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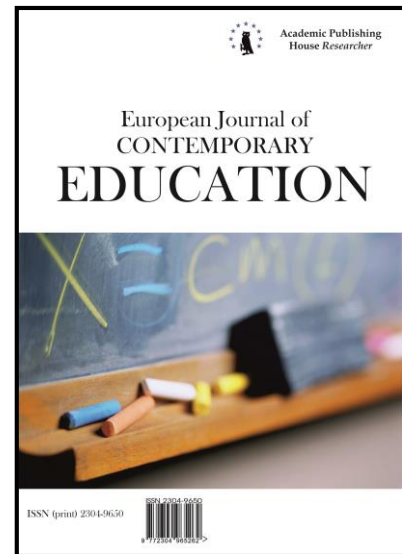
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“If I Should Stop Teaching Now, Where Will I Go?” Turnover Intentions among High School Teachers in Ghana

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Abstract

Teachers form one of the essential professional groups in the development domain of every country. Although most senior high school teachers in Ghana complains about poor conditions of service, a lot of them are still at post. The key research goal was to explore the retaining factors of senior high school teachers, within their existing demotivating Ghanaian socioeconomic context. Eighteen individual interviews were conducted among senior high school teachers in the Eastern Region using an interview guide. By means of an Inductive Content Analysis, three major themes emerged; (a) teachers' retention factors, (b) teachers' motivation factors and (c) Helping factors. It is remarkable that, motivation to these participants did not necessarily mean job satisfaction and job retention. Intrinsic motivation was rather perceived as influencing job performance while extrinsic motivations were needed to retain them. In general, the absence of these extrinsic motives were replaced with other retention factors like less stress at work, increasing liberty at work, and absence of alternative employment opportunities.

Keywords: Senior High School Teacher; Job Retention; Job Motivation; Turnover Intention; Eastern Region; Ghana.

1. Introduction

Teachers in Ghana have a long history as one of the most essential occupations in the drive for national development. As far back as the post-colonial era, Ghana's first president, Dr Kwame

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Nkrumah placed their training and welfare as essential. To his government, teachers ought “*to give service that is second to none*” (McWilliam, & Kwamena-Poh, 1975: 97). In this regard, teachers in Ghana’s first Republic, enjoyed one of the best wages and conditions of service as compared to all professions with analogous qualifications (McWilliam, & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). After the coup d’état of the Nkrumah government, several governments had tried in their best capacities to improve Ghana’s educational system with varying outcomes on teachers’ training and employment conditions (Sarfo, & Adusei, 2015).

Though Ghana’s educational system has been experiencing an undulating effect, the dark period of the nation’s economy between the 1970s and the early 1980s was its worst era. Due to poor remuneration and conditions of service, several professional teachers migrated from Ghana to many countries, with Nigeria being the topmost. This made the percentage of basic school teachers, for example, to drop from 67.95% [1978] to 59.49% [1984] (Pecku, 1998). As a result, this crisis left a demand gap for teachers in the country to fill across the different cycles.

The issue about the demand for secondary or high school teachers surpasses the supply in most African countries including Ghana. Mulkeen, Chapman, DeJaeghere, and Leu (2007) attributed this to “*factors such as secondary teacher attrition, bottlenecks in the teacher preparation system, and perceived unattractive conditions of service*” [p. v]. In addition, being a teacher can be generally stressful in most settings (Kottler, & Zehn, 2000). When job stress becomes chronic, burnout is often a negative response that often wears teachers down (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2009). Taking it from the classroom environment; high level of boredom, high job stress, poor job motivation and poor job satisfaction were associated with high turnover by several studies within Ghana and beyond (Jiang, & Klein, 2000; Jiang, Klein & Balloun, 2001; Nyarko, Twumwaa, & Adentwi, 2014; Sarfo, & Adusei, 2015).

