



Students' hair grooming controversy in Ghana: An analysis of the Achimota Senior High School and dreadlocked students' enrolment denial

Nyamawero Navei^{1*}

^{1*}Centre for Research in Culture and Creative Arts, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. navei@uew.edu.gh

*Corresponding author: navei@uew.edu.gh

 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14920551>

Received: December 30, 2024 | Accepted: February 10, 2025 | Published: February 25, 2025

ABSTRACT

Hair holds profound cultural, religious, and aesthetic significance in African societies. However, hair grooming policies in Ghanaian schools, heavily influenced by colonial legacies, have sparked significant controversies, as observed in the Achimota Senior High School and dreadlocked Rastafarian students' admission denial. Achimota School's refusal to enrol them because of their natural hair length led Tyrone Iras Marhguy to file a landmark lawsuit at the Accra High Court, ultimately winning the case against the school. The ruling highlights the conflicting tensions between hair grooming policies in Ghanaian educational institutions and child's rights. This study critically examines the Achimota School case, focusing on the sensational public controversies, litigation, and their psychological effects on the students, particularly Tyrone Iras Marhguy. Utilising a qualitative case study design, the study explores the lived experiences of Tyrone, and key stakeholders, from school authorities to advocacy groups, through interviews and analysis of media reportage. The findings reveal a deep-seated clash between the colonial hair grooming legacy and Ghana's Indigenous cultural landscape, highlighting an urgent need for policy reforms that honour students' rights to Ghanaian hair cultural expression. The study also underscores that the Achimota School's refusal to enrol the two Rasta students, the public controversies, and the legal tussle had negatively affected Tyrone's psychological wellbeing as a minor. Therefore, the study calls on the Ministry of Education, and Ghana Education Service to urgently reform the existing colonially-induced students' hair grooming policies in Ghana to accommodate indigenous Ghanaian hair grooming culture that ensures all students access education devoid of psychological trauma or any form of hindrance.

Keywords: Achimota Senior High School, Enrolment denial, Dreadlocked Rastafarian students, Students' hair grooming policies, Tyrone Iras Marhguy

1. INTRODUCTION

Hair is a cherished natural body part of Africans, valued for its cultural, religious, aesthetic, and other expressions. This fact is uncontested, as numerous studies affirm that Africans regard human hair as a symbol of ethnic and cultural identity, social status, religious affiliation, authority, marital status, age, gender, personal taste, and emotional state, among other things (Botchway, 2018; Omotoso, 2018; Tseyi, 2018; Essel, 2017; Majali, Jan & Asta, 2017; Sieber & Herreman, 2000; Mercer, 1987; Rattray, 1927). Despite the cultural, social, political, aesthetic, and customary significance of human hair in Africa, its grooming within educational institutions has recently sparked conflicting tensions, public controversy, and litigation in Ghana, particularly in the high-profile case involving two dreadlocked Rasta students. Although they had earned a place at Achimota Senior High School, authorities of the school refused to enroll them on 18th March 2021, citing the length of their natural hair as the reason (Asante, 2021; Kale-Dery, 2021; Ghanaweb, 2021a; 2021b; Joy News, 2021a; Citi TV, 2021). Achimota's management insisted that the Rasta students cut their dreadlocks before they could be admitted, a demand that the students and their parents firmly rejected. This refusal garnered significant media attention, leading to widespread public debate and controversy. Various groups, including teacher unions, child rights activists, the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, parents, and religious leaders, expressed opposing views on the matter, culminating in a lawsuit filed by one of the students, Tyrone Iras Marhguy. The Accra High Court ultimately ruled in Tyrone's favour (Addo, 2021; Asante, 2021; Kale-Dery, 2021; Ghanaweb, 2021a; 2021b).

Amidst the public debate over whether students should be allowed to maintain their natural hair, particularly at the pre-tertiary level, scholars have analysed the issue from cultural and legal perspectives. Their findings and recommendations have shaped the discourse (Antwi & Assibey, 2024; Essel, 2021; Darkwa, 2021; Gomda, 2021). Darkwa's (2021) study examines the dilemma surrounding hair shaving and the culture of short hair in Ghana's

secondary schools and found that such practices are rooted in colonial policies that selectively mandated only Ghanaian students during the early part of the introduction of Western education (Castle schools) in the country as a way of distinguishing them from Mulattoes. This colonial construct has since become a compulsory hair grooming standard in Ghanaian pre-tertiary schools, justified as promoting uniformity and ease of hair management for students (Darkwa, 2021). Darkwa further argues that Achimota School's initial refusal to enrol the Rasta students was discriminatory, given that Caucasian students at the school were permitted to maintain their long hair. Also, a decolonisation study by Essel (2021) examines the conflicting tensions emerging out of the prohibition of Afrocentric hairstyles in Ghanaian secondary schools. Essel highlights that Ghanaian schools, including Achimota, ban students from keeping their Afrocentric hairstyles without providing any scientific evidence that such hairstyles either hinder students' creativity, innovation, and academic achievement or undermine Ghanaian cultural identity, moral values, or societal well-being. Another decolonisation study on girls' hairstyles in Ghanaian secondary schools corroborates that the students' hair-shaving policy, rooted in colonialism and still perpetuated in Ghanaian schools, disrupts the preservation of Ghanaian hair culture, recommending that Afro-natural hairstyles be permitted in schools for the holistic development of students (Antwi & Assibey, 2024). From a legal perspective, Gomda (2021) analysed the Accra High Court ruling that declared Achimota Senior High School's refusal to enrol Tyrone Iras Marhguy due to his dreadlocked hair as an infringement on his rights to freedom of religion and education. Gomda argues that while new rights have gained recognition under the 1992 constitution, they are often undermined by state and non-state actors serving narrow interests. Judicial intervention, as seen in *Tyrone Marhguy vs Achimota School*, plays a crucial role in restoring and advancing human rights jurisprudence in Ghana (Gomda, 2021).

The empirical dialogue surrounding the Achimota and Rasta students' admission denial highlights the historical, cultural, and legal aspects of hair grooming policies in Ghanaian schools and the call for decolonisation to allow students to keep their natural hair. This approach not only nurtures self-care skills but also preserves Ghanaian cultural identity. However, there remains a notable research gap concerning the psychological impact of hair-shaving policies in pre-tertiary schools on students' well-being, self-esteem, academic performance, and social interactions. Addressing this gap through empirical studies on the psychosocial outcomes of the students' hair-shaving policy implemented in Ghanaian schools would enrich the existing legal, cultural, and decolonisation discussions for an informed policy revision in the collective interest of Ghanaians. The current study aims to critically examine the tensions and public controversies associated with Achimota Senior High School's refusal to enrol the two Rasta students due to their dreadlocked hair, with a focus on their psychological impacts on Tyrone Iras Marhguy. Specifically, it explores Tyrone's emotions, moods, and anxieties before, during, and after the High Court trial, his experiences following the court's directive for his enrolment at Achimota, the challenges he faced, and the successes he achieved as a student wearing dreadlocks. The implications of these psychological effects are discussed within the broader context of how colonial-era hair-shaving policies in Ghanaian pre-tertiary schools not only undermine cultural identity and human rights but also impact the psychological well-being of students.

2. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical underpinning

Multicultural Education Theory underpinned the study. Multicultural education is said to have emerged in the 1960s in the face of the civil rights movement of various historically oppressed groups (Tamang, 2022). Among the several contributors, James Albert Banks is credited as the father of multicultural education (Vavrus, 2023; Zaldana, 2010) due to his inclusive concept that encompasses a broad range of school practices, programmes, and resources aimed at promoting educational equality for children from diverse backgrounds (Banks, 1990; 1991; 1993). The study is therefore situated within Banks' theoretical thoughts on multicultural education. According to Banks, multicultural education entails providing equal quality educational opportunities to all learners regardless of their cultural, social class, gender, racial, or ethnic backgrounds. Banks' multicultural education theory emphasises equity and social justice in educational curricula and policy frameworks in terms of content selection and integration, knowledge construction, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction and/or elimination, as well as student empowerment. These inclusive perspectives call on stakeholders within the education sector to create inclusive curricula and policies, recognise diverse cultural contexts in knowledge construction, reduce bias, and empower all students irrespective of their different backgrounds.

