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Transforming the educational experiences of marginalized students in Ghana through dialogic literary gatherings

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Discrimination and educational inequalities continually affect lifelong learning opportunities among marginalized groups in the 21st century. In Ghana and many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, children from rural and urban poor communities, ethnic and linguistic minorities and those in displaced situations have experienced discrimination and marginalization in education for decades. However, few studies propose ways marginalized students in Ghana can transform their experiences in school. This paper explores how participating in a dialogue-based intervention named Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs) transformed the educational experiences of marginalized students. An ethnographic-case study was conducted with 8th-grade students in a compulsory school in Southeastern Ghana. Focusing on the personal accounts of seven students, our findings show that the DLGs created affordances for marginalized students to engage in egalitarian dialogue, share their grievances while transforming relationships and attitudes with their peers and boost participants' self-confidence, eventually transforming their educational experiences. This is relevant for practitioners and stakeholders seeking innovative strategies that potentially transform discriminated and marginalized students' experiences and potentially keep them in school.

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Introduction

Marginalization in education can affect students' academic performance, peer-to-peer interaction and sense of belongingness in school (Benner and Wang 2014; Pendergast et al. 2018). It is a form of acute and persistent disadvantage rooted in underlying social inequalities (UNESCO 2010), which may include cultural differences, knowledge gaps, and socioeconomic status (Akin and Neumann 2013). Firmly embedded in power imbalance, marginalization disproportionally affects groups and individuals who are more vulnerable, have less control over resources and are in positions of lower status and prestige (Causadias and Umaña-Taylor 2018). Duchak (2014) reports that young people experiencing poverty, homelessness, racism, and abuse among others, are potentially marginalized. These inequalities continually challenge inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning possibilities for these students. Particularly students with special educational needs and those affected by stereotyped educational environments (Fujino and Sato 2022; Santos et al. 2022). In Ghana and many parts of Africa, children from rural remote and urban poor communities, ethnic and/or racial and linguistic minority children, and children in displaced situations, among others, are marginalized educationally (Mfum-Mensah 2018; UNESCO 2023). These include children with disabilities who are often stigmatized, discriminated against and ostracized (Avoke 2002; Botts and Owusu 2013; Mantey 2017).

Likewise, children with learning difficulties otherwise known as problem learners are stigmatized and discriminated against both in school and at home thereby, demoralizing and discouraging them from actively participating in the teaching and learning process (Adom et al. 2019). Similarly, indigenous people who migrate also experience various degrees of discrimination and marginalization depending on factors such, as their assimilation into the target community, educational accomplishment, marital status and previous migration experience (Tutu et al. 2018). Additionally, students who migrate to Ghana from other parts of Africa also experience marginalization as a result of prejudice and stereotyping (Kyereko and Faas 2021). A vast amount of literature on discrimination and marginalization in educational settings in Ghana focuses on people with disabilities (Anthony 2011; Botts and Owusu 2013; Mantey 2017) leaving a paucity of literature on existent inequalities related to ethnicity, language, and social status among others.

These social differences, sadly, contribute to a decline in the rate at which students complete basic education in Ghana (Adam et al. 2016; Braimah and Oduro-Ofori 2005; Langer 2009; UNICEF 2019). Nonetheless, studies show that people in the country shy away from openly discussing differences (Dei 2005a, 2005b). As such, students experiencing marginalization because of existing social differences will find it even more challenging to discuss their experiences with peers. Paving the way for unpleasant educational experiences that potentially discourage marginalized students from completing their basic education. Indeed, educational experiences allude to all conditions necessary for education to be a reality as well as all those encounters that an individual faces in the course of one's education (Dewey 1986).

Therefore, creating learning environments in which students can experience an inclusive and equitable quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations 2015), is essential since it might enable those systematically marginalized to transform their experiences. Along these lines, few studies have advocated for strategies that will ensure active participation, motivation and encouragement of these vulnerable groups to boost their self-confidence and promote their acceptability in Ghanaian educational settings (Adom et al. 2019).

