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## **UNLOCKING YOUTH POTENTIALS THROUGH DISTINCTIVE CAPABILITIES. THE CASE OF YOUTHS IN THE GREATER ACCRA METROPOLITAN OF GHANA**

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### **Abstract**

*Youth in Ghana have many unique qualities, but they also face hurdles to obtaining education, skills courses, and social support for their growth. This study studied 68 youths in the Greater Accra Metropolis regarding their unique potential skills and obstacles that need to be overcome to enhance their distinctive capabilities. Like many low- and middle-income nations, Ghana is experiencing a "youth bulge." This expanding population allows for a "demographic dividend" to benefit the country's long-term growth. Nonetheless, the existing employment status of these youths lends itself to a "demographic bomb." With a sample size of 68, the study adopted a descriptive research design with a quantitative methods approach. Both purposive and random sampling techniques were employed in this study. Furthermore, data were collected using a Likert scale, with participants being asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a range of research questions to achieve the study's goals. Consequently, some of the statements were given a Likert scale rating. The findings of this study revealed that youths in the Greater Accra Metropolis have distinctive capabilities; however, most of these youths are unemployed due to the lack of support to enhance these distinctive capabilities. For the youth*



*population in Ghana to be well-equipped and gainfully employed, the study recommends that stakeholders use radical tactics to support these youths who are ready to utilise their unique talents and abilities.*

*Keywords: Youth, distinctive capabilities, human capital, youth unemployment, Ghana*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the study**

Young people constitute a major source of the human capital base that holds and drives the socio-cultural, economic and political development of their countries worldwide. When properly harnessed, their intellectual abilities and their productive acumen underpin social progress (Hoetu, 2008). In a demographically young continent like Africa, young people represent immense potential as both a threat and an opportunity. Accordingly, political leaders demanding change and those seeking to defend the existing order seek to mobilise young people (Hoetu, 2008).

Successive governments in Ghana have focused on economic empowerment as the key to youth development, apparently due to the alarming unemployment rate. However, this approach has failed. In spite of the numerous youth development initiatives by the government and its agencies, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, youth groups and other civil society organisations, these initiatives are not implemented within any clear framework with specific national goals on youth development (Hoetu, 2008). Such programmes and projects were also poorly coordinated and, as a result, achieved limited impact and gave room for duplication of efforts and activities.

The absence of a national youth platform where young people's capacities could be built to engage in governance has also been a key challenge. As a result, even though young people are represented on some state boards and committees, there have been practical difficulties (Hoetu, 2008).

In recognition of the need to adopt a holistic approach to youth development in Ghana, the government launched a youth policy in August 2010, which sets clear youth development objectives and priority areas.

### **Problem statement**

Youth unemployment in Ghana is exacerbated by the lack of skills among its youth, especially those not in school, jobs, or training. Youth unemployment leads to inactivity and the

non-development of potential and skills. Failure to engage kids in development programs is problematic for youth and the development community.

Several assessments of the extant literature led the researcher to conclude that most comprise articles and policy papers. Thus, there is no study literature on which stakeholders may depend for a radical solution to the untapped potential of youngsters in Greater Accra and Ghana. In addition, there are theoretical and empirical gaps in the few analysed available literature. This research explored a variety of methodological approaches to close the current gaps. Additional theoretical and empirical references were provided to support the study's conclusions. This research has also supplied current information on the statistical patterns of youngsters' untapped unique qualities in the greater Accra metropolitan area and Ghana as a whole.

Youth in Africa are often misunderstood as victims and perpetrators of societal issues, as opposed to individuals who make educated choices and take action. Nonetheless, there is evidence that young people are competent citizens with talents and capacities. However, as young people move from one stage of life to another, such as school to employment, they need assistance from their parents, community, and the government.

This research went further into the issue of juvenile potentials and capacities, examining its possibilities and the obstacles kids must overcome to realise their potential.

