreational activities and have fun		
7	I / My family has job opportunities to support our needs		
8	The government provides support for children like me in the community		
9	I have access to proper housing conditions		
10	I feel included and accepted by others in the community		
11	My family and I can meet our cultural and social needs		

Section E

Socio- Economic Condition of Child Migration on their Families

1. **Please rate the changes in your family's conditions following your child's migration, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Worsened 2 = Somewhat worsened, 3= No change, 4= Somewhat improved and 5 is Improved."**

SN	Statement	Response
1	The perceived impact of your child's migration on the overall household income	
2	Impact of the children's migration on their education	
3	Contribution of remittances sent by migrating child to the economic well- being of the family	
4	Impact of child's migration on the overall health and well-being of family members	
5	Level of social integration of the family in the new community since migration,	
6	Changes in your family's living conditions following child's migration,	
7	Changes in your employment status or opportunities since your child migrated	

8	Accommodation and access to utility by the family	

Section F

Influence of Social Networks on Child Migration in the Volta Region

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

SN	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1	Family connections, significantly impacted my decision to migrate to this community				
2	Community ties and networks played a crucial role in facilitating my migration				
3	My peers within this community influenced my decision to move to this community				
4	The support this community provides for others during difficulties influenced my migration				
5	The information and guidance I received from family and friends in this community influenced my migration				
6	My community leaders and influencers played a pivotal role in my decision to migrate				
7	Government support to this community during crisis influenced my decision to migrate				

Child Migration Questionnaires

Name of Enumerator

The name of the person administrating the questionnaire

George

SECTION A - Demographics

Demographics

Town of Resident

- ○ Aflao
- ○ Keta
- ◉ Dzemeni
- ○ Kpando Torkor

Gender

Gender

- ○ Male
- ◉ Female

Age

Age of Respondent

- ○ 9 – 12
- ○ 13 – 15
- ◉ 16 – 18

Education

Education level of respondent

- ○ Non Formal
- ○ Basic
- ◉ Secondary

Mode of transportation

What is the mode of Transport that you used to migrate to you current place of location

- ○ Walking
- ◉ Public Transport
- ○ Private Car
- ○ Water
- ○ Others

Ethnicity

What tribe do you belong to?

Ewe

Town/ community of origin

SECTION B - Characteristics of Child Migration

Characteristics of Child Migration

Type of child migration

Type of child migration

- (•) Internal
- ( ) International

Distance migrated (KM)

Distance migrated

Duration of migration in Hours

Duration of migration

Have you migrated to other places before?

Have you migrated to other places before?

- (•) Yes
- ( ) No

If yes, which town(s) did you migrate to before this place?

If yes, which town(s) did you migrate to before this place?

Togo

Means of transportation to current destination

Means of transportation to current destination

Public transport alone

Are you living alone or accommodated by someone

Are you living alone or accommodated by someone

Accommodated by someone

SECTION C - Prevalence of Child Migration (Migrant child)

Prevalence of Child Migration (Migrant child)

I have noticed other children like me coming to live in this community

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree — Disagree — Agree — (•) Strongly Agree — Neutral

I often see new children arriving from other places

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree — (•) Disagree — Neutral — Agree — Strongly Agree

Children from different places often come to stay with families here

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Are you living alone or accommodated by someone

Are you living alone or accommodated by someone

Accommodated by someone

SECTION C - Prevalence of Child Migration (Migrant child)

Prevalence of Child Migration (Migrant child)

I have noticed other children like me coming to live in this community

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Agree | **Strongly Agree** | Neutral

I often see new children arriving from other places

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | **Disagree** | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree

Children from different places often come to stay with families here

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | **Strongly Agree**

know friends who have moved to live here in the past year

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | **Neutral** | Agree | Strongly Agree

People in this community talk about children from other places coming here

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | **Agree** | Strongly Agree

Community members are aware of the increase in child migration

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | **Agree** | Strongly Agree

Sometimes children like me are on the news or talked about in our community

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | **Neutral** | Agree | Strongly Agree