Further, the identification of barriers affecting marginalized students' acceptability and adaptability in Ghanaian schools has been highlighted as essential for an in-depth understanding of issues of inclusion (Kyereko and Faas 2021). These can all be achieved by empowering learners to become actively involved in the teaching and learning process, particularly, those historically marginalized.

Consequently, research advocates for the need for "talk", collaborative learning and the development of reasoning in the classroom to guide the construction of knowledge among students and promote active participation of children during instruction (Howe et al. 2019; Mercer et al. 1999). Also, it is essential to create learning environments that foster discussion and dialogue in classrooms and schools (Fuentes-Moreno et al. 2020). These are evident in transforming the teaching and learning process while enabling both teachers and students to communicate effectively (Gaunt and Stott 2018). Accordingly, educational researchers advocate for better-informed practice with research that seeks to achieve social impact (García-Carrión et al. 2020). Along these lines, research shows that dialogic learning has transformed classrooms and schools to provide high-quality education for all students (Flecha and Soler, 2013). This approach, according to Flecha (2015) increases academic performance, improves social cohesion, and enables participants to overcome educational inequality in diverse contexts.

Indeed, it enables teachers to understand better how to face challenges when dealing with historically marginalized groups or when entering schools located in high-poverty areas (García-Carrión, Padrós Cuxart et al., 2020). Due to its success, in Namibia, dialogic learning was suggested as an approach to multiculturalism that could enhance tolerance among people and produce a society united through understanding (Bialostocka, 2017). Nonetheless, it was perceived as difficult to facilitate in South Africa but turned out to be feasible across diverse classrooms, where students, who initially got offended when people disagreed with them, began to accept disagreements with justifications as a normal part of classroom talk (Taylor and Lelliott, 2015). Thus, drawing on the social-cultural theory of cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978) and grounded on the theory of dialogic learning (Flecha, 2000), research shows that Dialogic Literary Gatherings (hereafter, DLGs), foster learning and inclusion of vulnerable populations (Soler-Gallart, 2019). DLGs are part of a set of educational interventions identified by the European research project INCLUD-ED as Successful Educational Actions (Flecha, 2015), which demonstrated positive academic and social results, replicated in many diverse contexts (Torras-Gómez et al., 2021). Despite the positive impact achieved by the dialogic approach to teaching and learning, little is known about how the Dialogic Literary Gatherings could be implemented in Africa, specifically in Ghana. This paper thus seeks to understand how the implementation of the DLGs in an 8th-grade classroom in the southeastern part of Ghana transforms, if any, students' educational experiences.

Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLGs)

Considering that human development and learning are socially mediated, based on interaction (Vygotsky 1978), teaching and learning should be grounded on egalitarian dialogue as opposed to relations of power (Flecha, 2000). DLGs are an interactive dialogue-based learning environment where participants through egalitarian dialogue, share and discuss greatest literary works that foster respect, solidarity, freedom, and overcome inequalities (Flecha 2000; Soler-Gallart 2019). These, based on the seven principles of dialogic learning: egalitarian dialogue, cultural

intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, creation of meaning, solidarity, and equality of differences (Flecha 2000) enable participants to engage in the reading and in the dialogue about the book, by sharing their feelings and making meaning of the text. Here, participants decide on the greatest literary works of humankind to be read over several sessions and select pages to read ahead of the gatherings by noting down or highlighting sections of the text that intrigue them. Learners then sit in a circle, read aloud the selected text and share with the rest of the group the reasons that have motivated their choice (Soler-Gallart 2019). The facilitator encourages the participation of all members and ensures that all opinions are respected, according to the principles of dialogic learning (Llopis et al. 2016).

Implemented in over 7000 schools in fourteen different countries across Europe and Latin America (Soler-Gallart 2019), the efficacy of DLGs has been studied in various contexts where positive impacts have been observed in reading (De Botton et al. 2014), prosocial behaviour (Villardón-Gallego et al. 2018) and in students' participation in collaborative interactions in second language acquisition (Santiago-Garabieta et al. 2022). It encourages friendship and respect (García-Carrión, Villardón-Gallego et al. 2020), and fosters a sense of community (García et al. 2018) and self-confidence (Díez-Palomar et al. 2020) among participants. Additionally, it efficiently promotes the inclusion and personal transformation of people in disadvantaged positions to become leaders within their communities (Soler 2015) thereby giving them a voice during decision-making.