In this context, the controversy surrounding the refusal of Tyrone Iras Marhguy, a Rasta student, admission into Achimota Senior High School due to his dreadlocked hair, a key cultural and religious element of Rastafari identity (Botchway, 2018; Loadenthal, 2013; Frank, 2007), demonstrates cultural and religious clash within the Achimota School's hair policy framework. Therefore, framed by the multicultural education theory, the study explores how the educational system in Ghana navigates cultural diversity and whether policies accommodate or marginalise minority groups like the Rastafarians. The theory provides a lens to critically assess the exclusiveness of the Achimota Senior High School's hair-shaving policy vis-à-vis the cultural and religious differences of Rastafarians, on one part, and the High Court's inclusive ruling on the matter, promoting a dialogue on the necessity for Ghanaian educational institutions to resort to a multicultural educational approach that prioritises equity and inclusiveness.

2.2. Rastafari hair culture

Rastafari as a religious and cultural movement has an African lineage. The emergence of Rastafari as a religious movement in the Caribbean dates back to the 1930s (Botchway, 2018; Waldstein, 2016; Chakravarty, 2014; Loadenthal, 2013; Jiwani, 1979) with an embedded response to slavery, and restoration of the African cultural identity and dignity (Chawane, 2014). Chawane's assertion resonates with Botchway (2018), who notes that Rastafari emerged from African Diasporians (Black) resistance to the European Atlantic Slave Trade, which not only displaced Africans between the 15th and 19th centuries but undermined their racial dignity. Whereas Jiwani (1979) associates Rastafari's origin to a Black Jamaican-based millenarian movement in the 1930s, the exact root of Rastafari transcends Jamaica to November 2, 1930, the crowning of Ras (head) Tafari (creator) Makonnen (Haile Selassie I) as the 225th Solomonic Emperor of Ethiopia (Goldson, 2020; Dagnini, 2009; Jiwani, 1979). The Rastafari movement thereof derived its nomenclature from the emperor's name, Ras Tafari Makonnen (Mokoena, 2017). In succinct articulation, Botchway (2018) upheld that Rastafari originated in Jamaica during the 1930s, evolving from Jamaican Ethiopianism, a literary and religious Afro-Atlantic philosophical tradition. This tradition interwove ideas, historical accounts, and Biblical references such as Genesis 2:10-13, Psalms 68:31, Amos 9:7, and Acts 8:26-39 to establish historical connections between Africa and its diaspora, tracing them back to a significant and ancient classical era (Botchway, 2018). Ethiopianism was an ancient ideological framework centred around Ethiopia, symbolising the nation's religious prominence and Black liberation (Dagnini, 2009; Botchway, 2018; Goldson, 2020). This ideology emerged partly due to the Ethiopian soldiers who fought in the Italian invasion of 1935, many of whom wore dreadlocks or left their hair uncut (Goldson, 2020; Botchway, 2018; Mokoena, 2017). Ethiopianism is the foundation of the Rastafari movement, which challenged Eurocentric misconceptions about Africa, advocating for African self-rule and a resurgence of Black supremacy (Goldson, 2020; Botchway, 2018; Dagnini, 2009). The Rastafarian movement has since spread beyond the Caribbean to North America, England (Jiwani, 1979) and across the globe. Chakravarty (2014) regards Rastafari as an international theological and cultural movement. A key visual marker of Rastafarians is the wearing of dreadlocks or keeping of Afrocentric hairstyles (Figure 1 A, B, C, D, E & F), viewed both as a sacred religious symbol and a distinguishing feature (Loadenthal, 2013). Dreadlocks reflect the Afrocentric politics of anti-colonialism within Rastafari ideology (Botchway, 2018). In concurrence, Frank (2007, p. 53) asserts that:

To many Rastas, dreadlocks symbolise their Davidic heritage and mark their adherence to Holy Scripture, in particular, Leviticus 21:5: 'they shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard, nor make any cuttings in the flesh'. Dreadlocks also signify their crown, their identification with the African lion's mane, their own kingliness (and queenliness).

Frank's report points to a position always argued by Rastafarians that they are descendants of the Biblical David and Solomon. This is because Rastafarians who look up to and uphold the divine power of Haile Selassie I (Power of the Trinity), believe that Ras Tafari Makonnen, Haile Selassie I (Figure 1A), is a direct descendant of Solomon and Sheba and the root of David (Jiwani, 1979; Goldson, 2020). Still on the symbolism behind dreadlocks to the adherents of the Rastafari faith, Roskind (2001), as cited in Loadenthal (2013: 4), chronicles that:

Dreadlocks are a covenant with Jah and show a commitment to the faith, a commitment against the customs and social codes of Babylon [colonialists]. It is argued that in the Bible, there is no reference to Christ cutting or grooming his hair and so he is regarded as most likely being a "locksman".

The customs and social codes herein referred to pertain to the era of colonialism and the slave trade in Africa, where the colonialists and slave raiders were stereotyped about African natural hair and deliberately labeled it as bad, inferior, or unattractive, misdemeanours perpetuated to disregard black culture and identity (Thomas, 2013; as cited in Essel, 2017; Tseyi, 2018). In the considered views of Waldstein (2016), the wearing of matted hair, dreadlocks, or *locks*, is an emblematic aspect of Rastafari, relating to the Biblical Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:5) that permits the sacred keeping of natural hair without shaving it.

All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

If wearing natural hair (locks) has spiritual inclination as sourced from the Holy Bible, therefore, people, particularly Africans, need to decolonise their ill mindset on the keeping of natural hair or dreadlocks by Rastafarians. Else, any further attempt to undermine Rastafarians' dreadlocks, which have African orientation, would not only be a fight against Africans' key pride in the natural qualities of their physiology and cultural attributes (Tseyi, 2018) but may be incongruous and contemptuous of the Biblical requirements of the Nazarite vow and others as herein observed.

Although the keeping of natural hair, or locks is emblematically synonymous with the Rastafari movement as espoused, it is noteworthy that not all Rastafarians keep natural hair or *locks*, and not everybody keeping dreadlocks is a Rastafarian. Many Rastafarians who wear dreadlocks or keep natural hair perceive them as a channel for spiritual energy, harnessed through meditation (Waldstein, 2016). This implies that there exist a good number of Rastafarians without dreadlocks and a lot more people who wear dreadlocks to re-emphasise Africanism, whereas others may grow locks for reasons best known to them. It is probably on this basis that Mokoena (2017) considers it a misconception that dreadlocks equal Rastafarianism. Mokoena argues that since Rastas got their locks from Africa, it is unjustifiable to

conclude that the keeping of dreadlocks is mainly the practice of the Rastafari faith.



A. Ras Tafari Makonnen
(Haile Selassie I-1892-1975)



B. Leonard Percival Howell
noted as the First Rasta (1898-1981)



C. Bob Nesta Marley
(1945-1981)



D. Peter Tosh (1947-1987)



E. Bunny Wailer 1947-2021



F. Joseph Hills (1949-2006)

Figure 1: (A, B, C, D, E & F): Renowned Rastafari Personalities with Natural Hair/Dreadlocked
(Photo credit: Pinterest, 2021).

2.3. Colonialisation of African Hair Culture and its Impact on Students' Hair Grooming Policies in Educational Institutions in Africa

The uniquely admirable indigenous African hair culture, since the era of colonialism and slavery, has undergone significant changes to the extent that many Africans continue to lose confidence in the hair traditions of their forebears. Erasmus (1997), as cited in Majali, Jan and Asta (2017: 160), notes that "the advent of colonialism and the increased interaction between different racial groups greatly impacted perceptions of beauty in Africa." Tseyi (2018: 29) affirms that "the colonial period imposed European beauty standards on African hair," while other scholars suggest that the end of the slave trade allowed Africans to reconsider their beauty and cultural ideals (Rooks, 1996; Thompson, 2009, as cited in Majali, Jan & Asta, 2017: 161).

