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Exploring the drivers of teacher professionalism in Ghana

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This research aimed to explore the working conditions teachers in the Ghana Education Service perceived as motivators in their professional practice. The research used mainly a qualitative approach and three focus groups of five members: each were organised with teacher participants drawn from the Ashanti Region purposively selected. The research revealed that the sources of motivation in the participants’ professional practice related to selfless and internal factors rather than external factors. The research concluded that since not all teachers were selflessly and internally motivated, there was the need for the government to do more to improve teachers’ working conditions so as to motivate those that were externally motivated.

Keywords: Ghana Education Service; teacher motivation; drivers; professional practice

Introduction

Teachers are indispensable stakeholders in the success of every country’s education system because of the pivotal role they play in the achievement of educational goals (Lambert 2004; Leigh 2007). At school, the type of relationship teachers develop with students could directly impact positively or negatively on the latter’s learning outcomes (Agezo 2010; Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez 2011). In Ghana, policies and programmes directed towards increasing the quality of education have given little attention to how to motivate teachers (George and Mensah 2011; Mulkeen, Chapman, and DeJaeghere 2007; Tanaka 2010) nonetheless some previous studies (Claeys 2011; Mensah 2011; Tanaka 2010) have shown that a good number of teachers in the Ghana Education Service are motivated in their professional practice. What factors could be responsible for teachers’ motivation for the teaching profession? The purpose of this research was to explore working conditions teachers in the Ghana Education Service perceived as drivers in their professional practice.

Many scholars involved in the study of teacher motivation have posited different explanations of what constitutes teacher motivation depending on their specific fields of application. For example, Velez (2007) has conceptualised teacher motivation as an inspiration in teachers to accomplish a professional goal. To Snowman, Mcowen, and Biehler (2008), teacher motivation may refer to the forces which bring about the arousal, selection, direction and continuation of behaviour in a teacher. In their view, teacher motivation is a concept that assists us in understanding why teachers behave

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the way they do. Motivation to teach is “a complex construct easier to define than to understand… motivation is not observed directly but rather inferred from the teacher’s behavioural indexes such as verbalisations, task choices, and goal-directed activities” (569). In this paper, teacher motivation is conceptualised as anything which spurs teachers onto quality professional practice.

What factors affect teacher motivation?

Broadly speaking, the factors affecting teacher motivation are many and varied. Common classification, however, puts them into three main categories, namely external, internal and selfless factors. Researchers like Bennell and Akyeampong (2007), Claeys (2011) and Javaid (2009) in their own classifications have named external, within-person and selfless factors affecting teacher motivation as extrinsic, intrinsic and altruistic, respectively. External factors are things which concern material benefits and job security and are determined basically by the level and type of external rewards that are available in the work place (Bennell and Akyeampong 2007; Javaid 2009). Sources of teachers’ external motivation may relate to a broad range of factors in their working conditions. These factors may include pay, class size, availability of teaching and learning materials, opportunity for promotion, opportunity to participate in educational policies as well as student discipline (Bennell and Akyeampong 2007; Javaid 2009).

Internal factors refer to the inward desires in teachers for professional growth and performance (Bennell and Akyeampong 2007; Claeys 2011). In effect, many people enter the teaching profession in order to help young people to learn. Such people cherish and value the accomplishment of high student learning outcomes and the work-related factors that allow them to practice their craft successfully (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 2009; Diamantes 2004). Selfless factors in teachers’ professional practice stimulate in them the desire to work with children and/or to serve society (Bennell and Akyeampong 2007; Claeys 2011).

Although external factors such as attractive remuneration and stimulating teaching environment play crucial roles in teacher motivation (Agezo 2010; Bennell and Akyeampong 2007; Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez 2011), the emerging body of literature has affirmed the importance of internal and selfless sources of motivation in teachers’ professional practice. For instance, Williams and Forgasz (2009) in their study involving 373 career change students in teacher education from three Australian universities have concluded that factors such as the desire to work with children, the desire to contribute to the society and the belief in the possession of the attribute of teachers are more important than extrinsic factors in the participants’ decision to become teachers. In a related study also conducted in Australia involving 211 student teachers, Sinclair (2008) has made similar findings asserting that selfless factors such as the desire to work with children and the provision of intellectual stimulation by teaching, calling to teach, love of teaching, perceived easy nature of teaching work and the desire for a career change were responsible for the participants’ motivation in their teaching profession. Still in Australia, Richardson and Watt (2006) have also looked at the background characteristics and teaching motivations for individuals entering teacher education across three major established urban teacher provider universities in the Australian States of New South Wales and Victoria. The participants were the entire cohorts (N = 1653) of first-year pre-service teacher education candidates at three universities in Sydney and Melbourne. They
have also found time for family and job transferability as higher order factors of participants’ motivation.

