

Exploring issues of teacher retention and attrition in Ghana: A case study of Public Senior High Schools in Kwabre East district of Ashanti region-Ghana

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Abstract

Teacher attrition and retention in the education sector is a matter of concern for all Ghanaians and as such the study was conducted to explore issues concerning teacher retention and attrition in Ghana. The study was descriptive survey in nature, and sought to establish factors that militate against the retention of teachers, as well as their satisfaction of the conditions of service in public senior high schools. The study was conducted in four Senior High Schools and a sample of 116 teachers was randomly selected for the study. A questionnaire was used to collect qualitative data. Findings revealed that most of the senior high school teachers may leave the teaching profession in the nearest future if their conditions of service and salaries, as well as school and classroom environment are not improved. Also the problem of teacher attrition in Senior High Schools in the district is partly attributable to non-compliance of the conditions of service for teachers by Ghana Education Service. Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations: As a matter of urgency, the state should review the conditions of service for teachers and ensure their full implementation. Moreover, the state should take immediate steps to improve upon infrastructure in Senior High Schools, especially, those located in rural communities, to create conducive environment for teaching and learning.

Keywords: Attrition; retention; senior high schools; education; conditions of service; and teachers.

1. Introduction

Teacher attrition is a global phenomenon that requires critical attention from all stakeholders of education. It is a problem not only in developing countries such as Ghana but in advanced countries like United States of America as well. This makes it a global issue that needs to be tackled seriously to ensure that teachers recruited are also retained in the teaching profession. In the United States, for instance, teacher dropout problem is continuously and gradually getting out of control. Teacher attrition has grown by 50 percent over the past fifteen years, and the national teacher turnover rate has risen to 16.8 percent. In urban schools it is over 20 percent, and in some schools and districts, the teacher dropout rate is higher than the student dropout rate (Kain, 2011). This high rate of teacher turnover in the U.S. school systems costs more than \$7 billion a year (Hernandez, 2007).

The situation in Ghana is not different from that of the United States. A report of a survey on teacher attrition in 2009 commissioned by the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and the Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU) revealed a very high teacher attrition rate in Ghana. The survey revealed that the Ghana Education Service (GES) estimates that about 10,000 teachers leave the classroom every year for other professions (GNAT, 2009). The high rate of teacher attrition impacts negatively on school improvement efforts as it disrupts the stability and continuity of teaching. Whereas high-performing schools are distinguished by stability and continuity of teaching, studies show that teaching traditionally has been characterized as an occupation with a very high turnover rate (Lawrence, 1999). This affirms the situation in Ghana where the Teacher Training institutions in the country produce so many teachers every year but there is still shortage of teachers because they are not retained in the profession.

Cobbold (2007) laments that, policy makers and school leaders in Ghana face the challenge of retaining qualified teachers in schools to ensure quality teaching and learning for all students. A national study (Quansah, 2003 as cited in Cobbold, 2007) reports a shortage of 40,000 trained teachers in basic schools, with 24,000 of these vacancies filled by untrained personnel. The Colleges of Education which produce the bulk of basic school teachers also do not have the facilities to admit and turn out enough teachers despite yearly increase in admission of teacher candidates. Added to this problem is the fact that many basic school teachers after graduating from the colleges teach for only three years, and then take advantage of the study leave with pay facility in the Ghana Education Service (GES), by which they upgrade their certificate qualifications to diploma and degree levels in

the universities through full-time study on full salary. The sad and painful aspect of it is that, a great majority (about 70%) of such teachers having enjoyed the study leave facility, do not return to the classroom after their studies (Akyeampong, 2002). This makes an otherwise good policy of the government counterproductive (Bame, 1991).

The popular saying in Ghana that “If you can read this, Thank the Teacher” clearly depicts that teachers play a vital role in the society and that they are indispensable ingredient in national development. Teachers are therefore the bedrock for all human learning, and they are the hub around which individual citizens are made to realize their full potential to serve their nations (Adu, 2005). Caillods, as cited in Ariko and Simatwa (2011), maintains that the art of teaching is a developmental process, and it involves a complex set of skills, many of which can only be well polished on uninterrupted job experience, hence the issue of teacher attrition impacts negatively on teaching and learning process since it does not ensure continuity in the teaching and learning process. Considering the careers of some prominent people such as Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and Dr. K. A. Busia, as teachers, it can be said that teaching had in the past attracted some of the best brains in Ghana. In those days the classroom became the ultimate place for some brilliant students to exhibit their academic prowess and the real treacheries in them. The economic benefits and the social prestige enjoyed by the then teacher served as motivating factors in attracting many people into the teaching profession and retaining them.