Empirical records abound that during the era of slavery, colonial institutions mislabeled Black hair with derogatory terms such as bad, unkempt, peppercorn, kinky, sugar in Zanzibar, messy, sheep wool, or coarse to dehumanise Black people and undermine their culture and identity (Gaddy, 2021; O'Brien-Richardson, 2019; Tseyi, 2018; Essel, 2017; Tseyi, 2018; Herskovits, 1941). Some of these derogatory terms represented nomenclatures of the major crops on which the African slaves worked (Kingston, 1890; as cited in Tseyi, 2018). This colonially-induced discrimination against African hair led to self-hatred, pushing Africans to alter their hair for social acceptance in the global worldview, leading to a gradual erosion of indigenous African hair beauty culture and identity (Omotoso, 2018).

The colonialists did not only mislabel African hair but institutionalised the hatred against African hair during the introduction of Western education to Africans. In Ghana, for instance, at the very beginning of the introduction of Western education through the establishment of Castle schools, only the hair of indigenous Ghanaian pupils was shaved, with the hair of the mulattoes untouched, showing the inferiority of Ghanaian hair and the supremacy of Western hair (Darkwa, 2021; Surama, 2019; as cited in Antwi & Assibey, 2024). The stringent colonially rooted African students' hair-shaving policy was further perpetuated in missionaries' schools established in parts of Africa, including Ghana, which misperceived Black hair as unsightly, ungodly, and untameable (Antwi & Assibey, 2024; Bizimungu, 2021). As Africans wholly adopted the Western system of education and religious beliefs, they assimilated

the Western derogatory views about the African natural hair beauty traditions, thereby institutionalising the colonial shave-hair legacy even in this post-colonial era. Students who fail to comply with these regulations are often subjected to stringent disciplinary actions, including rejection, suspension, expulsion, or corporal punishment at the hands of teachers and school authorities (Essel, 2021; Anderson, 2020; Fayokun & Adedeji, 2013; Ladd, 1973). However, its continuous enforcement in Africa based on promoting uniformity, discipline, and adherence to institutional values has generated public debate, resistance, and litigation in recent years across Africa (Brooks, Edwards & Brown-Beckford, 2024; Antwi & Assibey, 2024; Ntaba, 2023; Essel, 2021; Darkwa, 2021; Gomda, 2021; Addo, 2021; Osman & Wilké, 2018; Van Zyl & Van Reenen, 2002).

In South Africa, a student sought a judicial review of Settlers High School's decision to suspend her for five days for keeping her natural hair, where the court ultimately ruled that the school's decision was unlawful and overturned the suspension (Van Zyl & Van Reenen, 2002). Also, in 2016, some South African schools garnered media attention as students protested against codes of conduct that required them to cut their natural hair, arguing that such rules infringed upon their personal freedoms and cultural expressions (Wilké, 2018). In Jamaica, the Virgo family filed a legal suit in 2018 against Kensington Primary School after it refused to enrol their daughter due to her dreadlocked hair (Brooks, Edwards & Brown-Beckford, 2024). The plaintiff argued that their daughter's rights to religious freedom and expression had been violated, prompting them to file a constitutional claim against the school's Board of Management, the Jamaican Education Minister, and the Attorney General, where the case was won through appeal (Brooks, Edwards & Brown-Beckford, 2024). In Malawi, whereas Makeda Mbewe sought judicial review in 2017 after Blantyre Girls Primary School refused to enrol her due to her natural hair, in 2020, Ishmael Nansolo challenged Malindi Secondary School's decision not to admit him for a similar reason (Ntaba, 2023). The High Court of Malawi, Zomba District Registry, found that the hair-shaving policy of Malawi poses an unjustifiable limitation to students' fundamental rights and ordered the Ministry of Education to abolish it (Ntaba, 2023). Ghana has also been affected by this colonially induced students' hair-shaving policy. In 2021, two Rastafarian boys were denied enrolment by Achimota Senior High School due to their dreadlocks, which was successfully litigated and won by one of them (Tyrone Iras Marhgy), setting aside the school's decision (Addo, 2021; Gomda, 2021).

In conclusion, these recurrent cases of tensions and litigations that largely end in favour of students highlight the need for stakeholders within the education sector to re-evaluate and potentially abolish the outdated and discriminatory hair grooming policy implemented in African schools. The continued enforcement of this policy not only undermines the indigenous African hair grooming practices, preservation, and promotion of the cultural identity of Africans in the younger generations (students) but also violates their fundamental human rights to cultural and religious expressions as well as access to education.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research approach

The study aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Achimota School and Rastafarian students' hair controversy, examining its sociocultural, legal, and educational aspects, as well as the psychological impact of the case on Tyrone Iras Marhgy, one of the dreadlocked students. In doing so, it followed the qualitative research pathway, which involves exploring and understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of respondents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in this case, the experiences, beliefs, and social contexts that shape the perceptions and actions of the various respondents regarding the Achimota School and the Rasta students' admission saga.

3.2. Research design

The first instance in Ghana where parents and students publicly objected and litigated the colonially inherited students' hair-shaving policy in Ghana was the landmark case of Achimota School's refusal to enrol two dreadlocked Rastafarian students in 2021, as affirmed by the trial judge (Addo, 2021). This makes it a single case and a novel phenomenon. Therefore, since the study sought to investigate such a novel case, it best aligns with the case study design. Also, the fact that the novel case involved two dreadlocked boys who were denied enrolment by authorities of Achimota School, focusing on one of them (Tyron Iras Marhgy), further justifies the use of case study design. Generally, case study design involves an in-depth contextual inquiry into a puzzling phenomenon of essence (Yin, 2018; Creswell, 2013), in this context, Achimora School versus Tyrone Iras Marhgy. The fact that case study comes with types, the single holistic case study pathway (Yin, 2018; Creswell, 2013), guided the study in which Tyron Iras Marhgy was the focal individual being studied while holistically drawing triangulated data from other sources relevant to the study.

3.3. Population, sampling and sample size

The Achimota Senior High School and Rasta students' admission controversy of March 2021 involved two student victims, Tyrone Iras Marhgy and Oheneba Kwaku Nkrabea, who were denied enrolment based on their keeping of dreadlocks. In this study, Tyrone Iras Marhgy was sampled using a homogenous purposive sampling technique based

on his unique and novel lawsuit brought against the management of the Achimota School and other parties, through his father, in pursuit of his fundamental rights to keep his cultural and religious hair and his right to education as guaranteed by the 1992 constitution (Addo, 2021). Being the student involved in the litigation, Tyrone's personal experiences regarding the tensions, controversies, and anxieties during and after the litigation, his entry into Achimota School; his experiences as the first dreadlocked Ghanaian student in Achimota School, and the overall psychological effect of the case on him as a student, are central to the study, for which reason he was sampled as a principal respondent.

Also, heterogenous purposive sampling technique was used to sample heterogenous respondents including Tyrone's father; the Chairman of the governing board, the Chairman of the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), the President of the Old Students Association all of the Achimota School; Director-General of Ghana Education Service (GES); the Minister of Education; the President of the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT); the National Secretary of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), and the Executive Director of Child Rights International who are not only critical stakeholders but their views on the subject matter were publicly made through press releases, media interviews or newspaper reportage.

3.4. Data collection

The study relied on participants' narratives, documents, and media reports to understand the case from multiple perspectives. Therefore, data were gathered from relevant documents, interviews, and official statements published by Ghanaian media outlets, including print, television, and social media. The deliberate gathering of data from multiple sources not only introduced multiple perspectives on the subject matter under study but also contributed to the dependability, confirmability, transferability, credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the study's findings as corroborated by studies (Ahmed, 2024; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.5. Data analysis

All interview recordings and press conferences were transcribed, whereas relevant online and newspaper data on the Achimota Senior High School and the Rasta student's admission denial saga were also extracted, with all added to the High Court judgment on Tyrone's lawsuit against Achimota Senior High School. The entire data set was meticulously analysed using thematic and content analytical approaches. This was done through intense data review, coding, theme development, and discursive analysis of the findings, as generally proposed by practitioners (Howitt, 2019; Majumdar, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this, a coherent report comprising themes that reflected the findings and the context of the study was reached.