## **Research objectives**

### ***General objective***

This study's main goal is to evaluate ways of unlocking youth potential through distinctive capabilities.

### ***Specific objectives***

- i. Asses the distinctive capabilities of Ghanaian Youths?
- ii. Evaluate ways to enhance the potential and distinctive capabilities of Ghanaian Youths.
- iii. Find out the identified barriers youths face in enhancing their potential and how these have been overcome to ensure success and sustainability.

## **Research questions**

- i. What are the distinctive capabilities of Ghanaian Youths?
- ii. What are the ways to enhance the potential and distinctive capabilities of Ghanaian Youths?
- iii. What are the identified barriers faced by youths in enhancing their potential, and how have these been overcome to ensure success and sustainability?

## Significance of the Study

The research outcomes would reveal strategies to unleash young potential via unique skills and different approaches to produce a much more effective strategy for enhancing adolescent capacity. Adopting the proper youth capacity policy would contribute to the nation's growth.

The research aimed to "emphasise the potentials of the Ghanaian young, who play a vital role in fostering entrepreneurial growth. This research also examined the impact of youth policies in Ghana on the professional paths chosen by young people. In addition, the findings of the research would assist in informing decision-makers and policy-makers about the many strategies to unlock the potential of Ghanaian young and in developing policies directed toward the full use of the potential of Ghana's youth.

Further, the research results will be used by the Ministry of Youth and other government organisations in developing youth initiatives.

In addition to adding to the existing body of knowledge on unlocking young potentials in Ghana, the "findings will also give researchers and organisation decision makers with current information."

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Current innovation and invention dissemination theories acknowledge that all skill levels are significant and that a solid foundation in basic education is the basis for all adaptive innovation-related abilities (Domanski, Howaldt, & Kaletka, 2020). However, despite the significance of labour skills, "little systematic evidence exists regarding how the structure of education and training promotes the creation, spread, and adoption of innovations" (Su, Yuan, Umar, & Lobont, 2022).

There is a large public and commercial investment in developing the potential of adolescents via these initiatives. Also seeking their own alternatives are the youth. They provide the idea of a social order fighting to form amid persecution and economic suffering and seeking a voice in societies whose fundamental institutions are not favourable to hearing youthful voices.

In actuality, however, today's young no longer accept or respect these systems and are increasingly demanding a voice of their own. The common cliché that kids are the leaders of the future poses a significant concern about the quality of investments made in young people to prepare them for their leadership roles. Young people are naturally creative and dynamic and must be seen as actors, participants, and collaborators. In fact, they are strategic catalysts for

new ideas that contribute to peace, human growth, and the revitalisation of human civilisation, particularly in a globalising world.

## **Theoretical Review**

### ***Humanistic theory***

In order to get a knowledge of Youth work via this theory, the researcher draws on Abraham Maslow's work, which views the competent involvement of persons in the course of their lives as moulding and affecting their selves. This idea is predicated on the concept that people can direct the direction of their life and overcome obstacles through their actions. However, when using this idea, it is assumed to concentrate on the degree to which people use their ability to satisfy their own needs in response to life's obstacles (Chess & Norlin, 1991).

According to Hlagala and Delpont (2014), their theory views individuals as having the capacity to take care of their life and encourage their growth, making them accountable for their actions. It also emphasises the individual's individuality and capacity to promote healthy and productive behaviour via the uniquely human attributes of choice, creativity, evaluation, and the culmination of development: self-actualisation.

As one of the pioneers of humanistic psychology, Abraham Maslow (1970) created a hierarchy of needs that motivates individuals to reach the demands at the top of the hierarchy, which represents complete development (Chess & Norlin, 1991). Pittman, Obriel, and Kimball (1993:8), as cited in Benson and Pittman (2001) and Hahn and Raley (1998), defined youth development as "an ongoing growth process in which all youth actively seek and are assisted in meeting their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded and to build skills and competencies that allow them to function and contribute to daily life."