Child migration is a commonly recognised part of the culture here

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree

SECTION D Socio Economic Conditions of Child Migration on the Migrant Child

Socio Economic Conditions of Child Migration on the Migrant Child

I have access to affordable healthcare services when I need them

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

I / My family has enough money to meet our basic needs

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- (●) Yes
- ( ) No

I have opportunities to go to school and learn

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- ( ) Yes
- (●) No

I feel safe and secure in my current living situation

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- ( ) Yes
- (●) No

I have friends and support in the community where I live

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- ( ) Yes
- (●) No

I can participate in recreational activities and have fun

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- ( ) Yes
- (●) No

I / My family has job opportunities to support our needs

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- ( ) Yes
- (●) No

The government provides support for children like me in the community

Instructions: Please indicate by ticking Yes or No to the following question

- ( ) Yes
- (●) No

How many times do you eat (Food) daily?

- ( ) 1
- ( ) 2
- (●) 3
- ( ) 4

SECTION E Socio- Economic Condition of Child Migration on their Families

Please rate the changes in your family's conditions following your child's migration, using a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "Worsened 2 = Somewhat worsened, 3= No change, 4= Somewhat improved and 5 is Improved."

The perceived impact of your child's migration on the overall household income

Select One

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | **No change** | Somewhat improved | Improved

Impact of the children's migration on their education

Select one

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | **No change** | Somewhat improved | Improved

Contribution of remittances sent by migrating child to the economic well- being of the family

Select One

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | **No change** | Somewhat improved | Improved

Impact of child's migration on the overall health and well-being of family members

Select One

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | **No change** | Somewhat improved | Improved

Level of social integration of the family in the new community since migration

Select one

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | **No change** | Somewhat improved | Improved

Changes in your family's living conditions following child's migration,

select one

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | **No change** | Somewhat improved | Improved

Changes in your employment status or opportunities since your child migrated

select one

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | **No change** | Somewhat improved | Improved

Accommodation and access to utility by the family

select one

Worsened | Somewhat worsened | No change | **Somewhat improved** | Improved

SECTION F - Level of social integration of the family in the new community since migration,

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree.

Family connections, significantly impacted my decision to migrate to this community

select one

Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | **Agree** | Strongly Agree

WORK SECTION

Work and Condition of Work

Do you work?

Involvement in Employment

- (•) Yes
- ( ) No

If Yes, What type of work?

Type of Work

- (•) Hawking
- ( ) Fishing
- ( ) Farming
- ( ) Illegal Activity
- ( ) Domestic Work

How much are you paid (In Ghana Cedis)

50

Describe Your Condition of work

The way you are treated at work

Good

SECTION E Remittances

This is about sending money back home

Do you send money back home?

- (•) Yes
- ( ) No

If yes, how much?

Amount in Ghana Cedis

300

Do you want to go back to your place of origin?

- ( ) Yes
- (•) No
- ( ) Undecided

APPENDIX 3

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)
P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana

My Ref. No: ECH 217/ 23-24

May 02, 2024

George Yao Kafu
Dept. of Geography and Resource Development
University of Ghana
Legon

ETHICAL CLEARANCE
(ECH 217/ 23-24)

The Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH) conducted an expedited review and approved your protocol titled:

CHILD MIGRATION IN THE VOLTA REGION: EXPLORING THE DRIVERS AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: **GEORGE YAO KAFU**

Please note that the final review report must be submitted to the Committee at the completion of the study. Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation. Any modification of this research project must be submitted to ECH for review and approval prior to implementation.

Please report all serious adverse events related to this study to ECH within seven (7) days verbally and in writing within fourteen (14) days.

This certificate is valid until May 01, 2025. You are required to submit annual reports for continuing review.

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor Akosua K. Darkwah
ECH Vice-Chair

Cc: Professor C. Wrigley-Asante, Department of Geography and Resource Development, UG
Professor Joseph A. Yaro, Department of Geography and Resource Development, UG

Tel: +233-302933866 Email: ech@ug.edu.gh

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

April 24, 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION – MR. GEORGE YAO KAFU

The above-named is a PhD student of the Department of Geography and Resource Development, University of Ghana, Legon. As a requirement for his PhD programme, he is expected to present a thesis on the topic "***Child Migration in the Volta Region: Exploring the Drivers and Socio- Economic Implications***" and as such would require information for his research work from your outfit.

I shall be very grateful if you could accord him the needed support, he may require in collecting his data.

