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## **Barriers to Teacher Motivation for Professional Practice in the Ghana Education Service**

**INUSAH SALIFU**

*Faculty of Education, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia*

**ABSTRACT** In Ghana, several education initiatives for promoting the quality of education have excluded the issue of teacher motivation. Well-motivated teachers are likely to be more committed to their profession and this could lead to desirable learning outcomes. This research attempted to identify and analyse what teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana perceived as barriers to their motivation towards professional practice. Employing mainly a qualitative approach, the research revealed that the sources of frustration and stress in participants' professional practice related to unfavourable conditions of service in the Ghana Education Service. Suggestions for improvement in the conditions of service of teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana are explored.

### **Introduction**

Quality education is a vehicle for attaining freedom and lifting oneself out of poverty and domination. This places teachers' work at the core of educational practice. De-motivated teachers can do little to influence their students positively and/or support them to develop the necessary capabilities and dispositions to lift themselves out of poverty (Sarpong, 2002; Lambert, 2004; Osei, 2006). In recent times, many governments internationally have focused attention on increasing the quality of their education systems. However, policies and programmes directed to such endeavours have given little attention to how to motivate teachers towards quality professional practice. In Ghana, several education initiatives for promoting education quality have excluded the issue of teacher motivation (Cogneau, 2003; Agezo, 2010). The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher motivation with a focus on professional practice in the Ghana Education Service. Specifically, it explores the barriers to teacher motivation in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana as an important aspect of professional practice.

Several studies have established a correlation between teacher motivation and professional practice (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Velez, 2007). Teacher motivation refers to inspiration or encouragement of a teacher to do the best professionally (Velez, 2007). Other sources explain teacher motivation as all the forces which bring about the arousal, selection, direction and continuation of behaviour in teachers towards their work (Snowman et al, 2008). Bennell (2004) has reiterated that teacher motivation is implicated in psychological processes that influence teacher behaviour towards the achievement of educational goals. In this article, teacher motivation means the gratification of teachers in relation to their professional practice.

Multiple perspectives of teacher motivation suggest that it is related to teacher professional practice. Eraut (1994) and Higgs et al (2001) have considered professional practice as any propositional, theoretical or scientific experience, professional craft knowledge and knowledge about how to do a thing. From the definitions of teacher motivation and professional practice, it can be argued that motivation is a very important element in ensuring high-quality teacher professional practice. Well-motivated teachers are likely to hold their profession in high esteem (Javaid, 2009). This in turn constructs and shapes the quality of their professional practice needed

for desirable learning outcomes. Motivation creates in teachers positive experiences needed in establishing the importance and recognition they deserve as a professional body within society and these influence the quality of their professional practice (Kumar, 2000). Therefore, the focus of the research was to investigate how teacher motivation was implicated in the professional practice of teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana.

### **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 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 study took place specifically in three districts of the Ashanti region of Ghana: 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 square kilometres representing 10.2% of the land area of Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010).

### **What Factors Affect Teacher Motivation?**

Two main factors may affect teacher motivation – external and internal factors. External factors are determined basically by the level and type of external rewards that are available (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007), whereas internal factors are intrinsic in nature and come from within a teacher. However, Claeys (2011) has identified a third factor and calls it altruistic (selflessness). She has defined altruistic factor as ‘a love for and desire to work with children and/or young persons, and an inclination to serve society’ (p. 4).

#### *External Factors*

External factors affecting teacher motivation are many and varied; however, for the purposes of this article I have grouped them in three categories: working conditions, educational policies and occupational status.

*Working conditions.* Teachers’ working conditions may be explained as the necessary atmosphere created for teachers at the workplace to motivate them to greater performance. To me, teachers’ working conditions include classroom space and appropriate class size numbers, student discipline, electricity, availability of enough furniture, and teaching and learning materials. Teachers’ working conditions also include competitive remuneration, the opportunity to participate in decision making, the opportunity for promotion and to gain recognition, and to have access to decent housing as well as appreciable incentive packages apart from regular remuneration. In view of the above explanation, Javaid (2009) has noted that working conditions have a significant influence on teacher morale and motivation as well as their classroom performance.