Furthermore, as part of a longitudinal project, Anthony and Ord (2008) used semi-structured interviews and questionnaire and assigned their 68 participants, who were newly qualified change-of-career teachers in New Zealand, to cluster groups based on their complete interview data. They have found what they called push and pull factors such as loss of previous job, moving into a new settlement, inability to progress in previous jobs, previous desire to be a teacher, time for family and the acquisition of scholarship and sponsorship as being responsible for teachers’ motivation.

Claeys (2011) has made similar observations in her research to identify the US teachers’ initial motivation to select teaching as a profession and to explore the factors that contributed to their desire to remain in teaching. She has used the mixed methods approach and integrated sociocultural and phenomenology was her framework. She has used a non-probability convenience sampling technique in a cross-sectional survey called Motivation Orientation Teacher Survey and open-ended in-depth interviews with 175 compatible novice teachers with five or less than five years of teaching experience. In the research, she has explored the constructs of personal motivation, administrative support and induction support to capture novice teachers’ realities regarding the impact of their sociocultural context (school environment) on their decisions to remain in teaching. Her main findings are that apart from extrinsic factors such as material benefits and job security, intrinsic factors such as internal desire for personal and professional development and working in educational settings and altruistic factors such as a love for and desire to work with children and/or young persons and an inclination to serve society also contributed significantly to the level of motivation that her participants had to remain in teaching or leave the profession.

Using Singapore as an example, Mathew (2005) has contended that the majority of the teachers in Singapore consider their profession as a calling and as such often value the intrinsic rewards of teaching over the extrinsic ones. Conducive working environments such as light work load for teachers, good relationships among teachers and with students and good leadership from principals are likely to bring about job satisfaction in teachers (Mathew 2005).

Research context

Ghana is a country in West Africa with a population of about 23.699 million, a GDP growth of 5.7% and per capita income of $2500 (Index Mundi 2011). The official language of Ghana is English and all lessons from kindergarten to university are taught in English while the local languages and French are studied as second languages in schools. Tribal and ethnic groups use their various local dialects for conversation in households and in non-academic settings. The literacy rate stands at 80.6% for males and 77.9% for females (World Bank 2011).

The research took place specifically in three districts of the Ashanti region of Ghana, namely Kumasi Metropolis, Mampong Municipality and Ashanti Akim North Municipality. Kumasi is the capital city of the Ashanti region. The region has a total of 27 districts. Being the most populous region, it has a population of about 4,780,380 representing about 20% of the national total of 23.699 million and covers
an area of 24,390 km², representing 10.2% of the land area of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service 2010).

**Teaching context in the Ghana Education Service**

This section presents a brief discussion of some important aspects of teachers’ working conditions in the Ghana Education Service in terms of remuneration, study leave with pay and promotions.

*Teachers’ remuneration*

Allowances covering accommodation cost, uniform cost and utility bills included in teachers’ salaries also form a part of the motivation package for teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana. Because of this initiative, the government does not provide accommodation or uniform or pay utility bills for teachers. As a result, most of the teachers live in private houses and just a few are privileged to live in government houses and pay rent at the end of the month to the government. An annual medical allowance of about 15 Ghana Cedis (about AU$ 9) which cannot pay for a single consultation with a doctor is also given to a teacher who produces genuine medical reports. A single consultation with a doctor may cost about AU$ 50. As of 2011, a graduate professional teacher up to the professional rank of Assistant Director II (the third promotion after recruitment), for instance, took about 800 Ghana Cedis (about AU$ 500) as take-home salary per month depending on the person’s added responsibility such as the principal of a basic school (primary or junior high school).

The other responsibilities that go with such remuneration are assistant principal (for both basic and senior high schools), senior housemaster/mistress, housemaster/mistress and head of Department or form master/mistress (for only senior high schools). Within the Ghana Education Service, one key determinant of a teacher’s salary is his or her number of years on a rank, technically called step or incremental jump. A step or incremental jump is a yearly salary increase that teachers get on the first of September each year in order to differentiate them from those on the same rank but juniors in terms of job experience. This means that two teachers could be on the same rank, but their salaries could differ depending on who between them was promoted earlier. The condition of low salaries perhaps compels most teachers to be involved in part-time teaching jobs and other engagements such as selling general goods at the market to earn extra income to augment what is received from the state to the detriment of their pupils.