3.6. Ethical considerations

In the conduct of the study, the researcher manifestly respected the privacy of the principal respondent, Tyrone Iras Marhguy, in terms of his right to voluntary participation in the study, which was obtained through the administration of informed written consent. All attributions to him, including the inclusion of his photograph in the study, were under his express consent. Also, the other respondents whose views were expressed publicly through media interviews, press conferences, and online reports were pseudonymised to protect their confidentiality and anonymity (Kang & Hwang, 2021; Arifin, 2018; Wiles, 2013). Generally, the study was guided by the ethical principles of beneficence (researcher's duty to do good), non-maleficence (researcher's duty not to cause harm), and justice (researcher's responsibility to uphold honesty and integrity) (Kang & Hwang, 2021; Wiles, 2013).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Background of Achimota Senior High School

Achimota Senior High School, originally named Prince of Wales College, holds the distinction of being the first prestigious African institution founded in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) under the colonial administration of Governor Sir Gordon Guggisberg. Although established in 1924, the school began full operations in 1927, later assuming the name Achimota College (Agbodeka, 1977; Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000). The school is situated approximately nine kilometres east of Accra, the capital of Ghana, in the suburb of Achimota, which in the Ga language is variously translated to mean *do not speak the unspeakable; do not utter the unparadonable oath or speak no name* (Steiner-Khamsi & Quist, 2000; Arthur, 2001).

The Achimota College was envisioned as a model institution for producing bicultural leaders who could bridge African and European ideals, well-positioning them to take on leadership roles in the future (Jones, Jones & Ndaruhutse, 2014). The college's curriculum was based on the principles of adaptive education, which sought to integrate West African traditions and culture into the learning process. However, the school largely followed the British public school system, emphasising character training, and leadership development (Yamada, 2009). According to Yamada (2009), the first principal of the college, Reverend A. G. Frazer, attached special importance to students' character training through teamwork, religious teaching, and patriotism, with staff members expected to set good examples for students to emulate.

The College provided the opportunity for Ghana's top-performing students from across the nation, regardless of their religious, ethnic, or social background to receive a high-quality residential education (Svanikier, 2007; as cited in Jones, Jones & Ndaruhutse, 2014). Based on that many ordinary Ghanaians got the privilege to access quality education on a par with the affluent coastal elites and the educated upper class (Svanikier, 2007; as cited in Jones, Jones & Ndaruhutse, 2014). Svanikier report on the openness of access to all students, irrespective of their status, dispels misconceptions held by others that Achimota was only opened to high-class citizens to the neglect of the downtrodden. With such a historically inclusive reputation, it means that the decision by authorities of the Achimota Senior High School not to enrol the Rasta boys in 2021 is alien to the inclusive principle that underpinned the establishment of the School.

Some of the prominent alumni of Achimota College include Kwame Nkrumah – Ghana's 1st Prime Minister and 1st president; Edward Akufo-Addo - president of the 2nd Republic of Ghana; Jerry John Rawlings (1st president of Ghana's 4th Republic); John Evans Fiifi Atta Mills - third president of 4th republic of Ghana; Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara – the 1st president of Gambia; Robert Gabriel Mugabe 2nd President of Zimbabwe; John Dramani Mahama – Ghana's 4th Republican 4th & 6th president; Kow Nkensen Arkaah – 1st Vice President of Ghana's 4th Republic; K.A. Busia, former prime minister of Ghana; Rebecca Naa Okaikor – former 1st lady and wife of former president Akufo-Addo, and many others. The calibre of alumni of Achimota College suggests that the school has achieved and continues to achieve its vision of producing world-class leaders. Figure 2 shows the administrative block of the Achimota Senior High School.



Figure 2: Administration Block of Achimota School
(Source: Jackson, 2022).

4.2. Achimota Senior High School Refusal to Enrol Two Dreadlocked Students and Matters Arising

In Ghanaian public pre-tertiary schools, every student must keep his or her hair low, or downcut. Although this practice is not only a colonial legacy, against the will of some students and parents, the displeasures are swallowed in pain without open agitations for fears of being punished corporally by teachers and school authorities (Antwi & Assibey, 2024; Essel, 2021; Darkwa, 2021). However, on March 18, 2021, Ras Aswad Nkrabeah, a parent, through his social media (Facebook) handle, publicly expressed his revulsion about Achimota Senior High School's refusal to enrol two Rasta students based on their dreadlocks. Nkrabeah's post, which appeared to be a deliberate strategy initiated to court public attention to the alleged injustice, reports that:

Fellow Comrades and Friends, this morning, the school authorities of Achimota School claimed that their rules do not allow students with dreadlocks to be admitted. The school authorities denied two brilliant dreadlock students from being admitted after having been posted there by the Computer School Placement System. My son was one of the affected children and the other student was also refused on the same grounds. We have no option but to battle against this gross human rights violation. As a child[,] he has every right to his culture in so far as such culture do[es] not breach the 1992 Constitution. He equally deserves the right to access education within his culture just like other cultural believers. As a Rastafarian, I think that dreadlocks do no way cause any harm which should even be a basis to be asserted by the school authorities. The fundamental questions to ask is[are] what does our law say about [the] right to one's culture? Do you deny a child access to education based on his/her culture? Do public school rules override the supreme law of the land? Tomorrow I will be on TV3 to share some light. Will give update on time. Thank you for the Solidarity.

(R. A. Nkrabeah, Facebook communication, March 18, 2021 -

<https://www.facebook.com/100013918051118/posts/1120686568405268/?app=fbl>)

The key concern embedded in this statement of Nkrabeah hinges on the allegation of discrimination against two brilliant dreadlocked students, an infringement on their rights to education and cultural manifestation as guaranteed by the

supreme 1992 constitution of Ghana with which all other conventions, laws, and rules are subservient. Although the dreadlocks of the two boys were not directly associated with the Rastafari movement in Nkrabea's statement, his reference to culture points to the popular hair culture of Rastafarians of African descent, thus the keeping of natural hair/dreadlocks as observed by several scholars (Botchway, 2018; Tseyi, 2018; Mokoena, 2017; Waldstein, 2016; Loadenthal, 2013; Loadenthal, 2013; Frank, 2007). The soberness and vulnerability enshrined in Nkrabea's statement engendered intense public controversy (largely against Achimota School) publicised in both traditional and social media, print and non-print media in Ghana (Asante, 2021; Kale-Dery, 2021; Ghanaweb, 2021a; 2021b; Joy News, 2021a; Citi TV, 2021). Amidst the public controversy, there were calls and directives from lawyers, members of parliament, Child Rights International, psychologists, religious clerics, educators, and others for the authorities of Achimota School to rescind their decision and enrol the two students irrespective of their dreadlocks.

Child Rights International in particular holds the view that Achimota School ought to enrol the two students first before any further discussion on their hair could be made. The executive director of Child Rights International made references to the welfare principle of the Children's Act of 560 and the UNHCR principles on non-discrimination, calling for a balance between school rules, substantive rights, and fundamental freedoms of children. "In our opinion... the ultimate is the substantive rights of children" (Child Rights International, personal communication, March 19, 2021). The welfare principle of the Children's Act 560 (2 (1-2)), as referenced by Child Rights International, mandates that:

The best interest of the child shall be paramount in any matter concerning a child. The best interest of the child shall be the primary consideration by any court, person, institution, or other body in any matter concerned with a child. (The Children's Act, 1998: 6).

Also, the non-discrimination aspect of The Children's Act (1998: 7) posits that "no person shall discriminate against a child on the grounds of gender, race, age, religion, disability, health status, custom, ethnic origin, rural or urban background, birth or another status, socio-economic status or because the child is a refugee".

As a children's rights advocacy establishment, the press statement of Child Rights International anchors on the acknowledgment, protection, and respect for the welfare and substantive or fundamental rights of the dreadlocked students (children) to have access to education, which affirms Nkrabea's lamentations. Therefore, the press statement of Child Rights International sought to remind the authorities of the Achimota School to respect the referenced rights of the dreadlocked students and get them enrolled so that both the parents and the authorities of Achimota School could have an opportunity to strike a balance afterwards in the best interest of the Rasta boys. However, the call by Child Rights International fell on deaf ears, with Achimota School insisting that the children must shave their hair before they were enrolled. As the public tensions magnified through media (print and non-print) gaining intense national attention, the Director General of GES assured that the two dreadlocked students would be enrolled in Achimota School, as he has given a directive to that effect:

You cannot say that you will not admit someone on the basis of the person's religious beliefs, and so, we have directed Achimota School Headmistress to admit the students. The student is a Rastafarian and if there is evidence to show that he is, all that he needs to do is tie the hair neatly (Kale-Dery, 2021)

The intervention by the Director General of GES was acceptable since GES has the mandate to oversee the efficient implementation of national pre-tertiary education policies and programmes that equitably allows all Ghanaian children to receive quality formal education in public and private institutions, regardless of their background or beliefs (<https://ges.gov.gh/about-us/>). Therefore, the statement of the Director General of GES was categorical and corroborated the position canvassed by Nkrabea (father of one of the dreadlocked students) and Child Rights International, which emphasises the need for Achimota School to enrol the two Rast boys irrespective of the length of their hair. However, the directive by the Director General of GES witnessed counter-statements issued by teacher-unions such as NAGRAT, and GNAT) as well as the Old Students Association (OAA) of Achimota School, and the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) of Achimota School, among others, calling on the Director General of GES to rescind the directive.