Abraham Maslow hypothesised that needs are structured and prioritised hierarchically from lowest (bottom) to greatest (top) (Drakopoulos & Grimani, 2013). In addition, Abraham Maslow said that it is crucial to satisfy the requirements at the base of the pyramid before moving on to the next level. The diagram below depicts the hierarchy of requirements, with survival and fundamental needs (physiological needs) at the base and growth needs at the top.



Figure 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs

### ***Community youth development theory***

This idea emphasises the need to develop communities to effectively nurture and assist youth, hence assuring sustainable development (Benson & Pittman, 2001). In this setting, the focus is on empowering and developing young people to positively contribute to the growth of the communities that have constructed such institutions (Lerner et al., 2002).

Benson and Pittman (2012) accord that the best method to enhance the lives of young people is to make the communities in which they reside better places. Therefore, this approach seeks to engage youth in the betterment of their lives and their own and their communities' growth. In this perspective, asset-rich communities provide young people with the resources necessary to establish and pursue healthy lifestyles that contribute positively to themselves, their families, and their communities (Hlagala & Delport, 2014). Therefore, there is some validity to the premise that "good communities will foster and promote healthy families and people" (Villaruel et al., 2003). However, this research identifies young people as underutilised community resources (Wheeler, 2000).

The community youth development theory emphasises the significance of altering the setting (community) in which young people reside. This might be accomplished by including them extensively in the development process for their benefit and communities (Benson & Pittman, 2001; Hahn & Raley, 1998; Wheeler, 2000).

Moreover, the community youth development idea considers youth work a component of community development and transformation (Broadbent, 2006). Therefore, converging youth and community development is important, considering the circumstances that have eroded the

African value of interdependence originally accessible to adolescents by replacing it with the Western concept of individuality (Moran, 2019).

This transition is attributable to variables such as altered community structures (e.g., nuclear family vs extended family), altered cultural practices (collectivism against individualism), and altered family situations (e.g., working parents, disorganisation in families). According to Sansone (2022), these changes influence the character and substance of young people's development, their responses to available opportunities and services, and their place in society.

### **Enhancing the Potential and distinctive capabilities of Ghanaian Youths**

In order to enhance the potential of the youth, the government has developed policies which are being discussed in the next paragraphs.

In 2010, the National Youth Policy was enacted. Theme: "Towards an emancipated youth that positively impacts national development." It is meant to guide all parties engaged in the execution of youth development policies, programs, and initiatives. In 2015, the policy's implementation plan was unveiled, highlighting particular initiatives in human development and technology, economic empowerment, young engagement in government, youth leadership, and sports and national orientation.

The Youth Leadership and Skills Training Institutes' curriculum has been restructured and aligned with the competency-based approach of the Council for Technical and Vocational Educational Training framework for developing formal sector skills training to implement the policy objectives. (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021)

### **METHODOLOGY**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), research design involves the strategy of the enquiry or the logical structure of the research enquiry. Therefore, a descriptive research design was adopted for the research. It involves data collection given, answering questions concerning the current status of the issue under investigation.

The descriptive survey involves collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. It can be employed when collecting information about attitudes, opinions, habits or various educational or social issues (Williams, 2007).

The qualitative research approach that the study adopted alongside the descriptive design is a convergent parallel design. To this end, the researcher collected qualitative data and interpreted it at the reporting stage for effective analysis and inferences (Creswell & Plano, 2006). The study began with a mapping of the Greater Accra Metropolis. This was followed by selecting the various communities in the Greater Accra Region.

The study relied on primary and secondary data to gather relevant information for processing towards achieving the objectives. The questionnaire data collected were analysed manually. Each questionnaire was given a serial number for easy identification before scoring the responses. Then, the variables were decoded and interpreted. Descriptive statistics were used, and that allowed the researcher to make precise statements and describe things in a more precise manner.

A purposive approach was used to sample various community members, youth organisations, and staff of local government agencies. This is because these people have in their custody information on issues related to youth and unlocking youth potential in the Greater Accra Metropolis and therefore have the ability and responsibility to provide accurate information.