Teachers in Ghana have intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that are very vital to their career goals and output (Nyarko, Wiafe, & Abdul-Nasiru, 2013). In addition, satisfaction with salary is significantly associated with the intention of public school teachers to quit post (Cobbold, 2015). On the contrary, little have been done to bring to light the puzzling nature of teachers’ poor motivation and what is retaining them at post in Ghana. This debate in Ghana has been battled for a while in the quantitative domain with varying findings. In a recent study among Junior High School teachers in the Accra metropolis, Nyarko et al. (2014) showed a positive relationship between teachers’ motivation and their job satisfaction. However, they were silent on whether motivation and their job satisfaction necessarily will cause teachers in Ghana to be retained in their jobs.

Nonetheless, Hedges (2002) indicated that teachers in Ghana experiences hardship due to late payment of salaries. In a more critical sense, some teachers in Ghana chose the profession because of some potential benefits like job security and remuneration, rather than the love for the profession. In some instances, teaching as a profession seem to be the only haven for the less qualified candidates as approximately 69% and 40% of trainee teachers had the lowest possible passes in English and mathematics respectively (Akyeampong, & Stephens, 2002).

This qualitative study is vital as recent quantitative studies in Ghana (Aglomasa, & Avoke, 2013; Nyarko et al., 2014) were quiet on suggesting the possible experiences that may be leading to this paradoxical situation. Interestingly, a recent qualitative study by Sarfo and Adusei (2015) paints the picture that teachers’ job dissatisfaction within Ghana’s Primary School system usually affects pupils’ overall satisfaction and future achievements. The purpose of this study is to provide answers to the question: what is retaining teachers in the senior high school within the existing demotivating Ghanaian socioeconomic context?

2. Method

Participants

Using purposeful and snowball sampling methods, interviews were conducted among teachers in senior high schools in the Eastern Region. The Eastern Region of Ghana was selected because of the agitation record of the Eastern Regional Branch of National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) in the country. These NAGRAT members a decade ago stood vehemently to go on an indefinite strike against the government in request for better conditions of service (Ghana News Agency, 2006). With an inclusion criteria of graduate teachers who have taught for more than five (5) years in public senior high schools in the Eastern Region, eighteen (18) participants

were interviewed till theoretical saturation. Table 1 gives a summary of participants' demographic characteristics.

Measures

A semi-structured interview guide was developed from previous studies in Ghana (Nyarko et al., 2014; Mulkeen et al., 2007). The guide was used to elicit responses between 30 to 60 minutes per session. The questions asked included:

1. What is your perception about leaving your job as a teacher?
2. What is your view on satisfaction as a graduate teacher in the senior high school?
3. Can you explain why you are still keeping your job as a teacher?
4. What do you want to be improved by your employers?
5. What will be an acceptable net pay for a graduate teacher based on your entry grade in the current economic situation?

Asking these questions allowed the teachers the freedom to tell their story without any restriction. We asked prompt questions like: “can you highlight that...?”; “did you say that...?” etc. to assist clarification rather than serving as leading questions (van Manen, 2000). At the close of the interview, a leading question: “is there something you feel it is important that you want to add?” was asked. This was supposed to bring out any new information that was left out.

Table 1. Summary of Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Gender	
Male	Female
TRm1, 34 years old, PS, 11 years in the service	TRf1, 52 years old, DD I, 32 years in the service
TRm2, 39 years old, PS, 10 years in the service	TRf2, 37 years old, PS, 14 years in the service
TRm3, 40 years old, PS, 16 years in the service	TRf3, 32 years old, PS, 10 years in the service
TRm4, 40 years old, PS, 13 years in the service	TRf4, 35 years old, PS, 15 years in the service
TRm5, 33 years old, PS, 9 years in the service	TRf5, 40 years old, PS, 15 years in the service
TRm6, 48 years old, DD II, 23 years in the service	TRf6, 34 years old, PS, 6 years in the service
TRm7, 35 years old, PS, 10 years in the service	
TRm8, 34 years old, PS, 10 years in the service	
TRm9, 36 years old, PS, 9 years in the service	
TRm10, 39 years old, PS, 13 years in the service	
TRm11, 40 years old, PS, 14 years in the service	
TRm12, 32 years old, PS, 8 years in the service	

Notes: Teacher Respondent, Male = TRm; Teacher Respondent, Female = TRf; PS = Principal Superintendent; DD = Deputy Director.

