



Teacher retention in crisis: Informing policy to keep Ghanaian educators in classrooms

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ABSTRACT

Ghana's schools face a severe teacher retention crisis, with only 36 percent of teachers in a district survey planning to stay in their roles. Researchers conducted a comprehensive survey of 138 teachers to investigate their reasons for wanting to leave the profession. Common themes emerged, including low pay, poor working conditions, and overwhelming workloads. Additionally, concerns about teacher well-being and the declining status of the teaching profession were highlighted as significant issues. The study sought to identify strategies to keep teachers engaged, employing a theory about employee turnover to guide the analysis. Researchers carefully examined the survey responses and pinpointed key strategies to address the crisis. These included reducing teacher workloads, improving working conditions, and enhancing the prestige and status of the teaching profession. This research provides valuable insights for policymakers seeking effective solutions to Ghana's teacher retention problems. The findings underscore the urgent need to address the factors driving teachers away and implement strategies to maintain a stable, motivated, and highly skilled teaching workforce, which is crucial for advancing Ghana's educational system.

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ABSTRAK

Sekolah-sekolah di Ghana sedang menghadapi krisis retensi guru yang parah, dengan hanya 36 persen guru dalam survei distrik yang berencana untuk tetap menjabat. Peneliti melakukan survei komprehensif terhadap 138 guru untuk mendalami alasan mereka ingin meninggalkan profesinya. Tema-tema umum muncul, termasuk gaji rendah, kondisi kerja yang buruk, dan beban kerja yang sangat berat. Selain itu, kekhawatiran mengenai kesejahteraan guru dan menurunnya status profesi guru juga disoroti sebagai permasalahan yang signifikan. Studi ini berusaha mengidentifikasi strategi untuk menjaga keterlibatan guru, dengan menggunakan teori tentang pergantian karyawan untuk memandu analisis. Melalui pemeriksaan yang cermat terhadap respons survei, para peneliti menunjukkan strategi utama untuk mengatasi krisis ini. Hal ini termasuk mengurangi beban kerja guru, memperbaiki kondisi kerja, dan meningkatkan prestise dan status profesi guru. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan berharga bagi para pembuat kebijakan yang mencari solusi efektif terhadap masalah retensi guru di Ghana. Temuan-temuan ini menggarisbawahi kebutuhan mendesak untuk mengatasi faktor-faktor yang mendorong guru menjauh dan menerapkan strategi yang dapat mempertahankan tenaga pengajar yang stabil, termotivasi, dan berketerampilan tinggi, yang sangat penting bagi kemajuan sistem pendidikan Ghana.

Kata Kunci: pergantian karyawan; pengurangan guru; retensi guru

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of teacher attrition presents significant challenges, as its negative impacts are well-documented. High teacher attrition rates adversely affect student achievement and engagement (Bardach et al., 2022). Additionally, teacher attrition disrupts relationships among staff and students and weakens community engagement and cohesion (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). From a financial perspective, the implications of teacher attrition are substantial. With a national attrition rate of 16.8% and a 50% increase over the past fifteen years, the estimated cost per teacher turnover is around USD 8,900 (approximately GH¢131,100) (Sam et al., 2014). This includes the expenses related to recruiting, inducting, and supporting new teachers and the disruption to school improvement initiatives.

Teachers who remain in their positions, called 'stayers' also face indirect impacts. Hise, in his work "*Pepperdine Digital Commons Attrition, Mobility, and Retention Patterns of Public-School Teachers*" states the teachers bear the additional burden of taking on responsibilities of departed staff while striving to cope with the already difficult task of teaching and learning practices. The opportunity costs for experienced teachers leaving the profession are significant, especially when departures are due to ill health, burnout, or job dissatisfaction (Heffernan & Heffernan, 2019). Teacher attrition stems from escalating workloads, stress, emotional exhaustion, and dissatisfaction with policies like accountability measures and compensation concerns (Levatino et al., 2024; Rajendran et al., 2020). Additionally, the lack of teaching and learning resources, career progression, and concerns about status and remuneration drive teachers away from the profession (Levatino et al., 2024). The negative consequences of teacher turnover are not evenly distributed across schools. Research shows a concerning trend in Ghana and globally, where certain schools and student groups are worse affected by high teacher turnover rates.