There was a manual analysis which occurred in phases. First, interview transcripts were reviewed several times, searching for “recurring regularities” (Adèr & Adèr, 2008). Next, the researcher highlighted quotes and phrases from the interview that was significant to the study. Finally, using the constant comparative method (Green, 2019), the researcher went back and forth among transcripts until categories emerged consistent yet distinct (Maxwell & Mutawalli, 2012).

## FINDINGS

The researcher sent out questionnaires on the topic ‘unlocking youth potentials through distinctive capabilities, the case of youths in the greater Accra metropolitan. Google questionnaires were designed, dully filled out, and returned to the researcher. This gave a response rate of 53, deemed sufficient for the study.

### Demographics

Table 1: Respondent’s Demographic Information

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	41	60%
Female	27	40%
Total	68	100
Age		
18-25 years	19	30%
26-30 years	21	31%
31-40 years	15	22%
41-50 years	5	7%



51-60	6	9%
Above 60 years	2	3%
Total	68	100
Educational level		
Diploma	31	46%
Degree	25	37%
Professional	0	
WASSCE	3	4%
HND	9	13%
Doctorate	0	
Masters	0	
Other	0	
Total	68	100%
Occupation of participants		
Employed	17	25%
Unemployed	51	75%
Total	68	100%

Table 1...

### Distinctive Capabilities of the Participants

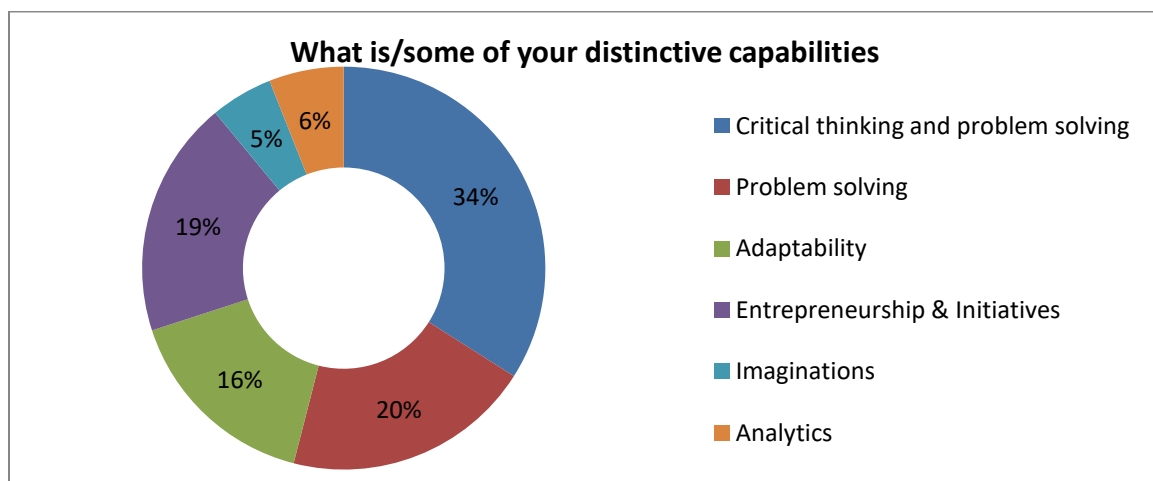


Figure 2: Distinctive Capabilities of the Participants

From the illustration, slightly close to half (34%) of the respondents stated that their distinctive capability was critical thinking and problem-solving. Also, according to the illustration, 20% of the respondents stated they had problem-solving skills. In addition, 16% of the respondents stated that their distinctive capability was adaptability, while 19% stated that entrepreneurship and initiatives were their distinctive capabilities. 5% of the respondents stated that imagination was their distinctive capability, and the remaining 6% stated that their distinctive capability was analytics.