Procedures

Ethical authorisation to carry out the study was sought from the Institutional Review Board of the International Network Center for Fundamental and Applied Research. Teachers from senior high schools in the Eastern Region were then contacted through their colleagues and heads after

our intentions were made clear through introductory letters from the authors. We used purposeful sampling technique to get to the primary informants. Using the snowball sampling technique, some of the colleagues of the primary informants who were always sharing thoughts of leaving their present teaching jobs were directed and contacted.

After piloting the guide with a graduate teacher who was teaching in a primary school, we made various changes to enhance the validity and reliability of guide. Ensuring all other ethical issues, and reliability and validity in qualitative research; we undertook individual interview sessions in person or on mobile phone [if the person was far due to distance]. After the interview data collection, all participants were thanked for their cooperation.

Data Analysis

We employed the Inductive Content Analysis to allow themes to emerge out of the data. The authors audio-recorded all interviews and manually transcribed them. Since interviews were concurrently collected, transcribed and analysed manually until reaching theoretical saturation, we were much familiar with data before the end of the data collection. Nonetheless, two (2) weeks were used to compare one transcript’s themes with the other till we finally completed our analysis. During the analysis, we anonymised names using pseudonyms and codes to guarantee confidentiality. The aim of the induction process was to enable us to systematise emerging themes to bring to light answers from respondents themselves while bracketing our experiences and feelings as teachers (Marshall, & Rossman, 1999; Morse, 2007).

3. Results

At theoretical saturation, 3 main themes emerged during our Inductive Content Analysis. These were; (a) teachers’ retention factors, (b) teachers’ motivation factors and (c) Helping factors. Table 2 shows a summary of themes and their respective sub-themes.

Table 2. Thematic Output of the Summarised Data

Themes	Sub-themes [N = 18]
1. Teachers’ retention factors	i.Stress at work [n = 18] ii.Liberty at work [n = 11] iii.Alternative employment [n = 10]
2. Teachers’ motivation factors	i.Love for students [n = 14] ii.Love for the teaching profession [n = 12]
3. Helping factors [conditions of service]	i.Remuneration [n = 18] ii.Accommodation and transportation [n = 10] iii.Promotion system [n = 8]

Notes: N = total sample; n = number of sample for a particular sub-theme

Theme 1: Teachers’ retention factors

Teachers in the senior high school, notwithstanding their turnover intentions were still keeping their jobs for some reasons. It became evident that although these extrinsic factors were not essentially motivating their work output as graduate teachers, it was only serving a purpose of keeping them in the classroom. During the inductive process, three (3) subthemes emerged.

The first sub-theme was the perception that teaching at the senior high school was less stressful, as compared to other jobs. From their expressions, these graduate teachers appraised stress at job as one of the strongest points to leave or stay in a particular job.

Quote from TRf6:

"The workload is somehow manageable; we do not teach the whole day. Sometimes, you may have 2 periods in a day while in some cases, there is no period at all in the day. I'm still teaching because it's a less stressful job".

The second sub-theme under the retention factors was the perceived liberty at work. This theme had both primary and secondary effects. In the primary sense, some of this graduate teachers felt at home within the serene and friendly school work-environment.

Quote from TRf2:

"Are you coming to fight with me because of the chalk or what? We all sit under these trees when we are all free."

On the other hand, a secondary effect of the perceived liberty at work can be seen when teachers base on this perceived freedom to engage in other forms of businesses. Although this may seem quite supportive in the economic sense, such acts during classes' hours may be detrimental.