Apart from their efficacy, DLGs enable marginalized groups and people at risk of marginalization to overcome barriers of dialoguing among peers imposed on them by injustice and discrimination (García-Carrión, Villardón-Gallego et al. 2020). It increases participants' self-esteem (Alvarez et al. 2018; Garcia Yeste et al. 2017) and enables people from marginalized groups to become confident readers and empowers them as social agents who are thoroughly involved in movements supporting and advocating for their communities (A. Flecha 2015; Garcia Yeste et al. 2017). Hence, debates held during the DLGs indeed promote participants' creation of meaning and transformation in their own lives and social contexts (López de Aguileta 2021).

The present study
The present paper aims to explore the transformations that occur in marginalized students' educational experiences while they participate in Dialogic Literary Gatherings in Ghana. This is part of a bigger project funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska Curie grant. As such, since few studies have focused on implementing dialogic learning environments to address educational inequalities in schools in Ghana, DLGs were implemented in a public school in the southeastern part of the country to fill the gap in the literature and potentially transform these students' experiences. Moreover, despite the positive impact of dialogic learning globally, little is known about this approach in the country and the few studies available focus on science education where it encouraged students' active participation in lessons (Boadi 2019).

Hence, the dialogic approach, specifically the implementation of DLGs, which have proven to be very successful in many diverse contexts worldwide, was chosen as an ideal intervention to explore its potential impact for transformation among 8th-grade students in Ghana.

Methodology
Qualitative Ethnographic case study (Rhoads 1995; Schwandt and Gates 2018) research methodology was adopted for the study.

Thus, combining elements of ethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) and case study (Yin 2014), weekly visitations were conducted with 8th-graders in a school in the southeastern part of Ghana from October 2021 until February 2022. This enabled the researcher on the field to get embedded in the school culture and classroom climate and also, be in a position to examine the phenomenon in its real-life context. As such, DLGs were implemented in the school for the first time with these 8th-graders over a duration of approximately five months. DLGs took place once a week during the students' English Literature classes however some sessions were held twice a week to make up for time lost during vacations and public holidays.

In accordance with the dictates of the syllabus of the Ghana Education Service concerning mandatory literature books to be read by students from seventh to eighth grade, participants together with their English literature teacher, agreed to read the classical book *Oliver Twist*. Additionally, participants agreed to read *Oedipus the King*, one of the teacher's supplementary teaching materials and *The Odyssey*, another book proposed by the researcher. During the DLG sessions, the students interacted with each other based on previous reading of age-appropriate versions of the books *Oliver Twist, Oedipus the King* and *The Odyssey* by choosing a piece of the text, reading it aloud and sharing their thoughts and feelings about aspects of the text that intrigued them. The ground rules of DLGs were reiterated at the beginning of each gathering hence, participants were aware they had to raise their hands and wait for their turn to speak. The moderators guided students' interactions and ensured the sessions were void of tensions and conflicts by inviting students to elaborate on points raised where necessary and ensuring that the debates were based on egalitarian dialogue and not power. It was also emphasized that there was no wrong answer only sharing of ideas therefore each person's opinion was to be respected.

Data collection. A total of seventeen DLG sessions lasting approximately one hour were observed and audio recorded. Five sessions were held with all the students in a single setting, and twelve sessions (six in each group) were held with students divided into two groups (A and B). This division was to ensure equitable participation in the DLGs, that is, to offer as many students as possible the opportunity to engage in the dialogue and share their opinions about their reading. One of the researchers -first author- facilitated the sessions with all participants combined and alternated facilitation of the gatherings with the English teacher who had previously been trained, in sessions where the students were divided. Additionally, observations were conducted in spaces outside the DLGs such as during recess to connect and bond with participants and also observe how they interact with their peers. Granted that one facet of marginalization is the experience of interaction with dominant groups (Given 2008), the observations enabled the researcher, a Ghanaian and a professional teacher in Ghana for seven years, to identify signs of discrimination and marginalization such as ostracization.