### Enhancing the Potential and distinctive capabilities of Ghanaian Youths

Youth Policy is a horizontal or cross-sectoral policy issue that impacts many sectors. Consequently, a policy area is not accountable for the money required to fulfil policy objectives. Instead, an implementation must occur via vertical sectors and resource-controlling regions.

The National Youth Policy of Ghana provides the framework for youth mainstreaming. Education and Skills Training; Science, Research and Technology; Information and Communication Technology (ICT); Youth and Employment; Entrepreneurial Development; Youth in Modern Agriculture; Gender Mainstreaming; Environment; Health, HIV/AIDS; Networking and Partnership; Mentoring; Arts and Culture; Governance, Democracy, and Leadership; Sports and Recreation; Youth in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding; and Networking and Partnership.

The strategy also defines distinct goals for each of the aforementioned key areas. First, it is essential to design a strategy for implementation. This must entail the identification of all youth development stakeholders, including the many ministries, departments, agencies, development partners, and non-governmental organisations, as well as youngsters themselves. These parties will next understand their responsibilities in the execution of each of the priority areas, establish timetables, assign resources for implementation, and establish monitoring and evaluation procedures. In addition, all state and nonstate organisations dealing with youth problems should be encouraged to include youth viewpoints in their work through interacting with youths. The following depicts the finding from the survey conducted.

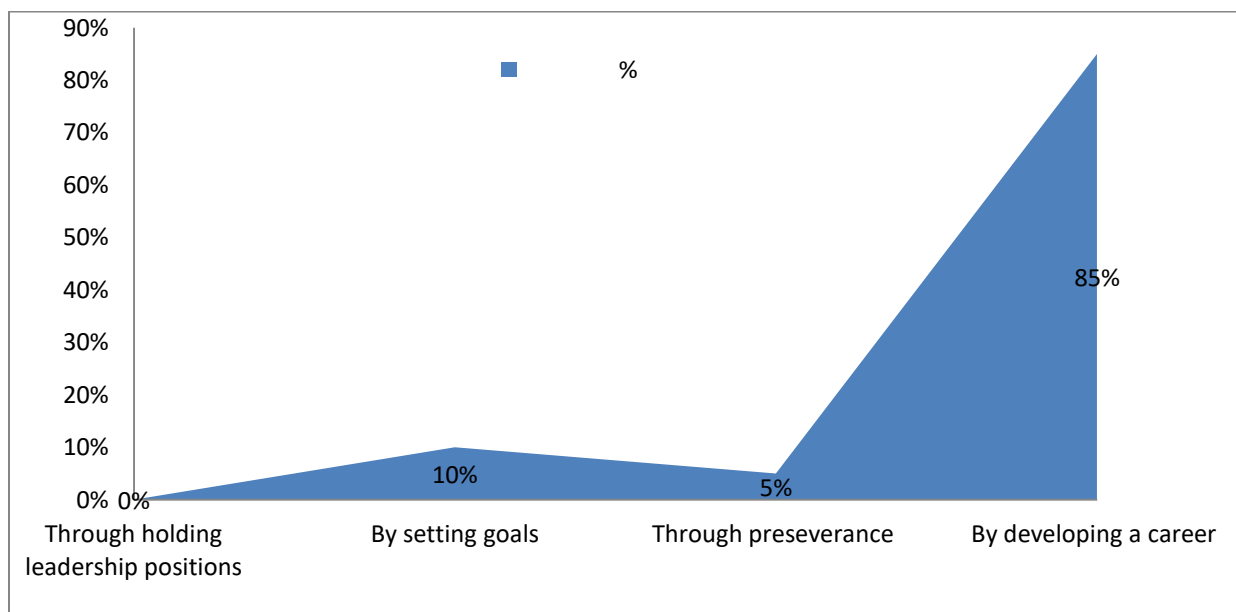


Figure 3: Enhancing the Potential and distinctive capabilities of Ghanaian Youths

From the above illustration, 85% of the respondents believed that they could enhance their potential by developing a career, and 10% believed that their potential could be enhanced by setting goals. In comparison, 5% of the respondents stated that perseverance could enhance their potential.