When teachers are situated in a favourable working environment which ensures attractive salaries, moderate teaching loads in terms of class size and number of teaching hours, good relationships amongst themselves and with students, and good leadership from principals, they are likely to be motivated in their professional practice (Adelabu, 2005). Similarly, when teachers’ working conditions can guarantee opportunities for promotions, loans and scholarship, the profession can compete favourably with other professions in attracting competent people (Reichardt, 2001). However, large class sizes, unusual hours of work, multi-grade teaching, unhealthy relationship amongst teachers and bad leadership demoralise teachers and kill off their motivation to be committed to their work (Mathew, 2005). Also, unattractive incentive packages and a lack of career advancement opportunities affect teacher motivation (Adelabu, 2005).

*Educational policies.* Educational policies may be explained as the specific and determined decisions and actions which affect the direction and development of education usually made by a body of policy makers including stakeholders such as the government, parents and other interest groups. Examples of educational policies include: duration, age of entry into and exit from schooling, calibre of teachers required to teach at various levels, code of ethics for teachers and certification of students. Allowances for teachers who work in rural areas and allowances for extra work such as marking or taking double shifts are a good step towards teacher motivation (Kubberud et al, 1999). However, constant changing of school curriculum and of number of years of schooling frustrate teachers and reduce their motivational level (Adelabu, 2005; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007).

*Occupational status.* Occupational status of teachers refers to the esteem and recognition teachers have in society as professionals. In Javaid's (2009) view, 'a teacher's professional status can be judged by his or her role in policy making, curriculum development and textbook development' (p. 7). It is important to look at this aspect because research has established that teachers are motivated by the satisfaction they derive from higher order needs such as social relations and esteem (Muller et al, 2009).

Coolahan (2003) has reported that teaching in Ireland generally enjoys a high social status and entrance to all categories of teaching is marked by keen competition. However, Bennell (2004) has noted that in Africa and South Asia teachers have low occupational status because they do not have the equivalent level of academic qualifications as compared with other professionals such as medical doctors, engineers and lawyers. According to him, 'teachers are often slightly better educated than their students' (p. 3). Teachers in Low Income Countries such as Africa and South Asia are considered *semi-professionals* and have low status because they are considered a relatively larger group, have lower professional standards, allow easy entry into their profession and have weak and many trade unions (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007).

#### *Intrinsic and Altruistic Factors*

Apart from external factors, internal and altruistic factors have also been identified as issues affecting teacher motivation. Internal factors are the 'intrinsic desires for personal and professional development and working in educational settings' (Claeys, 2011, p. 4). Altruism refers to 'a love for and desire to work with children and/or young persons, and an inclination to serve society' (p. 4).

Research has established that generally, females are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to stay in the profession than men (Smithers & Robinson, 2003; Haq & Islam, 2005). Also, younger teachers have less motivation to teach and are more likely to leave the profession than older teachers (Smithers & Robinson, 2003). In a situational analysis of teacher motivation in Bangladesh, Haq and Islam (2005) found that that gender is a significant issue confronting the education sector. Female teachers, for example, constituted only 24% of the 685,603 teachers in the country as of 2005. In another research highlighting gender, Michaelowa (2002) has looked at teacher job satisfaction in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa. She found that teachers with very high educational attainment are generally less satisfied and motivated with their job and preferred to leave. She has observed that such teachers 'face a mismatch between their professional expectation and realities' (p. 12). In a study conducted in the United States, Johnson et al (2005) also concluded that teachers with the least and the most experience are more likely to depart from teaching because they have less intrinsic motivation for their chosen profession. They have also found that younger teachers, especially under age 30, are the least likely to remain in their schools.

### **Methodology**

The research methodology was informed by one main question:

- What working conditions do teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana perceive as demotivators in their professional practice?

In exploring answers to this question, the research employed a qualitative approach as a main design. 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 in adopting research approaches that would yield useful data (Gall et al, 2007; Leedy & Ormrod, 2009). As a result, I conducted the research in two phases. The first phase was a scoping study which I conducted because it is 'a useful way of mapping fields of a study' (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005, p. 19). As this was not a comparative research study, my aim for conducting the scoping study was not to compare my 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 group discussions of five teacher participants in each. Each of the group discussions lasted for 60 minutes. I selected the members of the focus groups based on information obtained from the scoping study phase (see the data analysis section for analysis 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 & Plano-Clark, 2007). Group discussions were important for describing and understanding the barriers to teacher motivation for quality professional practice in Ghana.

#### *Preliminary Selection of Participants*

The target population for the study was all teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana with an average age of 30.1. 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) 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 (Ofori-Attah, 2007; Ghana Web, 2012).