Besides, one focus group with all participants and fourteen semi-structured interviews lasting approximately thirty minutes each were conducted with the seven students who reported being laughed at and called names during the DLGs. Each of the seven students was interviewed twice, one at the beginning of the study and the other getting to the end of the study. The interviews enabled the researcher to gather more information about participants' experiences which were shared during the gatherings and the changes that occurred after participating in the gatherings. The focus group also provided insight into the transformations participants noticed since participating in the

DLGs and the benefits they believed they derived from the sessions.

Participants. In all, seventy-nine 8th-grade students participated in the DLGs with seventy-one participants giving the researchers their assent and parental consent. The reason being, the DLGs were implemented as part of the regular classes for 8th graders in the school. Thus, all students in 8th grade, seventy-nine in number, participated in the sessions but only the contributions of seventy-one participants who voluntarily gave their assent and parental consent were involved in the data analysis and report. However, for this paper, we focused on the experiences of seven students who felt marginalized and their contributions during the DLG sessions. These seven students were selected based on the fact that their contributions during the DLGs indicated that they had experienced some sort of discrimination and marginalization. These include students who have been historically and systematically marginalized because of their ethnicity, language, culture, region of origin, and (dis)ability status, among others (Odumah and Golo 2016; UNESCO 2023). Particularly, in the context of Ghana, the Akans are labelled as boastful people who choose money instead of values and good moral practices (Joshua and Taylor-Abdulai 2014). Similarly, the Gas have suffered for being considered quarrelsome and the Fantes comedians who spend all their monies on food (Joshua and Taylor-Abdulai 2014; Odumah and Golo 2016). The selected students were then interviewed for an in-depth understanding of the issues raised and for the researcher to acquire some background knowledge about them.

The data gathered was supported by participants' contributions during the interviews conducted and contributions from their peers and English teacher during the DLGs. Additionally, information gathered during the focus group discussion and observations conducted outside the DLGs were included to provide context and background where necessary as to why participants' contributions were salient. Given that in Ghana factors such as late entry to school and grade repetitions result in students often being older than the expected age for their grades (Kyereko et al. 2022; UNICEF 2020), the marginalized group under discussion included five girls and two boys aged thirteen to sixteen years. This was a heterogeneous group where the students had mixed academic abilities and belonged to different ethnic groups in Ghana. These included the Akan, Ga-Dangme and Ewe ethnic groups (see Table 1). The compulsory school in which the study was conducted is a Junior High School located within the Greater Accra region which is the capital of Ghana. This location, apart from being the capital city of the country, is noted for its highly diverse community as a result of inter-regional migration.

The table below provides a brief overview of the marginalized participants under discussion. Their names have been pseudonymised to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1 Participants of the study.			
Participant	**Gender**	**Age**	**Ethnicity**
Ama	Female	16	Akan (Akyem)
Anthony	Male	15	Akan
Adorkor	Female	16	Ga-Dangme
Dora	Female	14	Akan (Fante)
Regina	Female	13	Ewe
Akpene	Female	13	Ewe
Mensah	Male	14	Akan

Data analysis. The dialogues during the DLGs and all the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Meanwhile, all spontaneous contributions in the Ghanaian languages were translated into English by the first author. This was analysed thematically in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of thematic analysis. While familiarizing ourselves with the data, key themes that emerged from the study were extracted (Bryman, 2012) and coded. Salient points and general themes which shared some similarities throughout the data were collated. The researchers reviewed these themes and agreed on those themes with sufficient examples to substantiate their inclusion in the report. The data was thus coded accordingly with particular attention to evidence that suggested that (a) students' contributions were respected based on egalitarian dialogue (b) participants found a space to freely share their feelings and (c) students who were otherwise diffident or insecure had developed some sort of self-confidence.