### Ways of enhancing youth's Potential

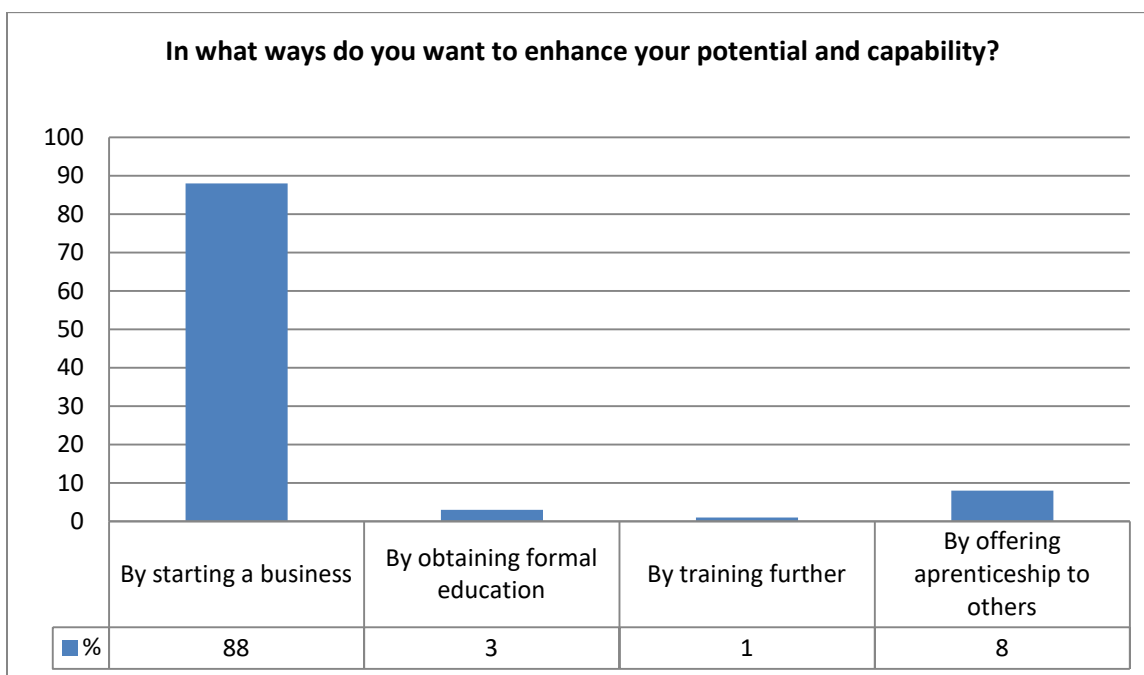


Figure 4: Ways of enhancing youth's Potential

According to the above illustration, most of 88% of respondents believed that starting a business can enhance their potential and capability. The response data showed that only 1% of the respondents stated that they would train further to enhance their potential and capability. 8% of the respondents stated that offering an apprenticeship to others is a way they can enhance their potential and capability. In comparison, 3% said obtaining formal education is a way they can enhance their potential and capability.

### Barriers Faced by Youths in enhancing their potential

The overall responses from the figure 5 revealed that 59% of the respondents revealed that an unfavourable business operating environment was a barrier to enhancing their potential improvement. From the illustration, 18% of the respondents undeniably believed that lack of family support hindered enhancing their capability. Also, the respondents in some measures (

12% and 11% respectively ) were of the view that lack of supporting educational qualifications and inadequate access to finance was a hindrance to enhancing their finances.