However, the current situation is totally different. The teaching profession has shown and continues to show some glimpses of impoverishment. Most of the people who enter the teaching profession these days do not take it as a lifelong career. It is sad to note that, some teachers find themselves in the teaching profession due to non-existence of other job opportunities while others also consider teaching as a stepping stone or a spring board to enter into other professions. Such teachers leave the teaching profession with the least chance they get and this situation creates teacher shortages in our schools (Koomson, 2005). The issue of teacher shortage is a big educational challenge in Ghana. Getting a chance to train and recruit teachers is a long, expensive and uncertain process. It has therefore, been essential to safeguard the exit of the few existing teachers by the school managements. The problem of teachers leaving the classroom seems to be on the increase every year, and this suggests that though so much money is spent on training and recruiting teachers, little or no attention is paid to their retention (GNAT, 2009; Bame, 1991; Vroom, 1998).

The question to ask now is “what is the driving force?” or “what factors militate against retention of teachers in the teaching profession in Ghana?” This is what this study seeks to find out.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Ghana’s education sector has been bedevilled with many challenges since independence. The challenges include inadequate and poor infrastructure, insufficient funding, low enrolment and shortage of qualified teachers especially in the rural areas. Within the sphere of challenges, teacher shortage, which is largely associated with low rate of teacher training and high level of teacher retention and attrition, has been identified as one of the most foreseeable but unsolvable problems facing the education system in Ghana. Despite the various interventions that had been put in place by the state to retain teachers, which includes the Single Spine Pay Policy and the best teacher award scheme, many teachers, continue to leave the teaching field for other professions every year. This was confirmed by a survey conducted in 2009 on Teacher Attrition in Ghana. This situation has prompted the researchers to seek for the various factors that are preventing teachers from staying in the teaching profession permanently.

The actual problem that this study seeks to address, therefore, is to find out the various factors that are militating against retention of teachers and for that matter, responsible for teacher attrition in Ghana.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to seek for the various factors that are militating against teacher retention in Ghana and for that matter, preventing teachers from remaining in the teaching profession.

The following are the major research questions that will be looked into in this study:

1. What are the factors that militate against retention of teachers in public senior high schools?
2. What extent are teachers in public senior high schools satisfied with their conditions of service?

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Design of the study

Descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. A descriptive survey involves asking the same set of questions often prepared in the form of written questionnaire or ability test of a large number of individuals either by mail, by telephone or in person. Such a study reports the way things are and draws responses from a wide range of people (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

Moreover, descriptive survey has an advantage of enabling the researchers to draw conclusions from the study since it gives an accurate picture of events and seeks to explain people’s perception and behaviour. However,

associated with descriptive survey design is the difficulty of ensuring that the questionnaire administered is clear and not ambiguous. Equally important is the problem of getting sufficient number of the questionnaire completed and returned in order that analysis can be made. Despite the disadvantages associated, descriptive survey design was considered the most appropriate since the study is aimed at reporting the way things are.

2.2 Population

The population for the study consisted of teachers in all the seven public Senior High Schools in the Kwabre East District namely, Simms Senior High School, Kofi Agyei Senior High School, Gyama Pensan Senior High School, Adventists Girls Senior High School, Adanwomase Senior High School, Antoa Senior High School, and S.D.A. Senior High School. With an average of 40 teachers in each school, gives a total of 280 teachers. All the schools were co-educational institutions except Adventists Girls Senior High School which was a single-sex institution.

2.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

A total sample size for the study was 112 comprising 28 teachers from each of the four schools that were selected out of the seven Public Senior High Schools in the district. This is in line with the suggestion of Nwana (1992) that, if the population is few hundreds, a sample size of 40% or more will do.

Four schools representing more than half of the seven schools were selected for the study. The four selected schools were Adanwomase Senior High School, Simms Senior High School, Kofi Agyei Senior High School, and Adventists Girls Senior High School.