Ethics. Ethical principles in accordance with the European Commission Ethics for researchers (2013) were adhered to, particularly its recommendations for research involving developing countries. Additionally, prior to its inception, the research gained ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board, that is the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Deusto with reference number ETK-28/20-21. Since the research involved students enrolled in a school, permission was sought from the institutional head for approval before the study began. Informed consent was obtained from parents, and the directive from a few guardians who declined to allow their children to participate in the study was adhered to despite their children giving the researchers their assent to take part in the study. In this case, since the DLGs were implemented as part of the normal school routine, these students took part in the DLGs, but their contributions were not involved in the data analysis and report. Besides, to ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used instead of the real names of all participants mentioned in the paper. Overall, participants were treated with respect and dignity.

Results

Findings from the present study indicated that DLGs created affordances for historically marginalized students to share their feelings and experiences in an egalitarian dialogic space. It gave these students a platform to transform their relationships and attitudes and helped boost their self-confidence. As such, contributions inferring that participants (a) were respected irrespective of their status; (b) had a space to freely share their feelings; and (c) who were otherwise diffident or insecure had developed some sort of self-confidence were noted and included in the findings reported. Where the DLGs enabled participants to share meaningful experiences that help students to change their expectations and attitudes towards education and eventually transformed participants' educational experiences in the classroom.

Egalitarian dialogic space. The DLGs provided participants with an egalitarian dialogic space to freely share their opinions in an equal and respectful atmosphere. This infers that students' contributions were respected irrespective of their status. Given that egalitarian dialogue is one of the principles of DLGs, this was emphasized throughout the sessions. Thus, it was well accepted and practised by participants thereby, granting all students an interactive space to share their views on the books read without fear of judgement. This was highlighted during the second interview with one of the participants in the extract below. Where during the DLGs, Ama, a female student reflected on the possibility of freely speaking grounded on the value of equality:

Now I can feel free to speak in the class and read….. at first when we were doing the literature and you mention some words wrong they laugh at you but now they don't laugh …… some girl in the class told me that we are all the same, some people they can read some people they cannot read and understand … what you can do she cannot do and what she can do you cannot do so we are all the same …

This is particularly important because Ama is a student known in the class as academically weak and a frequent absentee. During the observations conducted outside the DLGs, three of her classmates mentioned that she stopped speaking in class because she had a huge quarrel with someone who laughed at her for answering a question wrong and often absented herself from school. Nonetheless, her participation in the DLGs was positive, since she attended all the sessions except one and felt comfortable reading aloud, speaking and sharing her opinion in class, as reflected in the observations conducted.

Gradually, students who used to laugh at their classmates changed their behaviour during the DLGs. For example, one of the students, Kwame made a pronunciation mistake during one of the DLG sessions, and the classmates did not laugh, instead, another student help him by suggesting the correct word. The facilitator noticed this transformation and lauded the students for showing Kwame that respect. This was corroborated by their teacher who in her own words stated:

I have also realized that initially when he gets up to talk then, the whole class will start laughing and making noise but now they pay attention to him.

Drawing on this, it was therefore not a surprise when the students were asked to share how the DLGs had helped them, Kwame himself stated: "we should show respect to people who are older than us, even our juniors we should show respect to them so that they can respect us too". Thus, the egalitarian space created during the DLGs enabled them to think about the importance of being respected regardless of age or grade level.

Similarly, the principle of speaking one's mind without fear of judgement from colleagues was emphasized by another student, Anthony during the last DLG session. This is evident in the quote below:

Oh! It has helped us, it has helped plenty people here because if we are in the class if you are talking you raise your hand the teacher *mmch* [exclamation] here we have opened the circle, circle one! So, everybody is talking if you raise your hand they will give you the microphone you speak out, you show your idea you get me so here everybody comfortable so here I think is a good place.

This allusion to oneness and equality was reiterated by another student: Regina, during the focus group discussion. When asked to talk about the benefits they had derived from participating in the DLGs she stated that "It has helped us to treat each other equally because we are all human beings whether rich or poor, whether the person is disabled, anything at all, we should treat the person equally".