We thank you for your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Prof. Alex Barimah Owusu
For: Head of Department

UG

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

(Ketu South Municipal Education Directorate)

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

Email : gesketusouth2012@gmail.com
ketusouthmunicipal.deda@ges.gov.g

Tel: ...

Ketu South Municipal Education Offi
P. O. Box 43
Denu. (VR)

Ghana Post GPS VZ-0064-5411

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

Our Ref: GES/VR/MED/.....

Your Ref: .....

19th August, 2024

GEORGE YAO KAFU
DEPT OF GEOGRAPHY & RESOURCE DEV'T
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
LEGON, ACCRA

INTRODUCTORY LETTER

With reference to your letter dated 28th May, 2024 asking permission to conduct study on: Child Migration in the Volta Region: Exploring the Drivers and Socio-Economic Implications as part of academic research work.

We therefore write to inform you that the permission is hereby granted you to enter the Municipality and carry out the said activities on academic requirement.

You are requested to report back to the office immediately you are done with your research.

We look forward seeing you in our schools.

Thank you.

GODWIN AMELOR
MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
KETU SOUTH-DENU

MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR KETU SOUTH EDUCATION OFFICE GHANA

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

(KETA MUNICIPAL EDUCATION DIRECTORATE)

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

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

Municipal Education Office
P.O. Box KW 110

Keta
Email: gesketa@yahoo.com
GPRS NO. VK-0018-2445
Ref No: GES/VR/KE. DP (PT/.23721/2018/715/4
Your Ref No: .....

25th February, 2025

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Reference to your letter dated 5th February, 2025 received on the 24th February, 2025, seeking permission to conduct research work on the topic: **"Child Migration in the Volta Region"; Exploring the Drivers and Socio-Economic Implication** among children in the Basic Schools of the Keta Municipality, the Municipal Education Directorate writes to notify you of the approval to go ahead and conduct research work.

We also employ you to do as stated in your letter to treat with utmost confidentiality every information gathered for only academic purposes.

We expect a copy of your final research report.

Counting on your cooperation.

(GERHARD KWASI AYUDZIVI)
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
KETA MUNICIPALITY

MR. GEORGE YAO KAFU
ADEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

(South Dayi District)

In case of reply the number and date of this should be quoted

District Education Office
Private Mail Bag
South Dayi
Kpeve - V/R
Email: s.dayiges@gmail.com
Website: www.google.com/site/southdayiges-kpeve
Digital address: VE-0021-2039

My Ref. No: GES/VR/SDD.89/V.2/60
Your Ref. No.: .....

27th June, 2024

MR GEORGE YAO KAFU
PEKI COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
PEKI

RE: LETTER OF INTRODUCTION – MR. GEORGE YAO KAFU

With reference to your letter dated 24th April, 2024 asking permission to conduct interview to migrant children at the Basic Schools in Dzemeni which forms part of your thesis, you are hereby granted the permission.

However, your activities should not disrupt the contact hours of the pupils/students.

I wish you a successful programme.

Thank you.

DESPATCHED
Date 1/7/24
SOUTH DAYI DIST.

PROSPER YEVU (MR)
DISTRICT DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
SOUTH DAYI – KPEVE

Cc: All Management Members - SDDEO
The SISO – Tsanakpe Circuit
All Basic School Heads – Dzemeni
File Copy

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE

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

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

Municipal Education Office
P. O. Box 58
Kpando
Volta Region

2nd July,2024

Tel: No. 0557243037
Email: kpandoedu2021@yahoo.com
Ref. No. GES/VR/KPM/CFD/125/95

RE; PERMISSION TO CONDUCT INTERVIEW AT KPANDO TORKOR SCHOOLS.

We refer to your letter dated 20th June,2024 on the above subject and wish to notify you that your permission receives approval.
By copy of this letter, you are to collaborate with the Basic Heads in Kpando Torkor for effective data collection to ensure a befitting research work.

Thank you for your usual co-operation.
Thank you.

MUNICIPAL DIRECTOR
(PAUL KWAME AGBAVOR)
KPANDO

Mr. George Yao Kafu
Department of Geography and Resources Development
University of Ghana, Legon
Accra.

GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE
03 JUL 2024
KPANDO MUNICIPAL

INTEGRI PROCEDAMUS