Disadvantaged communities and rural areas are particularly vulnerable (Drane et al., 2021). Schools in these contexts, often called "hard-to-staff," experience higher teacher turnover rates and struggle to attract replacements. Teacher shortages hit some schools harder than others. Schools with students facing more significant academic challenges, often from lower-income families, become more vulnerable (Carver-Thomas et al., 2019). This lack of stability hinders their learning. Similarly, rural schools with limited resources struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers, especially in critical subjects like science and math. This creates an educational gap for these students, limiting their opportunities for future success. Consequently, students in these schools struggle to grasp complex science and math concepts without qualified teachers. According to Garcia & Weiss, "*The Teacher Shortage is Real, Large and Growing, and Worse than We Thought Series Report 2019*" this leads to lower test scores, difficulty meeting graduation requirements, and limited access to higher-level science and math courses in future education. The teacher shortage becomes even more concerning when considering how many new teachers leave early.

Although data specifically for Ghana is limited, research suggests a disturbing trend: a significant portion, potentially between 40% and 50%, of Ghanaian teachers may leave the profession within their first five years (Boateng, 2019). This highlights a critical need to understand why new teachers are leaving and how to support them. Policymakers have attempted to address the issue through financial incentives, fast-track career paths, and targeted recruitment programs (Blackmore et al., 2024). However, these strategies focus primarily on attracting and retaining new teachers. A crucial aspect often overlooked is how to support existing teachers and help them thrive in their roles. Understanding the factors contributing to teachers leaving the profession is essential in addressing attrition (Scott, 2019). By addressing teacher well-being alongside recruitment and retention strategies, we can create a sustainable and supportive environment for educators (Pagán-Castaño et al., 2021). Teacher attrition presents a complex challenge with uneven consequences. By attracting and supporting teachers, we can create a system that benefits all students, regardless of background or subject matter (Gorni & Saud, 2023). Research on teacher stress

and burnout becomes crucial in this context, as it can inform initiatives to create a more fulfilling and sustainable teaching experience.

Several research papers highlight the detrimental impact of low salaries and poor working conditions on Ghana's teacher workforce. Previous studies suggest low salaries significantly drive teacher discontent (Maxwell, 2020). Compared to other professions requiring similar qualifications, teaching offers limited financial security, impacting morale and career choices. Another study points to excessive workloads as a significant concern (Creagh et al., 2023). This can encompass large class sizes, demanding administrative tasks, and inadequate time for lesson planning and professional development (Govender & Ajani, 2021). Low salaries and poor working conditions create a vicious cycle. Dissatisfied teachers are more likely to leave the profession, leading to shortages and even heavier workloads for remaining teachers. This further exacerbates stress and creates a less attractive environment for recruits (Abetang et al., 2020).

Research paints a concerning picture of the declining professional status of teachers in Ghana. Studies suggest a lack of clear career progression opportunities for teachers in Ghana. This stagnation might contribute to a professional dead-end and reduced morale (Zamir, 2018). Ghana's low perceived teaching status discourages potential recruits and contributes to high early career attrition rates. A declining public perception of teaching as a respected profession deters new candidates and demoralizes current teachers. Additionally, the limited career advancement opportunities available to teachers can lead to feelings of stagnation and decreased motivation. Without a clear career path, teachers may struggle to find long-term satisfaction and professional growth, further exacerbating the challenges of retaining quality educators in the field (Abdulkareem & Lasis, 2024; Zamir, 2018).

The Ghanaian education system faces a looming crisis - a growing exodus of teachers fueled by stress, ill-being, and burnout. This phenomenon is not simply an internal issue within schools. Previous research highlights the role of external pressures in this crisis. Ongoing educational reforms and an increasingly complex teaching role contribute to teacher burden (Heffernan et al., 2022). The profession's internal struggles are compounded by a deteriorating public perception (Aronson et al., 2021). Media and politicians often portray teachers negatively, diminishing the profession's appeal. This article provides fresh insights into Ghana's teacher attraction, retention, and burnout issues. While previous research quantified the problem, this study adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing a large sample of teacher responses to understand the dissatisfaction factors better. The quantitative data, drawn from respondents' responses, reveals a concerning outlook for Ghana's teaching workforce.

External pressures, internal challenges, and a declining public image create a "perfect storm" driving teachers out of the profession (Simmie et al., 2019). Addressing this crisis demands a multi-faceted strategy that tackles workload, systemic reforms, and societal perceptions of teachers. Creating a supportive and respected environment is crucial for retaining educators and ensuring a brighter future for Ghanaian students. This study examines teacher experiences in Ghana's Agotime-Ziope District, focusing on two research questions: Why do teachers consider leaving the profession? How can identified challenges be addressed to improve teacher retention?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Teacher retention

Teacher retention is essential for a stable and effective educational system (Grissom, 2019). High retention rates suggest a supportive work environment where educators feel valued, motivated, and capable of performing their roles effectively. In contrast, low retention rates often indicate systemic issues such as

poor working conditions, inadequate support, or job dissatisfaction. Effective teacher retention strategies aim to create a nurturing environment that encourages teachers to stay, contributing to consistent and quality education. This research uses Turnover Theory, specifically the Push-Pull-Mooring Model, to analyze the factors influencing teacher retention in the Ghanaian education system.