Platform to transform relationships and attitudes. The DLGs provided students with a platform to share their grievances with their classmates where they were not simply heard but listened to. As such, participants had a space to freely share their feelings and instances where they felt poorly treated by their peers. This has impacted their relationships and attitudes. The call to voice out one's feelings was reiterated during the gatherings hence it was not surprising when one of the students, Adorkor, identified a connection in the book *Oliver Twist* and shared it during the second DLG session, thereby paving way for others to voice out and share their feelings.

Oliver was given the opportunity to see Mr Dr Losborne… opportunity comes, but once so, we should give people the authority to express their feeling …

This is a student who informed the researcher during the first interview conducted with her that she was laughed at for putting on worn-out shoes, therefore, she was unable to go out for recess on the said day. For this student to be able to call out to her peers to express their feelings when given the opportunity demonstrates a positive impact the DLGs had on this participant. It is worth noting that although she used the word authority instead of opportunity, none of the students made fun of her.

In the subsequent DLG session, Ama heeded the call to express one's feelings and shared that she felt unhappy when in school and sometimes did not want to go to school. This is illustrated in the following:

Anytime that I come to school I am not happy because I always try to read and I am not perfect …they laugh at me. Sometimes I myself I do not want to come to school because…I will remember that when I read I do not understand and when I go to my friends to explain me too then they gossip about me that you this girl you are coming to school you don't know anything …

When Ama finished speaking, the atmosphere was very quiet. Leading to the creation of awareness and eventually, a transformation in students' actions. This was evident during the second interview with another student, Dora when she mentioned that, her friends belonging to the Ewe ethnic group since the implementation of the DLGs are now conscious and make efforts to speak English instead of Ewe when she (Dora) is in their mist to ensure that she understands and follows ongoing discussions. This is illustrated in the excerpt below:

Like when we are doing DLGs we raised a topic like sometimes our actions make other people feel bad so when like my Ewe friends they are about to speak their language and they remember what we said in the DLGs they will say it in English so that I will also understand what they are trying to say…

Another student also used the platform to register her dislike of the way her classmates called her names because her uniform was big. This took place during the third DLG session held with all participants, where Regina stated:

Madam please me my uniform they say it's "osofo maame" (prophetess or pastor's wife) and maternity wear and some people too they call me "abrewa" (old lady) they said that I am born in the twelfth (12th) century I don't like it …….

This created awareness among participants concerning the effects their utterances and mockery have on their colleagues. At the end of the study, Regina mentioned during the focus group discussion that most of her peers had stopped calling her "abrewa" (old lady). The few who did, did so jokingly and not in mockery hence she did not get angry nor sad. This is evident in the following excerpt when she said:

First they used to call me names but now they have stopped and I like that, but this morning someone called me "abrewa wei su dɛn na ɛhanu!" (meaning what is wrong with this old woman!)

Researcher: you said they have stopped, but there is this one person who has not stopped?

Regina: yes, but the person is saying it for fun.

Researcher: so you didn't get angry?

Regina: No, I just laughed!

Boost self-confidence. Participants indicated that the DLGs helped boost their self-confidence and self-esteem. This came up after the students had called out to their friends to be bold and speak up. In that, students who refrained from speaking or answering questions in class because they felt unconfident, are now actively participating in the class. An example is Regina, who as mentioned by the teacher, did not really like talking and the teacher had to make efforts to get her to stand up and contribute to discussions in class. During the seventh DLG session, Regina called out to her classmates to be bold. In her own words, this is what she had to say "we should not run away from our fears…we should be bold …. and speak out"

Additionally, during the focus group discussion Regina indicated that unlike before, she could now stand in front of the class and talk. This is evident in the excerpt below, where she states "now I can stand in front of the class and talk, and they will listen to me".

Ama, another student who felt marginalized also reported noticing an improvement in her self-confidence and that of others during the second interview with her. While reflecting on how the DLGs have been beneficial for her, she reported that:

Now when a teacher asks me a question I don't feel shy again, I can get up and answer the question… I thought it was only me that I feel shy in class but now I see that those people that feel shy are improve, now they can answer questions…

In addition, Dora also indicated an improvement in her self-confidence. This was evident when she shared her experience with her father during the final DLG session:

It (the DLG) has helped a lot because it has helped me to learn how to express my feelings about many things and then it has helped me to know how I will talk and when I will talk to people … like today, this morning when I was coming, I was late and my father was delaying so I waited when his mood was a little bit good then I told him I will leave before him and he said okay fine and I left.