To get the four selected schools, the researchers purposively selected Adventists Girls Senior High School for being the only single-sex school in the district and therefore, might have some conditions different from the other six schools which were co-educational institutions. Simple random sampling technique was then used to select three other schools out of the six co-educational institutions which were homogeneous in character. Simple random sampling ensures fair, independent and equal chances for all the population to be selected and that, no member of the population has any more chance of being selected than the other (Osuala, 1993).

To get the three co-educational schools using simple random sampling method, the researchers wrote the name of each of the six schools on a separate piece of paper, folded each of the papers for them to pick three of them. The three schools that were picked were added to the only single-sex school to get the four selected schools.

In addition, purposive sampling technique was used to select 28 teachers from each of the four selected schools who responded to the questionnaire. Teachers of the selected schools were purposively selected for the study because they were the teachers available who were really experiencing the conditions existing in the schools and therefore, could provide the actual information needed for the study. The purposive sampling method enabled the researchers to use his own judgement to select the respondents who were available, capable and could give the needed responses promptly.

2.4 Research Instrument

The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire generally consisted of both likert type, which required the respondents to tick their responses from a given options, and open-ended which required the respondents' views on factors that militate against teacher retention and to offer suggestions and measures that can be adopted to retain teachers. The questionnaire had three sections. Section A consisted of background information on respondents such as gender, age, academic qualification, professional status, teaching experience and location of their schools. These teacher characteristics contribute to the qualities of a teacher and ensure quality teaching and learning (Windham, 1988).

Section B, captioned 'Teacher Retention' had eleven items. The items were of the likert type which requested respondents to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the factors which the researchers assumed to be factors that militate against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools.

Section C of the questionnaire was on implementation of conditions of service for teachers. This section sought for information on fringe benefits and incentives respondents receive from their schools and whether they were satisfied with the implementation of teachers' conditions of service by their employer.

To ensure reliability of the research instrument, the researchers used Cronbach's alpha to test for the reliability of the questionnaire. The test produced a reliability coefficient alpha value of 0.803 indicating that there is consistency and reliability in the questionnaire items.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

A total number of one hundred and twelve (112) questionnaires were administered to teachers in the four selected schools. The researchers used questionnaire because of the large number of respondents and also responding to questionnaire is time saving. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researchers to ensure that copies of the questionnaire got to the respondents at the right time and that each respondent answered one set of questionnaire.

In each of the four selected schools, twenty-eight teachers who were capable, available, and could give the needed responses promptly were purposively selected by the researchers and were given a set of questionnaire

each to respond to. Some of the respondents completed and submitted their questionnaires the same day while others asked the researchers to come for it later.

2.6 Data Analysis

The researchers used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data collected for this study and the results were presented in the form of frequency counts, percentages, and weighted means generated from descriptive statistics.

The data collected were first sorted and edited by the researchers to ensure consistency. With open-ended items, a short list was prepared from a master list of responses in order to arrive at the key responses given by respondents. Thus, Open-ended items were grouped based on the similarity of responses before coding. All data were subjected to frequency count to check and correct coding errors where necessary. A 4-point likert scale was used to analyze the responses for the closed-ended items where Strongly Agree = 4, Agree =3, Disagree =2 and Strongly Disagree =1. Item by item analysis was done by which the results were fed into SPSS software to generate means, frequencies and percentages which were finally used to prepare a table for each item.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Factors that Militate against Teacher Retention

In Section B of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate the extent of which they agree or disagree with some factors that were assumed to be militating against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools.

The results obtained are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Factors that militate against teacher retention

Factors	Mean/Decision
Low salaries of teachers	3.71 (Agree)
Delays in payment of teachers' salaries	3.02 (Agree)
Poor conditions of service for teachers	3.80 (Agree)
Lack of incentives (fringe benefits) in the teaching profession	3.73 (Agree)
Low status (prestige) of teaching profession	3.38 (Agree)
Misuse of study leave to serve as a stepping stone to enter other professions	2.64 (Agree)
Poor school and classroom environment	3.22 (Agree)
Students' indiscipline acts	2.99 (Agree)
Unfriendly working relationship between school management and teachers	2.61 (Agree)

From the results in Table 1 above, it is clear that all the respondents agreed (mean score above 2.5) with the factors assumed to be militating against retention of teachers in public Senior High Schools in the district.

Conditions of Service

The third section of the questionnaire was on conditions of service implementation. To find out the extent of which conditions of service for teachers were implemented, respondents were asked to select some of the fringe benefits that were readily available in their schools.