*Study leave with pay*

The study leave with pay concept in Ghana is an opportunity given to teachers to pursue further studies mainly in the universities and still draws salaries during their periods of absence. The duration of the leave is normally up to a maximum of four years. The initiative is aimed at enhancing teacher professional development required for quality classroom delivery (Agezo 2010). As a motivation policy, the Ghana Education Service grants the leave to all of its professional teachers. However, preference is given to those who sacrifice to serve in deprived areas (countryside without access to basic social amenities such as electricity, potable
water, decent accommodation and good roads) over those who teach in urban areas (cities or towns). Because of this, it takes teachers who serve in deprived areas a minimum of two years to qualify for study leave with pay as compared to a minimum of five years in the case of teachers who serve in urban areas. Also, priority is given to those who apply for study leave with pay to study in key areas such as Mathematics, Science, Information and Communication Technology and English Language. Teachers who propose to study in other areas such as Ghanaian Language, Social Studies, Management and Accounting studies, Home Economics, Visual Arts directly related to classroom teaching and Educational Administration and Management are also considered on a priority basis.

**Teachers’ promotions**

A teacher qualifies to be the principal of a senior high school only when the person attains the rank of Deputy Director (the third highest rank). The various ranks in the Ghana Education Service from the lowest to the highest are Superintendent II, Superintendent I, Senior Superintendent II, Senior Superintendent I, Principal Superintendent, Assistant Director II, Assistant Director I, Deputy Director, Director II and Director I. A teacher with a Diploma certificate begins on the rank of Senior Superintendent II, while a teacher with a Bachelor’s degree begins on the rank of Principal Superintendent. A teacher with a Master’s degree also begins on the rank of Principal Superintendent. However, the teacher gets two incremental jumps of salary ahead of the colleagues.

Qualification for promotion in the Ghana Education Service depends on a number of conditions. First, the teacher must have a satisfactory work history for a minimum of three consecutive years, including period of approved leave for those who accept posting and teach in deprived areas and five consecutive years, including period of approved leave for those who teach in urban areas. Second, the teacher must have a satisfactory appraisal from his or her supervisor who is normally the principal of the school in which a teacher teaches. If a principal is seeking promotion, the person is appraised by the Director of Education of the district or province he or she serves. Third, the teacher must pass an interview. The available literature (Agezo 2010), however, has indicated that the promotion initiative has not been effective in achieving its intended purpose of motivating the teachers because it is based on long service. The teachers would prefer a system of promotion based on academic qualification (Tanaka 2010).

**Method**

The research was informed by the question:

- What working conditions do teachers in the Ghana Education Service perceive as motivators in their professional practice?

In exploring answers to this question, the research employed mainly a qualitative approach and realistic phenomenology was the research design. My main intention for choosing this research design was to enable me gain insights into the life-worlds of my participants as well as to understand their personal meanings constructed from
their *lived experiences* (Johnson and Christensen 2008) of working conditions in the Ghana Education Service that motivate them in their professional practice.

**My logical positioning as a researcher**

Generally speaking, there are two logical positioning in qualitative studies – insider or outsider – but sometimes researchers adopt both positions when it becomes necessary (Denscombe 1998). Insider-qualitative researchers are those who choose to study a group to which they belong in terms of experience, language or identity, while outsider-researchers do not belong to the group under study. On the contrary, the outsider position allows researchers to know that their:

- self is intertwined with their research activity, but proceed on the basis that they can exercise sufficient control over their normal attitudes to allow them to operate in a detached manner, so that their investigation is not clouded by personal prejudices. (Denscombe 1998, 208–209)

I chose to present myself in the research as both an insider and outsider. On the one hand, I was an insider because I was once a teacher in the Ghana Education Service and had similar or almost identical experiences to those of my participants. On the other hand, I was an outsider because I did the research as part of my studies in a Western institution whose values and philosophies are different from those of Ghanaian context to which I bear affinity.

My insider–outsider position in the research yielded for me some benefits. For instance, my insider position enhanced the depth and breadth of my understanding of my participants, a situation that may not be accessible to a non-native researcher (Acker 2000; Kanuha 2000). My outsider position gave me the opportunity to engage in critical reflexivity. Critical reflexivity enabled me to examine myself as a researcher and the research relationship in order to respond to the participants and analyse the data from their perspectives other than mine. I therefore used words such as *they* and *them* to acknowledge my outsider status in relation to the participants’ insider status (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). The outsider position allowed me to listen, interpret and critique my participants’ experiences based on postcolonial theory.