Upon further discussions during the second interview with her, this participant revealed that initially, she would not have been able to tell her father she wanted to leave home before he does. Even if she did, he would have preferred to drop her off at school and would never agree for her to leave on her own. However, through the DLGs, she has learnt to approach people in a more respectful way. For this participant to be able to transfer a principle learnt during the DLGs to transform the relationship she has with her father reveals the positive impact the gatherings had in boosting participants' self-confidence.

Also, Akpene one of the seven students identified, mentioned during the focus group discussion that she had developed the confidence to answer questions in class. She explained that: "at first, I didn't have that courage to answer questions in class, but now after participating in the DLGs I have been answering questions in class …"

This was also confirmed by the teacher who mentioned that the girl used to be very shy and timid. However, since the implementation of the gatherings, she has noticed that the student has become more vocal and even participates in extracurricular activities such as joining the school's Drama and Dance club. The teacher mentioned that Akpene led the dance group and played a role in the drama performed by the club during the school's anniversary on 16th December 2021, which the researcher witnessed. The student confirmed the teacher's observation during the discussion and stated that she knew how to sing but was unable to stand in front of people to sing. However, she now sings in front of the whole congregation in her church. This attribute of confidence and bravery emerging from the DLG was emphasized by Dora during the same focus group discussion. This is evident in the excerpt below:

Dora: it helped us to be brave

Moderator: in what way?

Dora: like if we want to do something, we should be brave about it we should not look at what people will say about us.

Coming from a student who was shy and unable to voice her opinion to her friends and even her father demonstrates the positive influence the gatherings have had on her. Similarly, during the focus group discussion, another student who felt marginalized testified about the impact the DLGs had on him.

Mensah: The Odyssey has helped me to learn that we should be brave, courageous and critical thinker

Moderator: how has it helped you to be brave and a critical thinker?

Mensah: if you are in a situation, you need to think twice and think deep so that you can be out of that problem if me and my friends are in trouble I will think deep……

For this student who during one of the observations conducted outside the DLGs had a discussion with the researcher where he reported being laughed at and thus sometimes did not want to draw attention to himself to feel confident enough to share his contribution alone is a sign of bravery on his part. These transformations attest to the fact that DLGs indeed boost participants' self-confidence and increase their self-esteem.

Discussions and conclusions

Dialogic Literary Gatherings indeed transform classrooms to provide high-quality education for all, especially those historically marginalized. Aligning with research along these lines (Garcia Yeste et al. 2017), our findings report that the DLGs transformed the narrative in the 8th-grade classroom from one where marginalized students felt their contributions were only considered depending on their status and academic performance to one where their contributions were considered based on egalitarian dialogue. In addition, students' contributions as shown above emphasised the interactive and equal space participants obtained and felt respected while they participated in the DLGs. As reported in the results, after participating in the DLGs, students felt they had a platform where their views were now respected and considered irrespective of their standing in society or academic performance. This acknowledgement and respect for peers despite existing differences conform with the principles of egalitarian dialogue and equality of difference as suggested by Flecha (2000).

Granted that DLGs make affordances for participants to freely share their thoughts and feelings (Soler-Gallart 2019) to the extent of using their personal life experiences as examples and basis for discussion (Flecha 2000; Soler 2015), the DLGs provided marginalized students in the 8th-grade classroom with a platform