In a press conference held at Accra (22nd March, 2021), the national president of NAGRAT insisted that the headmistress and the staff of Achimota Senior High School did not deny the two dreadlocked students admission but rather upheld the rules and regulations of the School. He added that school rules and regulations go beyond haircuts to include:

...conformity, it talks about uniformity; it talks about obedience to school rules and regulations. We cannot begin this day to start making exemptions for individual students based on their beliefs, based on their culture, based on their tradition, and based on many other issues. That would lead to a chaotic school environment. And a chaotic school environment becomes an indisciplined school environment that cannot produce the results that we expect... If somebody's religion is to wear hair, another person's religion is to cover the hair, another person's religion is not to wear sandals and shoes, another person's religion is to walk about bare-chested, and so on and so forth, we will not be able to manage all these individual religious inclinations and their manifestations in our schools... NAGRAT disagrees totally with the position of the management of the Ghana education service. And we are calling on the

Ghana Education Service to redirect the Headmistress and the staff of Achimota Senior High School to ensure that the rules and regulations of Achimota Senior High School and indeed any other senior high school is[are] abided by every student... NAGRAT welcomes anyone who would go to court on this issue...when that comes, NAGRAT will attach itself because we are an interested party. That court case would not be limited to the wearing of rasta. It would be expanded into the establishment of rules and regulations in our schools. If the court rules that everybody can do what he or she likes, you will all be our guests as teachers. We will also develop ways and means of ensuring that we have proper chaotic school environments. But until then, we expect that all school rules are observed. (NAGRAT President, personal communication, March 22, 2021, <https://youtu.be/HIIapnVXZHE>).

The accounts of the NAGRAT president suggest that the rights of students are immaterial, but the strict implementation of school rules and regulations is crucial to avoid turning schools into unstructured, deregulated places governed by personal whims and desires. Also, one thing that remains interesting and perplexing about NAGRAT's position is the declaration that it would initiate deliberate steps to ensure a chaotic school environment even when the case is adjudicated in court and a determination is made in favour of the dreadlocked students. What this means is that NAGRAT, which is a key stakeholder in pre-education delivery in Ghana, is never prepared to countenance students keeping natural hair/dreadlocks in schools even when litigated and the court justifiably directs so. The position of NAGRAT was further deepened when GNAT added its voice by asserting that the rules and regulations of Achimota School be enforced to the letter. GNAT called on the parents of the affected Rasta students to respect the regulations of Achimota School, and if for any reason they think their children have a peculiar condition, they should not hesitate to go and discuss such with the school authorities (Citi TV, 2021, <https://youtu.be/Zxyjy5di6Q>). The defense mounted by the two teacher unions (NAGRAT & GNAT) for strict implementation of rules and regulations in school management in Ghana is probably because members (teachers) of the two teacher-unions are at the forefront of education delivery at the pre-tertiary level and would be the first group of stakeholders to face any eventualities that may emerge when students are given exemptions based on their cultural and religious inclinations. It is also worth noting that Ghanaian teachers are used to the colonially-rooted compulsory student hair-shaving policy (Antwi & Assibey, 2024; Darkwa, 2021; Essel, 2021; Bizimungu, 2021; Darkwa, 2021) and see no reason for its alteration as strongly affirmed by their NAGRAT and GNAT leaderships. Another key observation is that the accounts of the teacher-unions, particularly NAGRAT, suggest the unreadiness of schools manned by them to revise their rules and regulations to promote equitable quality educational opportunities to all manner of students regardless of their religious inclination, gender, ethnic, social class, cultural, or racial backgrounds do not align with the principle of multicultural education (Vavrus, 2023; Tamang, 2022; Zaldana, 2010; Banks, 1990; 1991; 1993), and should be reconsidered. This is because, for every rule, there must be exceptions to address case-by-case peculiarities that are inconsequential in altering the usual general serenity of school climates but guarantee equal educational opportunities for all.

Also, in separate press statements, the Old Students Association, and Parents and Teachers Association of Achimota School equally called on the Director General of GES to rescind its directive to Achimota School to enrol the two dreadlocked students based on their religious inclination, arguing that the action of the Director General undermined the authority of the school's governing board. The President of the Old Students Association of Achimota (OAA) lamented that in Ghana, school governing boards have the mandate to ensure effective governance of Senior High Schools by establishing the necessary rules and regulations. However, the frequent practice of GES officials issuing directives highlights a notable deviation from these formal governance structures (OAA President, press statement, March 22, 2021). On the other hand, the PTA of Achimota School, through its Chairman, indicated that they had unreserved and unequivocal support for the Headmistress of the school. He revealed that the revised rules and regulations of Achimota school state that "students must keep their hair low, simple, and natural. (Students' hair should not go through any chemical process). The scalp must not show". What this means is that every student of Achimota School, including the Caucasian students, must compulsorily keep their hair low (down-cut) since exemptions are not spelled out in the rule/regulation even on health grounds. Therefore, Achimota School's refusal to enrol the two dreadlocked Ghanaian Rasta students while admitting Caucasian students with long hair (Darkwa, 2021), contrary to its non-flexible hair policy, amounts to discrimination in the implementation of its students' hair grooming policy.

A cursory analysis of the views expressed by the teacher-unions (NAGRAT & GNAT), PTA, and OAA of Achimota School reveals their corroborative stance in favour of Achimota School's refusal to enrol the two Rasta students based on the school rules and regulations. However, no scientific justifications have been given on how the wearing of dreadlocks or natural hair by students could automatically lead to chaotic behavioural conduct that disrupts the long-established serenity of Achimota school's climate or the negative impact of students' wearing dreadlocks on their academic progress, nor has it been established that the wearing of dreadlocks is alien to the indigenous Ghanaian cultural and religious values, for which reason it should not be countenanced in Achimota school.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Education, who has the mandate to enact policies for the smooth running of all schools in Ghana, had a fair take on the matter. In contributing to a parliamentary debate on the Achimota School and the dreadlocked students' admission refusal saga, the sector minister pointed out that:

Mr. Speaker, Achimota has been a beacon of hope for many young men and women. Achimota has been defined by its history of inclusion. Achimota is the school that travels around the length and breadth of Ghana recruiting students, and they have a story to tell how Achimota changed them and made them leaders.... Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that Ghana Education Service, within the shortest possible time, is going to lay out specific guidelines for heads of schools as to how we proceed on this. Mr. Speaker... the Ministry is facilitating to make sure that our students operate in an environment where they give off their best, not just to themselves but to this nation. (https://youtu.be/_SiizPhw6hE)

The minister's statement highlights two key points: firstly, Achimota School's historical reputation as an inclusive institution, and secondly, the need to swiftly establish universally codified guidelines that resolve issues relating to students' hair grooming in Ghana. The inclusiveness of Achimota School as posited by the Education Minister finds expression in the findings of Svanikier's (2007) study, as cited in Jones, Jones & Ndaruhutse, (2014), which indicate that Achimota College, in the past, provided access to all Ghanaian children regardless of their social, ethnic, economic, or religious background), based on which many ordinary Ghanaian children got equal opportunity to access quality education just as those from rich homes. Therefore, the actions and inactions of the management of Achimota School, at all times, must align with this historical record of providing all-inclusive access to education by Ghanaian children irrespective of their cultural and religious background, including the dreadlocked students. Also, although the Minister of Education, at the time, admitted the Ministry's resolve to develop universal guidelines, the developed code of conduct for students in the pre-tertiary schools does not bring finality to students' hair grooming policy as it tends to sustain the colonially-rooted students' hair trimming policy (GES, 2024). Under improper dressing, the GES code of conduct (d) states that "students should have a decent haircut as prescribed by the school authorities. Hair should be clean, neat, modest, and avoid extremes in styles and colour" while the succeeding code of conduct (f) also requires "men's [boys'] hair should be neatly trimmed and beard clean shaven" (GES, 2024, pp. 08-09). The case that the aforementioned codified guidelines of GES give the discretionary power to school authorities to ensure that students have decent hair cut without any exemption guidelines suggests that the culture of school authorities corporally punishing students, suspending or refusing to enrol students due to their wearing of natural hair, as in the case of Achimota School, could potentially abound. In light of the GES' (2024) mandate of providing inclusive and equitable access to quality education by all Ghanaian children regardless of their social, cultural, religious, economic, and religious background, there is the need to revise the recently formulated code of conduct for students in pre-tertiary schools to address the existing contention between school authorities and students as to what constitutes decent hair and how students' keeping of Afrocentric natural hairstyle is deemed improper or indecent.