Although my outsider position required me to be neutral in the research, I acknowledge that, to a certain degree, the processes of data collection and interpretation may have been influenced by my own background, beliefs and values. Nonetheless, I believe that the awareness of this connection allowed me to remain sufficiently distanced and, to some extent, neutral during the processes of data collection and analysis. At the end of the transcriptions, I did a member check by sending the transcripts back to Ghana for the participants to read and check if there were issues which I misrepresented in the transcriptions. All the participants certified the transcripts as a true reflection of what transpired in both the group and follow-up individual interviews.

**Preliminary selection of participants**

The target population for the study was all teachers in public pre-tertiary schools (kindergarten, primary, junior high and senior high schools) in Ghana with an average age of 30.1 years. I did a preliminary selection of participants for the first phase (scoping study) of this research using two sampling techniques. The first was the
purposive sampling technique which I used to select the Ashanti region. I chose this region because the Population and Housing Census conducted in Ghana by the Ghana Statistical Service (2010) has indicated that the region has the highest population (4,780,380) in the country. Being the most populous area, it has the highest number of schools and teachers as well (Ghana Web 2012; Ofori-Attah 2007). According to the Ashanti Regional Information Management Education System, as of 2012, the region had a total of 6142 public kindergarten, primary, junior high and senior high schools and were taught by a total of 33,992 teachers.

Given the large size (27 districts) of the study area and heterogeneous nature of the sample frame, a second sampling technique became necessary in order to arrive at a representative sample (Gay, Mills, and Airasian 2009). I therefore used the simple random sampling technique to select 3 out of the 27 districts of the region. I did the selection by assigning random numbers to all the districts after which I selected three districts, namely Kumasi Metropolis, Mampong Municipality and Ashanti Akim North Municipality. Subsequently, I randomly selected 100 participants from each of the 3 districts to obtain a total of 300 participants as a sample. As this research did not have a purely quantitative focus, my aim in this preliminary participant selection phase was not to arrive at a representative sample, but to get as many participants as possible to partake in a quantitative scoping study, so that I could select among them my actual participants for the main (qualitative) research. From the sample, therefore, I got my actual participants for the second phase which was the main research (see data analysis section for procedure involved in the selection of second phase participants).

**Phases of the research**

Qualitative research is complex and it is not always possible to map out the parameters of field work. This difficulty requires the researcher to be skilful to adopt research approaches that would yield useful data (Gall, Gall, and Borg 2007; Leedy and Ormrod 2009). As a result, I conducted the research in two phases. The first phase was a quantitative scoping study which I conducted because it is “a useful way of mapping fields of a study” (Arksey and O’Malley 2005, 19). As this was not a comparative research study, my aim for conducting the quantitative scoping study was not to engage in a mixed method research and compare the results, but to guide the identification and selection of key informants and also to guide the selection of items in the survey questionnaire which I would use in the framing of questions for the second phase (main research). The scoping study therefore helped me to determine the direction, including the layout, for conducting the main research.

The second phase which adopted a qualitative data generation approach formed the main data collection for the research. It involved the organisation of three focus groups’ discussions of five teacher participants in each. Each of the focus group had two females and three males and represented one of the three randomly selected districts. Each of the group discussions lasted for 90 min. I purposively selected the members of the focus groups based on the information obtained from the scoping study phase (see data analysis section for criteria involved in the selection). The focus group discussions assisted me in generating data through group interactions on generic questions in relation to the aims of the research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). Group discussions were important for describing and understanding factors responsible for teacher motivation in Ghana.
**Research tools**

I used a researcher-constructed questionnaire for the first phase (scoping study) of the research and an interview schedule for the second phase (main research). I designed all items on the questionnaire according to views expressed by Velez (2007), Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) and Claey (2011), among others, who have contended that motivation means all the psychological processes that influence teacher behaviour towards the achievement of educational goals or the conditions and factors that promote commitment in teachers, allowing them to enjoy teaching and thus fulfil their goals. These authors have also identified altruistic, intrinsic and extrinsic issues as factors that can affect teacher motivation.