Quote from TRm3:

"Even as you're interviewing me now, I am from one business. I sell spare-parts and also work as a Taxi driver."

The absence of alternative employment, which is the third sub-theme was very vital. It is worth mentioning that once there are other available options, most of these graduate teachers will vacate their posts.

Quote from TRm1:

"If I should stop teaching now, where will I go? Even those who have recently finished universities in this country are even not getting jobs to do."

Theme 2: Teachers' motivation factors

The sense of motivation among these teachers were expressed more as an intrinsic drive to perform. Although this second major theme can surely lead to some level of retention, it was more recognised within the scope of job satisfaction and the energy to increase productivity. Under this theme, two sub-themes emerged; the love for students and the love for the teaching profession.

With respect to the first sub-theme, respondents placed so much emphasis on their relations with students. It was as if, some form of affection, bonding and responsibility strings were built in the process of teaching and learning.

Quote from TRm4:

"Whenever I see these students, I am very happy. I feel so responsible for their future when I am with these children."

In addition, the achievements of students whether in school or after school, had a lasting drive to make graduate teachers impart knowledge the more. This increased their desire to work more each time. These teachers placed a more priceless value on students' performance as their *"finished products"*.

Quote from TRf4:

"Once we impart knowledge to these students and see them pass their exams, we are pushed to do better."

Finally, the second sub-theme that emerged in the analysis is the love some of these teachers have for their profession. Such a sense of affection for their job brought in a concept of loyalty. It became obvious that these respondents saw their lives to revolve around their profession as more of 'an *innate call*' than an *'employment'*.

Quote from TRf3:

"...as for me, I see myself as a person born for the job and I take delight in teaching."

Theme 3: Helping factors

The third major theme that emerged in our analysis is what we termed as ‘helping factor’. They were helping in the sense that these graduate teachers noted them as missing motivating and retention factors that cannot be fully recovered. In a sense, they expressed them as factors that can only improve their conditions of service but not as current motivating and retention factors. These helping factors were in as expressed as ‘dreams’ or ‘wishes’ that is being sought rather than ‘realities’ that is going to be achieved soon.

Under this theme, 3 sub-themes emerged; remuneration, accommodation and transportation, and promotion system.

Remuneration as the first sub-theme was expressed as a necessity that is missing in their lives. Looking at their graduate /post-graduate qualifications, all the respondents felt that they were being paid below their qualification qualifications.

Quote from TRm1:

“You just look at me; a degree holder who has taught for ten years now and taking a net of 1300 Ghana Cedis a month. I have two children and a wife. Looking at the value of our Cedi, salary range between 2000 to 2500 Ghana Cedis will be adequate.”

At a point, salary was equated with prestige.

Quote from TRm1:

“There is no prestige attached to our job as teachers when you look at our salaries. It is time the government show us some respect as compared with other professions like medical doctors and nurses.”

The state whereby graduate teachers will be accommodated and offered a means of transportation to work was seen as the second sub-theme under the helping factors. Respondents felt that these offers would have made their lives better.

Quote from TRm10:

“If all staff members will be provided with accommodation and even means of transport, it will relieve the burden that most of us teachers go through each day.”

Finally, the third sub-theme that emerged under this theme is promotion system. Respondents felt that the system of promotion and upgrade in ranks is not fair and clear. This sub-theme was crucial because promotion is often linked with upgrade in conditions of service.

Quote from TRf1:

“In some of the government organisations, when you’re due for promotion, there is a tracking system that is fair and will identify those who are due. Ghana Education Service has a cumbersome system which is also ineffective.”

A summary of the results reveal that:

- High school teachers were retained within the poor conditions of service by less stress at work, liberty at work, and alternative employment.
- High school teachers were motivated to perform better by their love for students and love for the teaching profession.
- High school teachers wished they could have some improvement in their conditions of service. Key aspects included; better remuneration, possible accommodation, available means of transport, and better promotion system.