4.3. Tyrone Iras Marhgy's Lawsuit against Achimota Senior High School and Its Implications for Students' Hair Grooming Policy in Ghana

In the insistent refusal of Achimota School to enrol the two dreadlocked Ghanaian students unless they down-cut their dreadlocks, coupled with the failure of GES to enforce its earlier directive for the school to enrol them, one of the victims (Tyrone Iras Marhgy), through his next friend and father, filed a legal suit on 31st March, 2021, against the board of governors of Achimota Senior High School and the Attorney-General of Ghana in the high court of justice, Accra, seeking seven reliefs. That:

A declaration that the failure and or refusal of the 1st Respondent, to admit or enrol the Applicant on the basis of his Rastafarian religious inclination, beliefs and culture characterised by his keeping of rasta is a violation of his fundamental human rights and freedoms guaranteed under the 1992 Constitution particularly Articles 12 (1); 23; 21 (1) (b) (c); 26 (1); 17 (2) and (3);

A declaration that the failure and or refusal of the 1st Respondent, to admit or enrol the Applicant on the basis of his Rastafarian religious inclination, beliefs and culture characterised by his keeping of rasta is a violation of his right to education guaranteed under Articles 25 (1) (b), 28 (4) the 1992 Constitution;

A declaration that the order directed at the Applicant by the representative of the 1st Respondent to step aside during the registration process on the basis of his religious belief characterised by the keeping of rasta is a violation of his right to dignity guaranteed under Articles 15 (1) and 35 (4), (5) of the 1992 Constitution;

A declaration that there is no lawful basis for the 1st Respondent to interfere with the Applicant's right to education based on his rasta through which he manifests or expresses his constitutionally guaranteed right to religion and to practice and manifest same;

An order directed at the 1st Respondent to immediately admit or enrol the Applicant to continue with his education unhindered;

An order of perpetual injunction restraining the 1st Respondent either by themselves, servants, and/or agents from, in any way, interfering in the Applicant's senior secondary school education on the basis of his religious belief and practice as a Rastafarian;

An order directed at the 1st and 2nd Respondents to jointly and severally compensate the Applicant for the inconvenience, embarrassment, waste of time, and violation of his fundamental human rights and freedoms.

A cursory analysis of the reliefs sought in court by Tyrone, through his father, reveals their consistency with findings of studies that have variously affirmed dreadlocks as sacred elements and that represent the religious and cultural identity of the adherents of the Rastafari movement rooted in indigenous African hair culture (Botchway, 2018; Tseyi, 2018; Mokoena, 2017; Waldstein, 2016; Loadenthal, 2013; Loadenthal, 2013; Frank, 2007). After two months of hearing, the court, on May 31, 2021, granted all the reliefs except the last one, which demanded the award of cost to the defendants. The judge ruled that Achimota School's refusal to enrol Tyrone Iras Marhguay based on his Rastafarian religious beliefs and hairstyle violated his right to dignity and education, as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. As a result, the court ordered Achimota School to immediately enrol Tyrone so that he could continue his education without any forms of interference (Addo, 2021). Although the case is on appeal by the management of Achimota School and the Attorney General of Ghana (Nyabor, 2021), seeking to set aside the high court ruling, until then, this ruling (Addo, 2021) serves as a landmark case of reference in Ghana's legal jurisprudence in handling similar cases in the future. Therefore, although the ruling of the court specifically centres on Tyrone's suit, it has inferential implications for teachers, heads of schools, and the Ghana education service to reconsider the stringent implementation of the colonially-rooted students' must trim their hair before they are accepted to access their fundamental rights to education.

4.4. Psychological Effect of the Tensions, Controversies, and Litigation on Tyrone Iras Marhguay, and His Experiences as a Dreadlock student at Achimota Senior High School

In providing context to why Tyrone Iras Marhguay insisted on attending Achimota School amidst the tensions and controversies surrounding his hair when many other alternative second-cycle schools abound in Ghana, Tyrone indicated that the decision was driven by his family considerations. Being triplets, their parents had wanted them to attend the same senior high school. This narrowed their options significantly, especially since they needed a mixed-gender school close to home where they could be day students. Achimota was the only available Category A school that met these criteria, hence the insistence. However, in opting for Achimota School, Tyrone and his family anticipated some degree of tension due to his dreadlocks, but the magnitude of the challenges they faced was far beyond their expectations. In a bid to ease the process, they sought a letter of recommendation from the executive director of Omega Schools, attesting to Tyrone's good character during the period of his basic education. However, the recommendation was not accepted by the management of Achimota Senior High School, leading to public conflicting tensions (Asante, 2021; Kale-Dery, 2021; Ghanaweb, 2021a; Joy News, 2021a; Citi TV, 2021; Essel, 2021). According to Tyrone, he was deeply traumatised and depressed by some of the public commentaries that ridiculed, devalued, and denigrated him without any empathy for his age and right to keep his natural hair.

This eventually necessitated a lawsuit against Achimota Senior School to fight for his right to keep his natural hair while in school (Addo, 2021; Asante, 2021; Kale-Dery, 2021; Ghanaweb, 2021a; 2021b). Tyrone described the litigation process as incredibly stressful, thereby exacerbating the psychological impact of the case on him. According to him, each court session was allegedly filled with uncertainties and strategic delay actions perpetuated by the defendants. Tyrone purports that these setbacks, such as lawyers coming to court to say that they had forgotten documents, prolonged the case, creating an overwhelming sense that the legal proceedings might drag on indefinitely. The emotional toll was further deeply exacerbated by the fact that, during this time, Tyrone could not enrol in any other school, as that would have violated the court process he initiated. He was then left in a state of limbo, unable to move forward academically or make alternative plans until the final determination of the case by the court. Primary excerpts of Tyrone's traumatic experiential narratives about the court's trial processes include:

... it had been so stressful... I think those times were very, sometimes, I like to say very tough. But then, after just a few years, I feel like... everybody has a story anyway, so it's not too trivial. Each of the court's case, or every court's case, was too stressful in the sense that you may get to the courtroom, and maybe the argument is that you know, we forgot some documents, like literally, yeah, the lawyers will say we forgot some documents, and so, and when anything like that happens, it means you have to go back and come back either at least after 7 to 14 days, regardless. So, it's like, sometimes you just show up at the courtroom, ah, we forgot some documents, okay, fine, let's go, let's come back after a week or two. So, it was creating that kind of impression that this court case might go

on forever, and a lot of things were at stake. First of all, I was still home, and I couldn't enrol in any school at all, because that would be a breach of contempt of court, I think. Yeah, it was like, you are just there; you cannot even do anything. (T. I. Marhguy, personal communication, September 21, 2024)

This means that the refusal of Achimota School to enrol Tyrone due to his hair and the eventual litigation process created indelible pain, anxiety, and a permanent psychological imprint in Tyrone.