Because the questionnaire was self-designed, I conducted both validity and reliability tests prior to using it for the scoping study. A face validity test I conducted to measure its precision in covering all the domains of the research objectives revealed a positive result. To ascertain its reliability also, I pre-tested it in two districts of the Ashanti region which did not fall within the sample frame. In all, I used 60 participants, 30 from each of the named districts. However, 50 out of this number completed and returned the questionnaire I gave them. Using Cronbach’s alpha test, I got a reliability coefficient of .880, making the tool reliable for use. The questionnaire had 43 items in four sections. The first section (section A) dealt with demographic data of the principals. Section “B” had 15 on factors affecting teacher motivation in the Ghana Education Service. Section “C” had 14 items on participants’ views on the factors facilitating teacher motivation in the Ghana Education Service. Section “D” had 14 items on implications of motivation for teacher professional practice in the Ghana Education Service.

I administered the questionnaire personally in the scoping study via the simple random sampling technique. It was my belief that the administration of the tool in person would bring about the anticipated cooperation, at least, better than commissioning others to assist in that direction. I gave the participants two weeks to complete it. However, I allowed a one week extension for participants who could not complete the task on schedule. Out of the 300 participants, 210 completed and returned their questionnaires, giving me an overall response rate of 70%.

The interview schedule had semi-structured questions which I designed for audio recordings of the participants’ views. I chose to use an interview schedule because the main research required the collection of qualitative data in which the participants needed to use spoken words to make the research easier to understand (Neumman 2003). The use of open-ended questions gave me an ample opportunity to get from them certain details but crucial perspectives that could not be captured in the structured close-ended questionnaire (Creswell 2009).

**Data analysis**

I did an initial analysis of the quantitative data I obtained from the first phase (scoping study) in order to identify key participants and determine how to frame questions for the second phase of the research. I did the analysis at two stages using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). I chose the SPSS because of its efficacy as an analytical tool for the analysis of complex data (Pallant 2007). Also, it is a reliable tool for the running of all data meant for descriptive and inferential statistics (Field 2009).
I used the first stage analysis to identify the participants for the main research (focus group discussions). It involved a calculation of the mean of each participant’s total responses to the 43 items in sections “B”, “C” and “D” of the survey questionnaire seeking to find the participants’ views on factors affecting teacher motivation, factors facilitating teacher motivation and implications of teacher motivation for teacher professional practice in the Ghana Education Service, respectively. In doing the analysis, I coded various categories of questions on the tool according to the following five-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree-5; Agree-4; Neither Agree nor Disagree-3; Disagree-2; and Strongly Disagree-1. Furthermore, I recorded all the responses on a spreadsheet and ticked them on the tool before inputting them into the computer for the analysis. To facilitate scoring and easy analysis of data, I used the SPSS to categorise the participants with mean range from 3.59 up to 5.0 as those in agreement and considered those with mean range from 2.59 up to 3.58 as those neither in agreement nor disagreement (unsure). Also, I considered participants with mean range from 1.0 up to 2.58 as those in disagreement with the variables. The participants who indicated disagreement or unsure positions were mainly those I selected for the second phase (focus group discussions).

I used the second stage analysis to determine the framing of questions for the focus group discussions. It also involved a calculation of factor loading of all 43 items in sections “B”, “C” and “D” using Exploratory Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation to ascertain which of the variables were strongly weighed to guide the framing of questions for the discussions (Coakes, Steed, and Price 2008). The criteria for the analysis were determined by Kaiser’s criterion, suggested by Guttman and adapted by Kaiser, which considers factors with an eigenvalue greater than one as common factors (Brace, Kemp, and Snelgar 2006).

With the aim of unpacking the issues implicated in the participants’ views about motivators in their professional practice, I analysed the qualitative data of the second phase inductively using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The choice of the IPA was to enable me gain insights into how the participants made sense of the phenomenon under investigation and to explore the meanings their idiographic experiences hold for them (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008). The interpretative analytical approach also made it possible for me to do thematic analysis of the data in order to condense the extensive material into core themes that would reflect the overall objective of the research (Creswell 2009).

Before coding the transcript of the focus groups’ discussion, I developed a coding system as patterns emerged from the data. I grouped all the responses of the participants according to the arrangement of the questions during the discussion. It was possible to group the responses because the participants in the three focus groups answered the same semi-structured questions. While coding, I took note of crucial statements made by the participants that needed special attention (Creswell 2009). In doing the analysis, I explored to exhaustion all possible categories and themes until I found no new information providing further insight into the existing categories and themes. The discovery of patterns of explanations, views and understandings then provided the basis for summarising the data.