Table 2: Fringe Benefits readily Available in Schools

Benefits	Frequency (%)
T&T allowance	13 (11.6)
Leave of absence	12 (10.7)
Night allowance	2 (1.8)
Study leave with pay	27 (24.1)
T&T and Night allowance	5 (4.5)
T&T, Leave of absence and Night allowance	4 (3.6)
T&T and Refund of medical expenses	3 (2.6)
T&T and study leave with pay	1 (0.9)
Car maintenance allowance	12 (10.7)
None	33 (29.5)
Total	112 (100)

Statistics in the Table indicates that 24.1% selected study leave with pay while 22.3% representing almost one-quarter of the total respondents answered that Travel and Transport (T&T) allowance and leave of absence were readily available in their schools. However, only one respondent representing 0.9% selected both T&T allowance and Study leave with pay; 1.8% selected Night allowance; and 2.6% selected both T&T and Refund of medical expenses. Additionally, 29.5% of the respondents did not select any of the fringe benefits listed. This might mean that none of the fringe benefits listed was readily available in the schools of such respondents.

When respondents were further asked to indicate which of the fringe benefits they had ever requested for but had been denied, responses given are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Fringe Benefits Denied

Responses	Frequency (%)
T&T allowance	27 (24.1)
Leave of absence	12(10.7)
Refund of medical expenses	15(13.4)
Night allowance	4(3.6)
Study leave with pay	33(29.4)
T&T and refund of medical expenses	8(7.1)
None	13(11.6)
Total	112(100)

Statistics in Table 3 reveals that 13 out of 112 teachers representing 11.6% did not give any response. This means that such teachers had never requested for any of the fringe benefits. It also suggests that they had never enjoyed any of the fringe benefits.

It was further revealed that 42% had been denied refund of their medical expenses and study leave with pay. Only 10.7% and 3.6% had ever requested but denied of their leave of absence and night allowance respectively.

4.0 DISCUSSIONS

Low salaries of teachers

The mean score of 3.71 indicates that respondents agreed that low salaries of teachers are one of the factors that militate against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools in the district. This finding supports the view that low salaries and weak financial incentives create job dissatisfaction among teachers which results in teacher attrition (Lewis, Paik & Protheroe 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2001). There is the need for policy options in the national budget to improve the salary and income conditions of teachers to make the teaching profession more attractive (Hallack, 1990).

Delays in payment of teachers' salaries

The respondents agreed that delays in payment of teachers' salaries is another factor that militates against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools in the district (mean = 3.02). This finding supports the claim that practicing teachers are particularly concerned about the late payment of salaries rather than other non-monetary incentives (Mbanefoh, 1982). Prompt payment of salaries therefore induces greater commitment to teaching (Ubom, 2002).

Poor conditions of service for teachers

With the highest mean score of 3.80 as indicated in Table 3 above, respondents obviously agreed that poor conditions of service for teachers, is one and the most determining factor that militates against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools in the district. This is in conformity to what Blame (1991) stipulated that job dissatisfaction as a result of poor working conditions can lead to teachers dropout, indifference or lack of cooperation among teachers. This finding is in agreement with GNAT's (2009) survey on teacher attrition in Ghana, which identified low salaries and poor working conditions as the major reasons why teachers leave for "greener pastures" in other fields.

Lack of incentives (fringe benefits) in the teaching profession

The respondents again agreed that Lack of incentives (fringe benefits) in the teaching profession militates against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools in the district (mean = 3.73). This agrees with the view that practicing teachers are particularly concerned about the late payment of salaries and the non-payment of fringe benefits rather than other non-monetary incentives (Mbanefoh, 1982). Therefore, effective fringe benefits and incentive programmes put in place by employers can help to keep absenteeism and employee turnover to a tolerable level (Rebore, 1982). More so, fringe benefits are established as a positive determinant of job satisfaction even after controlling for individual fixed effort and testing for the endogeneity of fringe benefits otherwise. (Vroom, 1998).

Low status (prestige) of teaching profession

With the mean score of 3.38, it depicts respondents' agreement that low status (prestige) of the teaching profession in the Ghanaian society is one of the reasons why teachers leave teaching for other professions. This finding confirms the claim of Adelabu (2005) that where teachers feel society is dismissive of the profession, their commitment is undermined. This assertion also conforms Abraham Maslow theory of motivation quoted by Mbua (2003) on the 4th needs of self esteem, ego or status.