However, on May 31, 2021, the Accra High Court ruled in his favour, directing Achimota School to enrol him with immediate effect. Tyrone revealed that the victory brought a huge sense of psychological relief to him, not because his victory would put his detractors to shame, but because the ruling has allowed him to continue his education uninterrupted. "So, when it got to that final moment where they were like, yeah, you can be enrolled at Achimota School, I was so relieved by the fact that I was going to school" (T. I. Marhguy, personal communication, September 21, 2024). However, the joyous celebration was short-lived, as the first day of his enrolment in Achimota School was greeted with a new set of challenges. Tyrone emotionalised that:

...the first day in school was even the beginning of something I don't want to say worst, but something else. Because that first day I was enrolled in Achimota, the school was preparing for its semester vacation with the conduct of the end-of-semester examination. I had no option but to participate in it straight forward from home. As somebody who had been at home the entire period, without teachers, just moving from one media house to another and the court, I honestly did not think I was prepared enough for the examination. So, I got to the classroom, and they had started already. I said okay, fine. This is not the worst that happened over the past few months. I must just sit down and write the exams, which I did. It was very relieving. (T. I. Marhguy, personal communication, September 21, 2024)

The accounts of Tyrone raise critical psychological trauma surrounding his first day experience in Achimota Senior High School, and his enduring resilience and intrinsic motivational determination to overcome such traumatic experiences, regardless. Another traumatic experience that Tyrone had to bitterly accept as a result of his delayed entry into Achimota School was missing out on the opportunity to offer Biology as a science student.

I wanted to study Biology originally, partly for the National Science and Math Quiz... But, eventually, when I got there, I had to take ICT instead, because the Biology classes were full... for that part of the story, whenever I explain it, people feel like, of course... what do you expect? You beat the school to be enrolled, so any way that the school can show you something, they too will do it. But I mean, in my opinion, I feel like it was a genuine reason. Because, if you think about it, Biology is so sought after, and I mean, by the time that I went there, then the classes were really full... The fact that I didn't get to even study the Biology that I came there to do is regrettable. But what could I have done other than to make progress? (T. I. Marhguy, personal communication, September 21, 2024)

Tyrone further added that for his three years of enrolment in Achimota School, he never breached any school regulation, thereby disabusing the fears expressed by NAGRAT and others that he would be ungovernable when enrolled. He, however, admitted that he was extra careful not to do anything untoward in the school to affirm the wishes of the naysayers. Living with this mindset puts psychological pressure on Tyrone. Besides the aforementioned lingering psychological issues, Tyrone indicated that he had never been discriminated against by the management, teachers, and students of the school and had no regrets at all. Having excelled in his final year examination and Scholastic Aptitude Test, Tyrone is currently pursuing engineering at Pennsylvania University of the United States of America, one of the most globally sought-after prestigious universities. During the interview, Tyrone (Figure 3) concluded his traumatic experiences by asserting that the attempt to deny him his academic progress due to his natural hair was unfounded and a setback to the Ghanaian educational system that needs redress. "...I feel like, I mean, everybody has a story anyway, so it's not too trivial, but it's fine, it's okay", the final words of Tyrone (T. I. Marhguy, personal communication, September 21, 2024).



Figure 3: Tyrone Iras Marhgy at Pennsylvania University as an Engineering Student
(Photo Credit: Fieldwork, 2025).

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the intersection of cultural identity, legal rights, and educational policy through the lens of the Achimota Senior High School's refusal to enroll Tyrone Iras Marhgy and one other Rastafarian student due to their keeping of natural hair. Focus is placed on the sensational public tensions, controversies, litigation, and psychological effects associated with the case. Analysis of the findings shows that the Achimota Senior High School's refusal to enrol the two dreadlocked students in March 2021 was based on the school's resolve to enforce its long-sustained colonially-induced students' hair shaving policy, often at the expense of indigenous Ghanaian hair cultural identity, and religious rights of students. The Achimota Senior High School case also spotlights the Rastafarian community's struggle for religious acceptance in educational settings, reaffirming the rigidity of Ghanaian schools in protecting colonial legacies to the detriment of Ghanaian cultural values. Therefore, Tyrone Iras Marhgy's option to resort to legal suit, his victory of the case at Accra High Court, and his eventual enrolment in Achimota Senior High School remains a landmark case in Ghana, indicating that the constitutional rights of students to education and religious freedom supersede schools' exclusive rules and regulations. The ruling of the case deepens the need for reforms in Ghanaian educational policies to recognise cultural diversity and the individual rights of students.

As Ghana continues to navigate around its postcolonial identity crisis, a more inclusive approach to policy-making could foster an educational environment where all students can freely express their cultural identities, strengthening personal growth, national cohesion, and national cultural identity preservation. Conclusively, the study underscores that the Achimota Senior High School's refusal to enroll the two Rasta students, its associated public controversies, and the ensuing legal tussle not only undermine the grooming of Indigenous hair culture in students but have negatively impacted Tyrone psychologically. To foster a culturally inclusive and psychologically balanced educational environment, it is recommended that Ghanaian educational policymakers (Ministry of Education – MOE, and Ghana Education Service - GES) revise the existing colonially-induced students' compulsory hair-shaving policy to harmoniously accommodate the cultural and religious diversity of Ghanaians. To ensure this, an interdisciplinary task force of experts involving educators, legal experts, psychologists, and cultural custodians should be constituted by MOE and GES to assess and reform the existing colonially-induced students' hair grooming policy to align with the constitutional rights of children and Ghanaian hair grooming traditions. This tends to ensure inclusive education for all Ghanaian children regardless of their social, cultural, economic, ethnic, or religious inclination as well as preserve and promote the indigenous Ghanaian hair grooming culture and identity for posterity. As inexhaustible as the current study stands, further research is required to establish the impact of students' hair grooming policies on students' self-esteem, academic performance, and social integration after school. Such research could inform policy adaptations that enhance both student welfare and Ghana's broader commitment to cultural diversity and equality.

REFERENCES

1. Addo, G. A. (2021). *Suit NO. HR/0055/2021*. High Court of Justice, Human Rights Division One, Accra. Retrieved from https://www.graphic.com.gh/images/2021/may/03/Tyron_MarghuyvAchimota_SchoolAGI_Judgment_2021_06_02.pdf
2. Agbodeka, F. (1977). *Achimota in the national setting: A unique educational experiment in West Africa*, Accra. Afram Publications.