**Results**

The results of the research presented in this paper are based on the data collected from three focus groups’ discussions. In the presentation of the results, I will be
using codes FG #1, FG #2 and FG #3 to represent focus group 1, 2 and 3, respectively. The results have revealed the following selfless and internal factors as perceived motivators in the participants’ professional practice: inspiration to serve God and society and help students, peace in the teaching profession in Ghana, inspiration from role models, passion for teaching, flexibility of time in the teaching job and compelling situations.

**Inspiration to serve God, society and help students**

Inspiration to serve God and society and the desire to help students also account for some of the reasons why some teachers in Ghana have chosen to practise their career in the Ghana Education Service. These same reasons have influenced their decision to remain in the job and be committed to work. For example, the participants have claimed that they are inspired by their students to remain in the profession and would like to see the students achieve academic success:

Generally I’m excited that I’m a teacher. If salaries and other conditions of service are stabilised teachers would always be happy. My motivation has not changed. Sometimes when I look at the way the Ghana Education Service handles the affairs of teachers I’m put off but when I look at the students I train to come out of school successfully I get some enthusiasm…I love seeing my students progress to higher positions in life and not conditions of service…I feel very proud that I’m a teacher. I do enjoy when I meet former students and they introduce me to others as their former teacher. I get the joy and inner satisfaction for training these young ones to go up the social ladder…(FG #2)

Furthermore, in order to help their students succeed academically, these teachers have resolved to make available their talents to the students whom they have a responsibility to help acquire knowledge that would see them through examinations:

What I want to say is what my colleague has just said. What I want to add is that teaching is something God has given to me as a gift to go out and help those who lack knowledge. This would enable them face the challenges in their lives. What motivates me to go to class every day is seeing my students and sharing ideas. I am committed to my work because when students come into our hands there is a time limit within which they should prepare for exams. Without going to class to teach I would put the students at a disadvantage…(FG #3)

In addition, the teachers have a perception that sharing their knowledge with their students is one of the ways they could demonstrate their patriotism and contribute to the development of society. This is because they expect that the students will also use the knowledge given to them to transform Ghana into a better country in future:

I have chosen teaching as a profession just to equip students with formal education in my field of study so that they would be well informed with the understanding, knowledge and wisdom and also be skillful and innovative. You see, even though we’re living in a country where things are not all that right, as somebody said that a journey of million miles begins with a step, we’re all hoping that in the near future as we’re leaving our children behind, the country will belong to them. I therefore have to render my services to the country by imparting knowledge to these children who will be the leaders of the country. Who knows? Maybe something good may come out of them. I believe that in the near future they will also do likewise and things can change…(FG #2)

The teachers even see their teaching career as a good way of helping Ghana develop her human resource capability:
My reason for choosing teaching as a profession is to help train the needed human resource for the country. As we all know, a nation’s development is based on the calibre of human resource that it is able to produce. As a teacher, I should be part of the training of the human resource of this nation. What I do in the classroom every day is part of nation building. It is the field that I have chosen to help … I chose teaching as a profession also because I believe I have sufficiently acquired the necessary skills, knowledge, competence and everything necessary to impart knowledge to the youth as a way of helping my country to meet her human resource requirement … (FG #1)

Apart from the above reasons, why the participants feel self-motivated, they have also perceived the teaching job from a moral perspective and believed their attendance to the classroom every day is a service to God:

I am in this job (teaching) because I love to help others. I consider it an act of worship to God. My Prophet Mohammed, peace and blessings be upon Him said if you have a contract with anybody respect the contract. On moral grounds, I’ve signed contract with the Ghana Education Service and I have to honour it. (FG #3)

Peace in the teaching profession in Ghana
Some of the participants in this research are of the view that although their salaries are not attractive, they have sought inspiration from the peaceful working atmosphere within the profession:

I’m content! Of course, money is not everything. I know the teaching profession doesn’t attract high salaries in the country but it’s not everything that is money. In terms of job satisfaction I think I have enough of it. What is more, I enjoy peace that goes with the profession. I live in confidence that I’m a peaceful person offering my quota to national development so I don’t have any problem … (FG #1)

Inspiration from role models
Former teachers play a significant role in shaping the desire of some teachers in the Ghana Education Service to have chosen the profession as a career. Perhaps this is due to good professional dispositions and commitments displayed by these former teachers in their teaching. For instance, having a lot of affection for their former teachers, some of the participants in this research perceive their former teachers as role models whose good examples of selfless dedication they have to emulate:

The main reason why I chose teaching as a profession is that in my life people imparted knowledge in me and taught me how to do certain things. When I grew up I realised that if I got the opportunity to impart knowledge into others it would be good. The reason is to impart knowledge into people as others imparted knowledge into me … (FG #1)

Passion for teaching
Some teachers in the Ghana Education Service are engaged in the job because they enjoy the art of teaching. Some of the participants in this research have claimed that they are in the right profession because they have a passion for teaching and this influenced their decision in the beginning to enrol in teacher training to become professional teachers:
I’m satisfied. My motivation has not changed. It has even increased … Yes! I have been teaching for the past 20 years and I love the job. I don’t have the intention to leave for another profession … Really my motivation for the job in the Ghana Education Service hasn’t changed even though I’m praying for more salary and other incentives. I see myself happy in this profession because imparting knowledge to another is something great. I’m fairly happy. (FG #2)

Also, the teachers are committed to their duties because they are conscious of the fact that they are paid for the job they do:

Once I’m a teacher it’s my responsibility to be in the classroom always because I have accepted to teach and the code of conduct for teachers in the Ghana Education Service says that if a teacher absents himself from class he has to be sanctioned. Also, being a responsible person, it wouldn’t be good for me to absent myself from class when I know at the end of the month I’m going to collect my salary. (FG #2)

*Flexibility of work in the teaching profession*

The nature of work in the Ghana Education Service allows time to meet family commitments. This has been cited by the majority (five out of six) of the female participants as a motivating factor for their choice of career in the Ghana Education Service:

… Working in the industry is very stressful; not allowing one time for her family. I think that for teaching there is vacation and early closure which would allow me time to cater for my children as a mother and my husband. I’m satisfied with the teaching profession. And secondly being a lady, I think the profession gives me room to train my children and grandchildren well … I’m a family lady and I wanted a profession that would allow me time for my family … (FG #1)

*Compelling situations*

Compelling situations also motivate some teachers to practise their profession in the Ghana Education Service. For example, a participant had an initial plan of becoming an engineer; however, a misfortune in his family compelled him to embrace the teaching profession:

Well, I’m in the Ghana Education Service by default. Originally it was not my aim to be a teacher but a circumstance arose in the family and I did not have any choice than to become a teacher. After my secondary school I should have gone to the University. I wanted to be an engineer … (FG #2)

*Reasons for sustained motivation in some teachers in the Ghana Education Service*

It appears because most of the participants have been inspired by selfless and internal factors as presented above, they have not had any change in motivation since joining the Ghana Education Service:

My motivation has not changed a bit. I have the edge to serve humanity but if it was as a result of the conditions of service then I would say they are nothing to write home about. Teaching in Ghana is a kind of profession that would not make somebody quite rich because of the poor conditions of service. It’s a service that impoverishes you but
because we are there to serve humanity what can we say? So I’m optimistic that some-
day it will be better. Yes, the situation is not as hopeless as some people want to find
it. It’s somewhat better but it’s not the best. It’s not up to the scratch as we would want
to have it but we would not say it’s quite deplorable too. (FG #2)

Also, because these self-motivated participants have not had change in their initial
motivation since joining teaching service, they do not have the desire to leave the
service. Consequently, when I asked whether they had any profession they would
have preferred to than teaching, I had the following non-affirmative responses across
the three focus groups:

No, I don’t leaving the Ghana Education Service. This is because the art of teaching is
a gift from God to me; it’s a calling. (FG #3)

No, it’s only teaching that I prefer for myself. (FG #2)

…I have no plans to be in any other profession other than the teaching field… Yes! If
I wanted to leave I would have done so earlier. No any other profession apart from
learning I wish for myself! (FG #1)

Despite the above responses, other participants are rather indifferent as to their
impressions about the teaching profession:

I wouldn’t say I’m sad or happy in the teaching profession. I hang in-between them
but I would give glory to the Lord for how far he has brought me. As I’m able to get
the basic needs of mankind, I would say I’m ok. As to whether my motivation has
changed, as I said earlier, I have not regretted that I’m a teacher. My motivation has
not changed but I wish the Ghana Education Service could do better than what they’re
doing now so that my interest for the job would continue to increase. (FG #1)

Discussion

The research question asks: What working conditions do teachers in the Ghana
Education Service perceive as motivators in their professional practice?

In addressing this question, I investigated the participants’ views in terms of
what they perceived as drivers in their professional practice. This question required
engaging the participants in focus group discussions and analysing their discourses
grounded in the qualitative data to gain insights into their thoughts about motivators
in their professional practice.