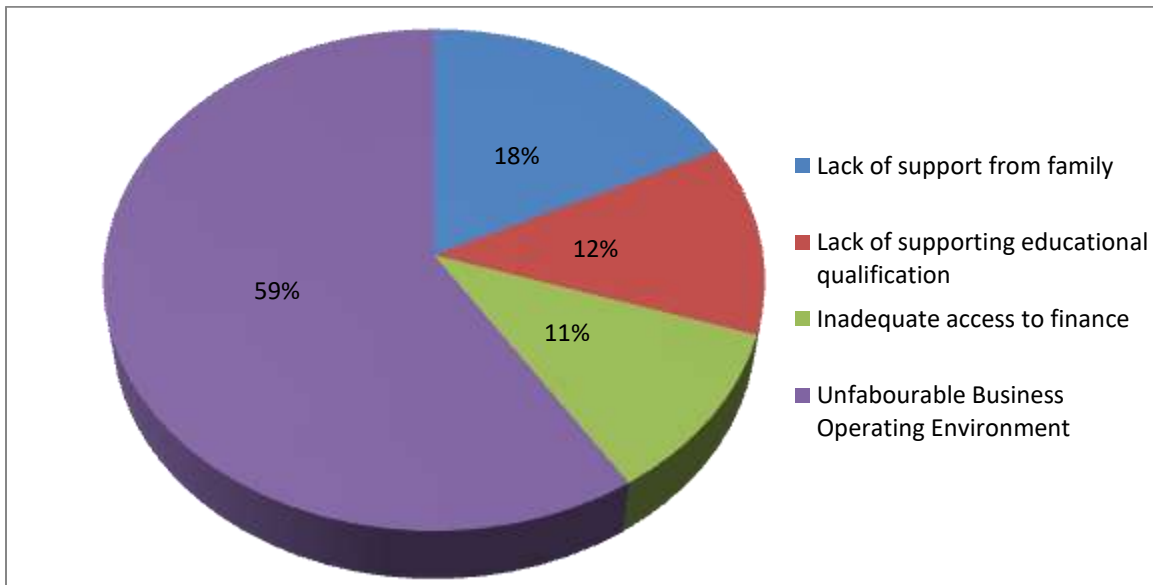


Figure 5: Barriers Faced by Youths in enhancing their potential

**Frequency of discouragement rate due to barriers**

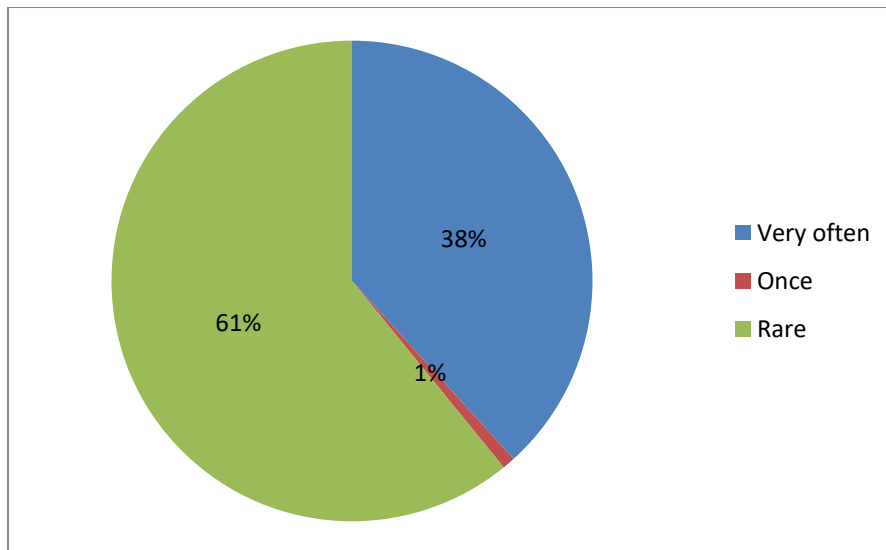


Figure 6: Frequency of discouragement rate due to barriers

When the respondents were asked to state their discouragement rate due to barriers, it is clear from the illustration that 38% of the respondents agreed that it was very often, while 60% believed it was rare. The remaining 1% stated that they were once discouraged.