Given the large size (27 districts) of the study area and the heterogeneous nature of the sample frame, a second sampling technique became necessary in order to arrive at a representative sample (Gay et al, 2009). I therefore used the simple random sampling technique to select three out of the 27 districts of the region. I did the selection by writing the names of all the districts on pieces of paper and putting them in a Milo tin. I shook the tin vigorously to mix them up, after which I selected the three districts (i.e. Kumasi Metropolis, Mampong Municipality and Ashanti Akim North Municipality) randomly to obtain 300 participants as a sample. From this sample I obtained my actual participants for the second phase, which consisted of the main research (see the data analysis section for the procedure involved in the selection of second-phase participants).

#### *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 Bennell and Akyeampong (2007), Velez (2007) and Claeys (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, 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 of this number completed and returned the questionnaire I gave them. Using Cronbach's alpha test, I obtained 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 items 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 the 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 two weeks to participants to complete it. However, I allowed a one-week extension for participants who could not complete the task on schedule. Out of 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 participants' views. I chose the interview schedule because the main research required the collection of qualitative data in which participants needed to use spoken words to make the research easier to understand (Neumann, 2003). The use of open-ended questions gave me ample opportunity to obtain from them certain details but crucial perspectives that could not be captured in structured close-ended questions (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 software (SPSS). I chose 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 participants for the main research. 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 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 5-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree – 5; Agree – 4; Neither Agree nor Disagree – 3; Disagree – 2; Strongly Disagree – 1. Furthermore, I recorded all the responses on a large sheet 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 SPSS to categorise the participants with a mean range from 3.59 to 5.0 as those in agreement and considered those with a mean range from 2.59 to 3.58 as those neither in agreement nor disagreement. The last were participants with a mean range from 1.0 to 2.58 whom I considered as those in disagreement with the variables.

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 et al, 2008). The criteria for the analysis was determined by Kaiser's criterion, suggested by Guttman and adapted by Kaiser, which considers factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 as common factors (Brace et al, 2006).

With the aim of unpacking the issues implicated in participants' views about their working conditions that frustrated and induced stress in them, I analysed the qualitative data of the second phase inductively using thematic analysis. I adopted such an analytical approach 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 group discussions, 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 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 main aim of the research was to explore what teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana perceived as sources of frustration and stress in their professional practice. The results of the research presented in this article are based on the data collected from the three focus group 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 working conditions as sources of frustrations and stress for the teachers' professionalism in the Ghana Education Service: abuse of authority by some principals, non-responsiveness to teachers' needs by principals, the lack of teacher involvement in decision making, the lack of a convenient physical and material environment and unattractive remuneration. Each of these issues is examined in the ensuing presentations.

### *Abuse of Authority by Principals in the Ghana Education Service*

One of the major issues that have emerged from the group discussions relate to how some principals adopt an authoritarian management style and use their position to victimise teachers whom they perceive as threats to their administration. For example, some of the participants are not happy with the perceived arbitrariness in the transfers of teachers to settle scores:

My biggest problem is how public education is being run in the country. ... The system allows heads of schools to run them as if they are their personal property. Because of this a teacher does not have any job security especially when you are working in an environment and you don't develop any special relationship with your boss (supervisor) to like you. He or she can just go to the main office and ask for your release or transfer that he or she cannot work with you, meanwhile it is not a personal job. Under the public service, if you (supervisor) cannot work with a person it should not be based on personal grounds. It should be based on the professional ethics. If a teacher commits an offence, he or she is not invited for questioning before disciplinary action is taken against him or her so the teacher is unable to put up defence. (FG #3)

The teachers in their desperation have compared their situation to other professions, arguing that the way teachers are treated does not occur in professions such as the judiciary or banking:

The people in authority only listen to the heads and before the teacher realises he or she is asked to proceed on transfer. In other professions it doesn't happen. For example, the Chief Justice can't decide that a particular judge should be removed or transferred based on personal reasons. Similarly, a Bank Manager cannot write that he or she cannot work with a subordinate based on personal reasons. In the Ghana Education Service, teachers have been reduced to the same level as students. In our case as teachers heads cannot dismiss a teacher but they can cause his or her transfer at any time. This is what I hate most! It all boils down to how schools are managed. (FG #1)

The data have demonstrated that professional relationships are constructed on the basis of colonial rationality where a servant serves the boss. Such constructions, according to the participants, are visible in the ways principals communicate to their teachers. For instance, they have expressed worry about the habit of being rebuked by the principals in the presence of their students when issues occur in their schools:

Of all the teaching experiences I've had, what I dislike most is the relationship between teachers and our heads (supervisors). We call this a profession but the relationship seems like a household relationship. The head or whoever calls himself a boss can just walk up to you and say anything in the presence of your students. Everybody commits mistakes; even they (supervisors) do but when a teacher does they can do anything to him even in front of students but professionally that should not be. (FG #2)

Some principals violate the professional code of conduct of the Ghana Education Service. For example, they issue queries to teachers without following laid-down procedures. In the views of some of the participants, this practice amounts to treating teachers as though they are not professionals:

A head can send you a query without following the due processes that would have to be taken before that query comes. They don't treat us like professionals; they treat us like their sons and daughters probably because many of them are advanced in age forgetting that you have undergone a professional training and you know what you are about. One may attribute this behaviour partly to frustration on their part probably because their salaries are not also encouraging. They behave out of professional standards and that I hate so much! (FG #2)

Regarding the issue above, the teachers feel they have been disappointed by the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), which is supposed to be their mediator. They have argued that GNAT is not doing enough to protect teachers who are being subdued by their principals:

What I least like about my teaching profession is the autocratic system of some heads of schools. Moreover, the teachers association, GNAT, does not recognise its members; that is also a problem. If a teacher has a problem in his or her school the association is supposed to support him or her but it doesn't. (FG #1)

#### *Non-Responsiveness to Teachers' Needs by Principals*

Another issue causing frustration and stress in some of the participants is the perceived indifference shown by their principals towards their welfare. They have accused their principals of being interested only in seeing them go to the classroom to teach:

What I perceive as the most significant barrier is the fact that authorities (principals) are not interested in the teacher's welfare but are interested in the work he does. No authority cares about whether a teacher is healthy but when he is not in the classroom there is trouble. When a teacher is sick what is the medical allowance given him? If a teacher's wife or family is sick and he does not have funds no one cares. It becomes the burden of the teacher. The only thing they want is to see you in the classroom effectively teaching. (FG #2)

#### *Teacher Involvement in Decision Making in the Ghana Education Service*

Teacher participation in school policy and decision making contributes to education development (Lambert, 2004; Tanaka, 2010). In this research, participants during the group discussions commented on their dissatisfaction with how the Ghana Education Service does not recognise and adequately involve them in planning education policies. For instance, some of the participants are not happy that their principals and the Ghanaian government do not involve them in decision making at both school and national levels. This development has affected the teachers' enthusiasm for the teaching profession:

What I least like about my teaching profession is the autocratic behaviour of some heads of institutions. When they take decisions they don't involve teachers. When they say something it's final. This puts me off all the time. Another thing is the increase of the duration of the senior high programme from three to four years; and back to three years without adequate involvement of teachers. (FG #1)

#### *Physical and Material Environment*

In the context of this research, physical and material environment refers to classroom space as well as teaching and learning materials. The results have demonstrated that large class sizes and inadequate teaching and learning materials constitute one of the major sources of frustration and stress for some teachers in the Ghana Education Service. Generally, developing countries' school classrooms have been associated with large class sizes (Mathew, 2005). In this research, teachers

### *Barriers to Teacher Motivation*

have reported teaching large classes as limiting their motivation and capacity to deliver quality teaching:

talking about congenial environment for teaching, for a subject like mathematics or the sciences, you don't crowd the students in just one class and stand and lecture. Even to move from one student to the other to inspect what he or she is doing is impossible because the classroom is congested. Sometimes the materials to use in teaching my students cannot be found in the school. This is a systemic failure on the part of successive governments we have had. You can't crowd between 60 and 70 students in just one small classroom. This is a big disincentive! (FG #2)

A related issue which frustrates and stresses the teachers is inadequate teaching resources:

the most significant barrier to my profession is the lack of sufficient teaching and learning materials ... the lack of teaching and learning materials make things difficult for me in my teaching career. (FG #2)

In the absence of adequate resources for teachers to use in teaching, the majority rely on borrowed materials for lessons that require practical components:

I teach home economics and it requires adequate instructional media for students but the Ghana Education Service doesn't live up to this expectation. My students borrow cookers from their homes to the school for practical lessons. Sometimes they don't get this material and lessons have to be called off. This doesn't augur well for teaching. (FG # 3)

In a situation where it is not possible to borrow teaching materials, it becomes even difficult for the teachers to carry out lessons requiring laboratory experiments:

Very discouraging is the situation where as a science teacher, I want to do a demonstration in the laboratory and there is no equipment or right apparatus to do that. It is quite frustrating! (FG #1)

The results have suggested the classroom conditions under which the teachers work is affecting their capacity to introduce novelty into their teaching and are rather resorting to lecturing and transmission pedagogy:

I think my motivation has changed because of the poor general working conditions of teachers. For example, I'm not happy about the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials needed for successful classroom teaching. If you are teaching a subject and you don't have anything to use in teaching how can you do your work well? For example, if you are teaching and you don't have a marker to use, you would be teaching small children like lecturing is done at the University. This situation doesn't make me happy in this job. (FG # 3)

### *Remuneration Issues*

The results of this research have further indicated that perceived low remuneration, long service-based promotions in the Ghana Education Service and payment of school fees by teachers' wards also negatively impact on some teachers' motivation for quality professional practice. Starting with perceived unattractive remuneration in the Ghana Education Service, the participants claimed the teaching profession is not attractive because teachers are not paid salaries that are comparable with the salaries of other professions also employed by the government. Some of the professions the participants have cited include lecturers in tertiary institutions and medical practitioners:

Comparing teaching in the Ghana Education Service to teaching at the University or Polytechnic level, you realise that it is better to teach at this tertiary level. This is because the salary in the Ghana Education Service is not attractive. ... If you look at the level of salaries of teachers you would realise that it's on the low side and other conditions such as fringed benefits in terms of car loans and building loans are absent in the Ghana Education Service. Teachers are not entitled to any loans but in other professions those things are provided. ... Even with the National Youth Employment Programme that the country runs now, you'll realise that applicants may have the same certificates from recognised academic institution but it will surprise you to learn that those who are sent to work as nurses in hospitals, polyclinics and clinics are paid better than their colleagues sent to work as teachers in schools. (FG #1)

The participants have also compared their pay with the pay of their colleagues in the legal service:

In fact, my motivation has changed because my salary is not comparable to that of a lawyer. Now I want to divert to this profession that I consider less stressful and pay well because my income in the Ghana Education Service is not satisfactory to me. Because the things a lawyer can do in respect of contributing to the society a teacher cannot do them. Teachers' salaries do not match theirs. Even in the environments they [lawyers] work in, that of the teacher does not compare to theirs. Go to a lawyer's office and you'll see that the office of the teacher does not match it. (FG #2)

The teachers have further claimed that because lawyers are better paid they are able to make their working environment look more comfortable and luxurious:

Just consider one scenario here. Just consider where we're sitting down as an office of the teacher (Staff Common Room). It is full of plastic chairs which can easily break for us to fall. A lawyer would not sit on these because he knows the effect they can have on him. A lawyer would not accept that! But who would provide better ones? We (teachers) would not spend our meagre salaries in buying replacement but lawyers can afford to make their offices look appealing. (FG #1)

Apart from the professions indicated above, the teachers perceive their colleagues in the government security services as being better paid:

I'm taking care of a sister in school. When she finishes and joins one of the security services like the Ghana Immigration Service her salary will be more than mine. For me I feel cheated, to be frank. I have the same qualification with somebody in the Ghana Immigration Service but the person's pay is more than mine. The person has all important facilities in his room but I don't so I can't say I'm happy in this condition. My situation is deplorable! I would say I see myself as somebody under paid based on my professional skills and that one makes me unhappy. ... When I compare myself with my colleagues with the same qualification in these securities services, I see them better and enjoying life better because of good pay. This does not make me happy. My situation is 30% better and 70% not better when I look at material success. My motivation has changed and I feel like leaving the teaching job because of the explanation I've given you. (FG #3)

Low salary levels impact negatively on the social lives of the teacher participants and compel them to worry daily about how they will meet family obligations:

I see my salary to be too small. This doesn't make me happy in this job because apart from the fact that I am serving humanity I have social and economic obligations as a teacher. Once I'm unable to meet all these obligations no matter what I put into the job I would not feel happy ... Like a colleague just mentioned, when there is an issue in the family and members are making contributions you can't give what you don't have. Somebody can donate what is equal to probably a teacher's three months' salaries. That is a lawyer or a doctor! A teacher cannot do that. If a teacher does that he or she would have crises in the family; he or she cannot cater for utilities and other social services ... you see, as a man I need much salary to be responsible and take care of my nuclear family and even my extended family. Looking at my educational background my family expects me to perform that particular task. Because I'm being under paid I'm not able to shoulder my responsibilities as expected. Let me give an example. My uncle died and the family members met to make contributions. In fact, when the contributions were made, because I was a teacher, even though the profession that I practise is valuable I could not give much because my salary is small. (FG #1)

## Discussion

The research question asks: What working conditions do teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana perceive as de-motivators in their professional practice?