Evidence from the results has shown that although the working conditions in
which the teacher participants have been situated do not provide the satisfaction they
deserve in their professional practice, they are generally satisfied, have no change in
motivation and prefer to stay in the Ghana Education Service because they are influ-
enced by selfless and internal motivation. Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) and
Claeys (2011) have described selfless motivation as an inclination in teachers to
work with children or serve society. Internal motivation, on the other hand, is an
inward desire in teachers to engage in quality professional practice for the sake of
pleasurable experiences. In this research, the selfless and internal motivation factors
identified include inspiration to serve God and society and help students, peace in
the teaching profession in Ghana, inspiration from role models, passion for teaching,
flexibility of time in the teaching job and compelling situations.

Across the three focus groups, there has been a common view that the teaching
profession is an act of worship to God (focus group transcripts). The influence of
religion on the teachers’ selflessness and internal motivation for teaching has a historical origin, dating back to the pre-colonial and colonial periods. In the pre-colonial period, Ghanaians had their own way of traditional worship where they served God through lesser gods whom they believed served as intermediary between them and the one God. Around the fifteenth century, during the colonial period, Christianity and Islam were introduced in modern Ghana by the Christian missionaries and Muslim merchants, respectively (Boahen 1975; Perbi 2004). Since then, the two foreign religions have dominated and had a significant influence on social life in postcolonial Ghana (Perbi 2004). As many Ghanaians are religious, these participants may have sought consolation in religion and put their hope in God because their working conditions are not attractive (Agezo 2010).

Also, the teachers may have been internally motivated to help other people because all the three prominent religions (Christianity, Islam and Traditional African worship) in the country exist on the basis of the belief that service to mankind is service to God. Besides, as all the religions advocate peace, it is possible that religion is a strong factor in the teachers’ admiration of the teaching profession in Ghana because of its peaceful nature. The teachers are deemed selfless and often assured that their compensation is in heaven; yet, on earth, and specifically in Ghana, their working conditions do not guarantee the fairness they deserve as a professional body (Osei 2006).

Furthermore, it appears that inspiration from role models as a source of motivation in the teachers can be explained from a Ghanaian sociocultural perspective. Informal education is a fundamental aspect of the sociocultural set-up of the Ghanaian society and has existed even before the introduction of formal/western education by the colonial masters (McWilliams and Kwamena-Po 1975; Ofòri-Attah 2007). In the informal education system, children learn mainly by imitation and copy good moral virtues from both their immediate and external environments. Parents and other elders in the society are expected to play a crucial role in this form of education by living exemplary lives worthy of emulation by the young ones. It seems this ideology is the rationale behind the teachers’ reliance on their former teachers as role models.

The tendency to use selfless and internal motivation as a way of securing inner self-satisfaction is not a unique phenomenon to only Ghanaian teachers. As noted in the introduction, other studies conducted in other parts of the world to examine the factors influencing the career choice and professional commitments of teachers have also found similar results. For example, in Australia, New Zealand and Singapore, Mathew (2005), Rasid and Dhindsa (2010), Richardson and Watt (2006) and Williams and Forgaz (2009) have found, among other things, that the love for and desire to work with children and/or young persons, love for teaching, time for family and an inclination to serve society have contributed significantly to their participants’ desire to enter and remain in the teaching profession. In line with the findings of the current research, Anthony and Ord (2008) have found compelling factors such as loss of previous job, moving into a new settlement, inability to progress in previous jobs and the acquisition of scholarship or sponsorship to be responsible for their participants’ attraction to the teaching profession. However, in this research, the only compelling factor I have found to be responsible for the participants’ motivation is the occurrence of a misfortune in a family.
Limitations
The large size of Ghana made it impossible for me to collect data from all the target population. In view of this, purposive sampling was used as the main technique relying on certain characteristics of the sampled area such as its population size, number of teachers and schools. The use of the purposive sampling technique does not provide a sufficient basis for making generalisation for the entire population. Future studies may consider larger sample sizes.

Conclusion
This study explored the drivers of teacher professionalism in Ghana. Drawing on the results, the study seeks to support the emerging body of literature on teacher motivation, arguing that most teachers are attracted to the profession based on reasons relating to selflessness and internal attachment for the profession rather than externally driven factors such as high pay and congenial working environment. I therefore recommend that the government should do more to improve the working conditions of teachers so as to motivate those that are externally motivated and also make the profession attractive to prospective applicants.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor
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