## DISCUSSION

Due to the worrisome unemployment rate, successive administrations in Ghana have seen economic empowerment as the key to young development. However, this strategy was unsuccessful.

Despite the government's and its agencies, non-governmental organisations, faith-based organisations, youth groups, and other civil society organisations' numerous youth development initiatives, these initiatives are not implemented within a clear framework with specific national goals on youth development. These initiatives and projects were also poorly organised, which reduced their effectiveness and allowed for duplication of efforts and operations.

A significant obstacle has also been the lack of a national youth platform where young people's capacity to participate in government might be strengthened. Even though certain state boards and committees include youth representation, there have been practical obstacles. In awareness of the need to take a comprehensive approach to youth development in Ghana, the government released in August 2010 a youth policy that establishes defined goals and priorities for youth development.

Franco and Tracey (2019) have emphasised in recent studies that capacity-building in the formal education system is one of the primary pathways for the social inclusion of young people. According to these findings, extra years of education increase career chances and better equip young people to engage in today's complex, globalised, democratic societies. Education is also one of the most effective instruments for ending the cycle of intergenerational poverty reproduction.

Ghana's youth have vast potentials that, if realised, might considerably contribute to national development. Nonetheless, these youths encounter several difficulties, including unemployment (Ampadu-Ameyaw et al., 2020). Therefore, the government of Ghana enacted a policy similar to the Ghana Young Employment Agency (GYEA), which is now known as the Youth Enterprise Agency (YEA), to assist the country's youth in finding more employment opportunities in numerous sectors, including agriculture, education, forestry, and resource mobilisation.

## CONCLUSION

Ghana's youth are a primary source of the human capital that sustains and propels the socio-cultural, economic, and political growth of nations throughout the globe. When appropriately used, their intellectual aptitude and productive acumen support societal growth. In a continent as young as Ghana, young people offer great potential as a danger and an opportunity. Political leaders who advocate for change and those who prefer to maintain the

status quo aim to enlist the support of young people. However, in practice, young people's energy and skills are used productively and poorly by participating in violent conflict and other vices that impede societal growth.

Nevertheless, according to the results of this poll, most of the youth's unique qualities are underused owing to a lack of assistance from government agencies and other stakeholders with the resources to do so.

The magnitude and complexity of the difficulties young people face cause policy-makers and government officials in charge of youth programs to worry about the best method to tackle these challenges and where to start. The situation cannot be considered hopeless.

Defining kids' identities is a recurrent obstacle in youth work. The definition of youth and how society sees youth vary throughout time, place, and culture. Functionally, youth refers to the era between childhood and maturity, characterised by rituals and other bodily changes. However, more viewpoints are significant in defining youth. This research suggests that the current generation of youth has several obstacles that hinder their maturation into responsible adults. Inadequate public services, particularly education, are a significant obstacle.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

First of all, for the youths to be relevant in these trying times, Ghana has to develop possibilities for youth engagement, and for youths to participate, they must be able to do so. Therefore, there is a need to assist in forming a national youth platform comprised of young groups and national organisations that consider their respective priority and distinctive areas as outlined in this study. Furthermore, this youth platform must be duplicated at the district and regional levels.

The approach mentioned above to youth development requires a high level of government commitment, the availability of committed youth and development workers and other youth-related non-governmental organisations, strong management systems, adequate funding for the implementation of the programmes, targeted programme development that addresses real needs, and a deliberate effort to institutionalise youth programmes.

In actuality, however, today's young no longer accept or respect these systems and are increasingly demanding a voice of their own. Moreover, the common cliché that youths are the leaders of the future poses a significant concern about the quality of investments made in young people to prepare them for their leadership roles. Therefore, the integration of adolescents is the most reliable method for ensuring good youth development must also be enhanced.

The study focuses on the potential of Ghanaian youth; hence the findings are not applicable to other countries with different socioeconomic settings. As a result, the study suggests that future researchers in the topic examine a broader geographical area.

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