Our work has the following novelties:

- For the first time, our study discovered three major themes; (a) teachers’ retention factors, (b) teachers’ motivation factors and (c) Helping factors
- Essentially, the hope for a better remuneration, availability of accommodation, means of transportation and better promotion systems were observed as ‘helping factors’. These factors were noted as ‘dreams’ or ‘wishes’ that may never be achieved.
- We have used an Inductive Content Analysis explore the factors responsible for the retention of teachers even when they are poorly paid.

4. Discussion

The data analysis revealed an interesting display of issues affecting job performance, job satisfaction, motivation at work and retention of graduate teachers in Ghana. It became obvious that though all 3 themes [retention factors, motivation factors and helping factors] logically could lead to some form of motivation and possible retention, they are not equally perceived as such. From the analysis, graduate teachers in the senior high school although had turnover intentions, kept their jobs because of the less stressful nature of their job, perceived liberty at work, and the relative absence of alternative employment. Despite the fact that these factors appears to be extrinsic forms of motivation, they were perceived as serving more as retention factors. Granting both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations as indispensable to career goals and output of teachers in Ghana (Nyarko et al., 2013), it is clear from this study that extrinsic motivation retain more than intrinsic factors. Even in the developed countries, research have documented that “*teachers are primarily attracted to teaching by intrinsic motivation, but extrinsic factors play a major role in retaining them*” (Cooper, & Avarado, 2006: 17).

The results also indicated that intrinsic factors such as love for students and the teaching profession were linked more to job satisfaction than retention (Cooper, & Avarado, 2006). As supported by Cobbold (2015), intrinsic drives increased the job/career satisfaction of Ghanaian teachers. Since these intrinsic factors were not the main anchorage for retention to a greater extent among these graduate teachers, any better extrinsic offer would cause them to vacate their posts. Recent estimations showed that majority of teachers with Certificate or Diploma in Education who took study leave with pay from the Ghana Education Service leave after attaining their degrees (Cobbold, 2015; Sam, Effah, & Osei-Owusu, 2014).

The third major theme that emerged were the helping factors. We discovered from the interviews that these were factors the respondents wished they should enjoy, though they were not sure they could attain them. These factors did not only affect their drive to give their best but their turnover intentions also. It is important to note that salary for example, was linked with their professional image and brand. As confirmed by studies in the field of attrition, employees who were paid lesser than they felt they should, perceived a greater sense of ‘devaluation’ (Cobbold, 2015; Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). These factors though can help the graduate teachers to stay and give their best, can equally also help them to leave because they present themselves as extrinsic drives that have been desired for long.

5. Limitations

The use of only public Senior High School teachers, may not be very adequate. Future studies will benefit from other institutions where graduate teachers may teach like private senior high schools, vocational and technical schools etc.

6. Conclusion

Graduate teachers in Ghana have qualifications that are equivalent to many professionals in other fields of employment. As every employer aims not only at retaining personnel, but also to maximise their output, the Ghana Education Service (GES) have not fully achieved its best because of some of these factors.

Senior high school teachers in the Eastern Region are still at post because of extrinsic factors like less stress at work, liberty at work and the absence of alternative employment. On the other hand, their love for students and the teaching profession intrinsically motivated them to bring out their best and to enjoy their professions as teachers.

As these two major factors sit on the extremes, helping factors like better remuneration, good promotion system, availability accommodation and transportation were daily dreams that could make them to stay or leave the classroom if offered a second look by GES.

7. Recommendations

We recommend that Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service should strengthen their policies on improving the extrinsic factors that motivate teachers in Ghana. This will enable them to make the teaching profession attractive and lucrative.

Similarly, we recommend an additional investigation into the findings by researchers, educational institutions and policy makers. This effort will aid in finding more answers to problem of poor teacher motivation, satisfaction and retention in Ghana.

Novel themes like 'helping factors' can be looked further in future studies. Even so, findings from this qualitative study have significant implications for pedagogy, human resource management, research and policy.

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9. Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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