to share their grievances while transforming their relationships and attitudes. DGLs created affordances for the students not simply to be heard but to be listened to. For instance, it is common in Ghana for some guardians to sew uniforms which are a bit big for their wards. This is with the assumption that students grow fast hence, they will grow into the big uniforms and parents would not have to buy new ones within a short period. Thus, when Regina shared her concerns regarding the mockery of her uniform being big, participants probably became conscientious. Thereby making room for friends who constantly mocked her to listen and empathize with her. Aligning with research conducted within the field, this finding reiterates the fact that the DLGs make affordances for all participants to engage in dialogic interactions (Santiago-Garabieta et al. 2021) and make meaning of the information gained. By so doing these vulnerable ones, the marginalized had a voice in the classroom and felt appreciated and not judged for their differences. Apart from encouraging these vulnerable ones to voice out and share their feelings, this platform enabled marginalized students to talk about the differences that existed between their classmates and themselves. Eventually, overcoming Dei (2005a, 2005b) reported difficulty in talking about differences in Ghanaian society.

Furthermore, the DLGs transformed marginalized students' educational experience from one of shyness and diffidence as a result of discrimination from peers to one filled with assertiveness and high self-esteem. Consistent with research within the field, (Alvarez et al. 2018; Garcia Yeste et al. 2017) where participants despite their experiences of stigmatization and exclusion became confident and empowered to transform their self-concept, the DLGs helped boost participants' confidence. Thus, students became assertive and willingly participated in class proceedings and school activities in which they would otherwise not take part. Apart from these, participants testified having transferred the skills obtained to their personal lives where after years of remaining behind the curtains, they were now engaging in activities that empower them. These accentuate the potential of DLGs in developing participants' self-confidence (Díez-Palomar et al. 2020) and a positive transformation in their personal lives.

Finally, our findings revealed that DLGs provided marginalized students in the 8th-grade classroom under study with an egalitarian dialogic space to freely share their opinions without fear of judgement. It granted this group of students a platform to share their grievances while transforming their relationships and attitudes with their classmates and helped boost participants' self-confidence and self-esteem. Resonating with research along these lines (Díez-Palomar et al. 2020; García-Carrión, Villardón-Gallego et al. 2020; Garcia Yeste et al. 2017; Soler 2015), the DLGs enabled all students to be engaged in the teaching and learning process thereby eventually ensuring an inclusive quality education for all (SDG-4). Two decades after Mercer and colleagues (1999) demonstrated the importance of explicitly teaching children how to use language to reason, our findings confirm the critical role of quality talk in the classroom for reasoning and learning among students. Hence, this study shows how the increasing evidence about classroom dialogue accommodates diverse ways to create affordances for students not only to be taught how to reason but also, to scaffold their own thinking.

These transformations infer that students by having a voice in the classroom were respected and appreciated for their differences. Besides, students such as Ama, could make new meaning to their educational experiences and turn away from truancy, thereby potentially remaining in school. Indicating that human development and learning is indeed a socially mediated process based on interaction (Vygotsky 1978) where students and or participants through dialogue, are empowered and supported to make meaning of their experiences and the world as a whole (Freire 1970; Flecha 2000). Nonetheless, due to time constraints,

the study was limited by its inability to measure the impact of the DLGs on marginalized students' academic performance. Future research could delimit this setback by exploring this option. Notwithstanding granted that little is known about Dialogic Learning, particularly DLGs in Africa despite its success worldwide, this study contributes to science by replicating this approach in Ghana. It is the first study to implement DLG in the country, thereby augmenting the number of countries this study has been implemented in. Its success is relevant for educational stakeholders seeking innovative strategies that transform discriminated and marginalized students' experiences and potentially keep such vulnerable ones in school.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Author contributions
EA and RGC conceived the idea presented herein. Authors EA, RGC, LVG, and MSG developed a plan for the theory. EA and RGC designed the methodology, with the support of LVG and MSG. EA collected the data under the guidance and supervision of RGC. EA and RGC analysed the findings and drafted the first version of the manuscript. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, and analysis. All authors revised and contributed to drafting the final manuscript and approved it.

Competing interests
The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval
This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Deusto, Spain (Date 30 /03/2021. Reference Number ETK-28/20-21).

Informed consent
Informed consent and where applicable assent were obtained from all participants included in the study. Thus, for students under the age of 18, parental or guardian consent was sought followed by participants' assent to voluntarily participate in the study.

Additional information

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