In addressing this question, I investigated participants' views through focus group discussions in terms of working conditions that negatively impacted on teachers' *selves* as professional educators. The results indicated that what participants perceived as frustrations and stresses in their

professional practice relate to perceived unattractive working conditions such as abuse of authority by some principals, non-responsiveness to teachers' needs, unattractive remuneration, large class sizes, inadequate instructional media and the lack of involvement in decision making. These issues have been described by Bennell and Akyeampong (2007) as external factors influencing teacher motivation. According to the authors, external motivators relate to material benefits and job security and are determined basically by the level and type of external rewards that are available in the workplace. External motivation relates also to a broad range of behaviour which a person gets involved in as a means to an end. Tanaka (2010) has asserted that in developing countries, teachers prefer things that are more external in nature. These things may include salary and non-salary benefits as well as professional status.

Research has revealed that external motivation is very important in ensuring quality in teachers' professional practice (Lambert, 2004; Agezo, 2010). It has been found also that quality professional practice in teaching leads to high student learning outcomes. For example, teachers who are motivated in their professional practice work effectively towards achieving success in the classroom (Adelabu, 2005; Agezo, 2010). However, the results of this research have revealed that some participants have perceived themselves as grappling with unfavourable working conditions which have affected their motivation for quality professional practice. Earlier studies conducted in Ghana by Mensah (2011) and George and Mensah (2010) also revealed similar findings. For instance, Mensah (2011) found that extrinsic factors such as opportunities to use special abilities, job security, remuneration and good leadership from principals are very important motivators in participants' professional practice. George and Mensah (2010) observed that large class sizes and a lack of sufficient teaching and learning materials impact negatively on teacher motivation and satisfaction.

Unattractive conditions of service for teachers are not peculiar to Ghana alone. The literature has shown that extensive research on this has been done in different parts of the world and the findings are that the teaching force in many developing countries has increased tremendously yet conditions of service are not attractive (Cogneau, 2003). This situation has affected the attendance, motivation and performance of teachers, affecting the general quality of education (Kubberud et al, 1999). It is generally perceived that unfavourable conditions of service for teachers are responsible for the growing incidences of unprofessional conduct among teachers such as absenteeism and lateness to school (Ibidapo-Obe, 2007).

For teachers to be regular and punctual at school, it is essential that their income, for instance, covers basic needs. However, because this is not the case, many teachers in Ghana are compelled to take on extra commitments outside their normal jobs to augment their incomes. This situation has brought in its wake teacher absenteeism in most parts of the country (Sarpong, 2002; Osei, 2006). Michaelowa (2002) observed that on average, teachers miss their classes close to half a week per month and this behaviour has posed dire implications for students' learning outcomes in most African countries. In Malawi, Kenya and Uganda, absenteeism rates among primary school teachers stand at 18%, 20% and 27% respectively (Tanaka, 2010).

### **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, and numbers of teachers and schools. The use of the purposive sampling technique does not provide a sufficient basis for making a generalisation for the entire population. Future studies may consider a larger sample size.

### **Conclusion**

This study focused specifically on what participants perceived as de-motivators in their professional practice in the Ghana Education Service. The findings revealed that abuse of authority by some principals, non-responsiveness to teachers' needs, the lack of teacher involvement in decision making, large class sizes, inadequate teaching and learning materials, inadequate teacher facilities, the lack of periodic review of the teaching syllabus, unattractive remuneration and long service-

based promotions were the factors participants perceived as de-motivators in their professional practice. Based on the findings, I argue that a highly motivated teaching profession in Ghana is crucial since the teachers play a significant role in ensuring successful implementations of innovative education programmes aimed at increasing student learning outcomes. In order to motivate teachers in public pre-tertiary schools in Ghana towards quality pedagogical delivery, the government of Ghana should be more proactive in dealing with all the aspects of the teachers' conditions of service (as outlined above) which they perceive as barriers to their professional practice.

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**INUSAH SALIFU** completed his PhD at the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia.  
Correspondence: [insalifu1@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:insalifu1@yahoo.co.uk)