3. Ahmed, S. K. (2024). The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health*, 2(100051), 1-5.
4. Anderson, J. (2020). Hair discrimination is racist: Why black communities advocate for hair peace. *Engage*, 1(3), 42-51.
5. Antwi, E., & Assibey, B. G. (2024). Afro-identity redemption: Decolonizing hairstyles of girls in Ghanaian senior high schools in promotion of cultural sustainability. *Journal of Science and Technology*, 42(3), 110-117.
6. Arifin, A. R. M. (2018). Ethical considerations in qualitative study. *International Journal of Care Scholars*, 1(2), 30-33.
7. Arthur, C. (2001). *Internet use in second cycle institutions in Ghana: A study of Achimota school* (Master of Arts Dissertation). Department of Information Studies: University of Ghana, Legon.
8. Asante, K. (2021, April 1). Rastafarian student denied enrolment by Achimota School sues; wants court to order school to admit him. Joy Online. Retrieved from <https://www.myjoyonline.com/rastafarian-student-denied-enrolment-by-achimota-school-sues-wants-court-to-order-school-to-admit-him/>
9. Banks, J. A. (2013). The construction and historical development of multicultural education, 1962-2012. *Theory Into Practice*, 52(1), 73-82.
10. Banks, J. A. (1990). Citizenship education for a pluralistic democratic society. *The Social Studies*, 81(5), 210-214.
11. Banks, J. A. (1991). Multicultural education: Its effects on students' racial and gender role attitudes. In J. P. Shauer (Ed.), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning* (pp. 459-469). New York: Macmillan.
12. Bizimungu, N. (2021, March 29). The racist politicization of black hair in African school. *Minority Africa*. Retrieved from <https://minorityafrica.org/the-racist-politicization-of-black-hair-in-african-schools/>
13. Botchway, D. N. Y. M. (2018). The hairs of your head are all numbered: Symbolisms of hair and dreadlocks in the Boboshanti order of Rastafari. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 12(8), 20-38.
14. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
15. Brooks, P., Edwards, J. A., & Brown-Beckford, J. A. (2024). *Supreme court civil appeal NO COA2020CV00069*. Jamaica, Court of Appeal. Retrieved from <https://www.courtsofappeal.gov.jm/sites/default/files/judgments/Virgo%20%28Dale%29%20and%20Another%20v%20Board%20of%20Management%20of%20Kensington%20Primary%20School%20and%20others.pdf>
16. Chawane, M. (2014). The appearance and significance of Rastafari cultural aspects in South Africa. *New Contree*, 71, 92-113.
17. Chakravarty, K. G. (2014). Rastafari revisited: A four-point orthodox/secular typology. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 1-30.
18. Citi TV. (2021). *Achimota School rejects GES' directive to admit Rastafarians*. Citi Newsroom. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/hf3-xVKxlpk>
19. Citi TV (2021). *GNAT backs Achimota School's decision not to admit Rasta students*. Citi Newsroom. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/Zxyjy5di6Q>
20. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE.
21. Dagnini, J. K. (2009). *Rastafari: Alternative religion and resistance against White Christianity*. OpenEdition Journals: Études caribéennes. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudescaribeennes.3665>
22. Darkwa, E. (2021). "Our hair our pride": The contours of hair politics and high school education in Ghana. *International Journal of Current Researches in Sciences, Social Sciences and Languages*, 02(02), 23-31.
23. Essel, O. Q. (2021). Conflicting tensions in decolonising proscribed Afrocentric hair beauty culture standards in Ghanaian senior high schools. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI)*, VIII(III), 116-122.
24. Essel, O. Q. (2017). AFCON 2017 hairstyles fashion identity construction of selected players. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management Research*, 3(6), 13-26.
25. Fayokun, K. O., & Adedeji, S. O. (2013). Legal issues in educational management in Nigeria. *Makerere Journal of Higher Education*, 4(2), 187-202.
26. Frank, K. (2007). *Whether beast or human: The Cultural legacies of dread, locks, and dystopia*. CUNY Academic Works.
27. Gaddy, B. D. (2021). What's hair got to do with it?: How school hair policies violate the United States Constitution. *Administrative Law Review Accord*, 6(3), 155-173.
28. GES. (2024, January 5). *Code of conduct for students in the pre-tertiary levels of education in the Ghana education service*. Ghana Education Service. Retrieved from <https://ges.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/CODE-OF-CONDUCT-FOR-STUDENTS-IN-THE-PRE-TERTIARY-LEVELS-OF-EDUCATION-IN-THE-GES.pdf>
29. Ghanaweb. (2021a, March 20). *Admit rasta student first – Child Rights International to Achimota school*. Ghanaweb.com. Retrieved from <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Admit-Rasta-student->

[first-Child-Rights-International-to-Achimota-School-1210054](#)

30. Ghanaweb. (2021b, March 24). Achimota school rastafarian students saga: Who has said what so far? Ghanaweb.com. Retrieved from <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Achimota-School-Rastafarian-students-saga-Who-has-said-what-so-far-1213996>
31. Goldson, R. R. (2020). *Jah in the flesh: An examination of spirit, power, and divine envesselment in Rastafari* (PhD Dissertation). Temple University.
32. Gomda, A. A. (2021). Human rights and its enemies: Tyrone Marhgy v. Achimota school. *Ghana School of Law Student Journal*, VI, 1-30.
33. Herskovits, M. J. (1941). *The myth of the Negro past*. Harper & Brothers Publishers
34. Howitt, D. (2019). *Introduction to qualitative research methods in psychology: Putting theory into practice* (4th Ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
35. Jackson, I. (2022). Development visions in Ghana: From design schools and building research to Tema New Town. *Architectural History*, 65, 293–326.
36. Jiwani, Y. (1979). *The forms of Jah: Mystic collectivity of Rastafarians and its organization precipitates* (Master Arts Thesis). Simon Fraser University.
37. Joy News. (2021a). Admission Blues: Authorities of Achimota School only spelt out rules to students. Multimedia Group Limited. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/HIIapnVXZHE>
38. Joy News. (2021b). *Diversity in our schools: Rastafarian question*. Multimedia Group Limited. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/hTrnP6NWfTo>
39. Jones, A., Jones, C., & Ndaruhutse, S. (2014). *Higher education and developmental leadership: The case of Ghana*. Developmental Leadership Program.
40. Kale-Dery., S. (2021, March 20). *GES directs Achimota school to admit*. Graphic Online. Retrieved from <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ges-directs-achimota-school-to-admit-rastafarians>
41. Kang, E., & Hwang, H. (2021). ethical conducts in qualitative research methodology: Participant observation and interview process. *Journal of Research and Publication Ethics*, 2(2), 5-10.
42. Ladd, E. T. (1973). Assessing the reasonableness of school disciplinary actions: Haircut cases illuminate the problem. *Buffalo Law Review*, 22(2), 545-573.
43. Loadenthal, M. (2013). Jah people: The cultural hybridity of white Rastafarians. *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, 1, 1-21.
44. Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
45. Majali, Z., Jan, K. C., & Asta, R. (2017). Everyday Hair Discourses of African Black Women. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 13(1):158-172.
46. Majumdar, A. (2019). *Thematic analysis in qualitative research*. IGI Global.
47. Mercer, K. (1987). Black hair/style politics. *New Formations*, 3:33-54.
48. Mokoena, H. (2017). If Black girls had long hair. *Image & text: A Journal for Design*, 29(1), 112-129.
49. Ntamba, Z. J. V. (2023). *Judicial review case number 55 of 2019*. High Court of Malawi, Zomba District Registry.
50. Nyabor, J. (2021, September, 13). *Achimota school, AG appeal court ruling on Rastafarian student Tyrone Marhgy*. Citi News Room. Retrieved from <https://citinewsroom.com/2021/09/achimota-school-ag-appeal-court-ruling-on-rastafarian-student-tyrone-marhgy/>
51. O'Brien-Richardson, P. (2019). The case for hair health in health education: exploring hair and physical activity among urban African American girls. *American Journal of Health Education*, 50(2), 135–145.
52. Omotoso, S. A. (2018). Gender and hair politics: An African philosophical analysis. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 12(8), 5-19.
53. Osman, F., & Wilké, J. (2018). Dress codes in schools: A tale of headscarves and hairstyles. *Obiter*, 39(3), 585-601.
54. Pinterest. (2021). *Rasta pictures*. Pinterest.com. Retrieved from <https://www.pinterest.com/antoniomather/rasta-pictures/>
55. Rattray, R. S. (1927). *Religion and art in Ashanti*. Clarendon Press.
56. Tamang, Y. B. (2022). Multicultural Education: Concept, Emergence and Dimensions. *Innovative Research Journal*, 1(1), 80-85.
57. Tseyi, F. S. (2018). *Natural hair and the Ghanaian woman* (Master of Arts Thesis). University of Ghana, Legon.
58. TV3 Network. (2021). *Ministry of education will find a solution to the Rastafarian students - Achimota issue-Adutwum*. TV3 Network Limited Ghana. Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/SiizPhw6hE>
59. Sieber, R., & Herreman, F. (2000). Hair in African art and culture. *African Arts*, 33(3), 54-96.
60. Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Quist, H. O. (2000). The politics of educational borrowing: Reopening the case of Achimota in British Ghana. *Comparative Education Review*, 44(3), 272-299.
61. Vavrus, M. (2023). James Banks: Preeminent Scholar of Multicultural Civic Education. In B.A. Geier (ed.), *The palgrave handbook of educational thinkers* (pp.1-18). Palgrave Macmillan.
62. Waldstein, A. (2016). Studying the body in Rastafari ritual: Spirituality, embodiment and ethnographic knowledge.

Journal for the Study of Religious Experience, 2, 71-86.

63. Yamada, S. (2009). Traditions' and cultural production: Character training at the Achimota School in colonial Ghana. *History of Education*, 38(1), 29-59.
64. Van ZyL, D. H., & Van Reenen, D. (2002). Case No 3791/00. The High Court of South Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZAWCHC/2002/4.pdf>
65. Wiles, R. (2013). *Qualitative research ethics?* Bloomsbury.
66. Zaldana, C. J. (2010). Multicultural education: What is it and does it have benefits? *CMC Senior Theses*, 64, 1-23.