Misuse of study leave to serve as a stepping stone to enter other professions

The respondents disagreed that this factor militates against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools (mean = 2.64). In other words, misuse of study leave to serve as a stepping stone to enter other professions is not one of the factors that push teachers out of the teaching profession in the district. This finding is in contrast with the claim that teachers who go for study leave and further studies leave the teaching profession after their course

(Gbadamosi, 2002; GNAT, 2009).

Poor school and classroom environment

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree that poor school and classroom environment militates against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools. The mean score of 3.22 indicates respondents' agreement. This result is in support of earlier studies that when facilities and structures in most schools are dilapidated and inadequate, it demotivates teachers (Adelabu, 2005). Additionally, a pleasant work environment that guarantees job satisfaction is a necessary condition for teacher retention (Bacharach, Baner & Conley, 1986).

Students' indiscipline acts

Respondents did not agree that Students' indiscipline acts militate against teacher retention (mean = 2.99). This is in contrast with the findings of Adelabu 2005 that the widespread students' indiscipline such as truancy, lateness, absenteeism, and roaming the streets during school hours serve as a disincentive to teachers to stay in teaching.

Unfriendly working relationship between school management and teachers

The mean score of 2.61 indicates that respondents disagreed that unfriendly working relationship between school management and teachers militates against teacher retention in public Senior High Schools in the district. This finding contrasts with the assertion that many beginning teachers leave teaching because they think they are neglected by the management system once they are posted to schools (Cobbold, 2007).

Conditions of Service

Fringe benefits can have a significant impact on the ability of an institution to attract and retain good employees (Rebore, 1982). Therefore, teachers who had not been enjoying the fringe benefits are likely to leave their schools.

One person did not answer the question, 22% were satisfied, but a majority of the respondents (77%) were dissatisfied with the conditions of service implementation in their schools. This implies that majority of Senior High Schools teachers are likely to leave their schools for other places where they can get their satisfaction. This is because studies have shown that poor and non-implementation of conditions of service are among the major causes of teacher attrition in Ghana (Cobbold, 2006; GNAT, 2009). When conditions in general are poor, the employee will be dissatisfied with his job (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). The unwillingness of some teachers to pursue teaching-related programme is a clear indication that such teachers would not come back to teach if they got opportunity for further studies. This finding is in agreement with Gbadamosi (2002) that teachers leave once they have upgraded their qualifications through various study leave and sandwich programmes.

5.0 Conclusions

It can be concluded from the study findings that most of the senior high school teachers in Kwabre East district will leave the teaching profession in the nearest future if their conditions of service and salaries, as well as school and classroom environment are not improved.

Secondly, the problem of teacher attrition in the senior high schools in the district is partly attributable to non-implementation of the conditions of service for teachers by their employer. Additionally, management of senior high schools in the district can help to retain their teaching staff by offering them attractive incentive packages. Moreover, teachers who go for study leave or further studies would return to teach if conditions of service for teachers are improved and fully implemented; teachers are given allowances; and more recognition is given to Second Degree and PhD holders in the teaching profession.

Conclusion can further be drawn from the study that enhanced salaries, car and housing loans, free accommodation, free medical care, as well as free education for teachers' wards are the major expectations of teachers in the district that should be satisfied to motivate and retain them.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made by the researchers.

1. The state as a matter of urgency should review the conditions of service for Teachers and ensure it full implementation.
2. The state should take immediate steps to improve infrastructure in the senior high schools especially, those located in rural communities to make the school and classroom environment conducive for teachers to feel comfortable to stay and teach.
3. The state should give more recognition to higher degrees like Masters and PhD, in relation to salary increase, promotions and appointments to top positions in the service. This will attract teachers who go for further studies to return to teach. For instance, teachers who complete further studies should be promoted one step higher on their ranks instead of the two salary incremental

- jumps currently given to such teachers.
4. School management should pay inconvenience and extra duty allowances to teachers who perform additional responsibilities and extra duties. Such allowances should be attractive enough to motivate them to stay in the teaching profession.
 5. Teachers should be educated and encouraged to form credit unions at the school level and also join credit and welfare schemes in Teacher Associations in the country. These facilities will give teachers the opportunity to assess loans to acquire their basic needs, purchase cars and build houses. This will go a long way to raise the status of teachers in the sight of the general public.

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