Teacher turnover

Teacher turnover refers to the rate at which teachers leave their positions, whether to move to other schools, leave the profession entirely, or transition to other roles within the education sector (Räsänen et al., 2020). High turnover rates can disrupt the learning environment, increase recruitment and training costs, and negatively impact student outcomes. Conversely, teacher retention focuses on maintaining a stable teaching workforce by ensuring teachers remain in their positions for extended periods. Several factors influence teacher turnover and retention, broadly categorized into internal factors, such as motivation and job satisfaction, and external factors, including working conditions, salary, and administrative support.

Motivation

Motivation plays a critical role in teacher retention. Intrinsically motivated teachers are more likely to remain committed to their profession. Intrinsic motivation often stems from a passion for teaching, a desire to make a difference in students' lives, and a sense of personal and professional fulfillment (Chaudhuri, 2020). When teachers feel their work is meaningful and impactful, they are likelier to stay in the profession despite challenges. They feel productive and less likely to leave their jobs. Factors contributing to job satisfaction include a positive school climate, opportunities for professional growth, recognition and appreciation, autonomy in the classroom, and a sense of accomplishment. When teachers feel respected and valued, their commitment to their job and their likelihood of remaining in the profession increases.

Working conditions

The working conditions within schools significantly impact teacher retention (Toropova et al., 2021). Poor working conditions, such as inadequate resources, large class sizes, high levels of stress, and lack of administrative support, can lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction. Conversely, positive working conditions increase retention rates, including well-equipped classrooms, manageable workloads, and supportive school culture.

Compensation

Compensation is crucial to teacher retention (Perryman & Calvert, 2018). Competitive salaries can attract and retain talented teachers, while low pay can lead to financial stress and drive teachers to seek better-paying opportunities outside the profession. In many cases, teachers leave the profession not because of a lack of passion for teaching but because they cannot sustain themselves financially on a teacher's salary.

Administrative support

Support from school administration is another critical factor influencing teacher retention. Effective administrative support includes providing professional development opportunities, offering mentorship and guidance, addressing teacher concerns, and creating a collaborative and respectful school environment.

When teachers feel supported by their administrators, they are more likely to remain in their positions and be committed to their school's success.

Turnover Theory: The Push-Pull-Mooring Model

Turnover Theory, specifically the Push-Pull-Mooring Model, provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing teacher retention. This model helps understand the factors influencing a teacher's decision to stay or leave their position.

Push factors

Push factors represent the negative aspects of a profession that might drive someone away. These could be internal or external factors such as low motivation, low salaries, or a lack of job satisfaction (Ali & Anwar, 2021). In Ghanaian education, push factors could include inadequate resources, high-stress levels, lack of professional development opportunities, and insufficient administrative support.

Pull factors

Pull factors represent the allure of other opportunities in different professions that might entice an individual to leave their current role (Urbański, 2022). For teachers in Ghana, pull factors might include better-paying jobs in other sectors, opportunities for career advancement outside of teaching, or more supportive working environments elsewhere.

Mooring factors

Mooring factors are the positive aspects of a job that make someone want to stay. These include good working conditions, career advancement opportunities, and a sense of purpose. For teachers in Ghana, mooring factors might include a reliable salary, supportive local culture, and intrinsic motivation derived from making a difference in students' lives.

Empirical evidence

Empirical evidence underscores the importance of addressing push and mooring factors to improve teacher retention. Previous research highlights how low salaries and job dissatisfaction push teachers to leave the profession (Schaack et al., 2022). Conversely, other studies demonstrate how better opportunities in other sectors distract teachers from teaching. Another research emphasizes the importance of administrative support and professional development in retaining teachers. Providing ongoing mentorship, career advancement opportunities, and recognition for teachers' contributions can create a supportive environment that encourages them to stay (Kallio et al., 2024).

METHODS

The primary objective of this research was to gather insights into teachers' intentions to remain in or leave the profession, their reasons for considering departure, the challenges they face, and proposed solutions to these challenges. In 2024, an anonymous online questionnaire via Google Form was administered to teachers in the Agotime-Ziope District of Ghana. This study explored teachers' experiences, perceptions

of their work, and satisfaction levels. The questionnaire was announced through various WhatsApp platforms of teachers in the district to reach a broad audience.

Sample and Data Collection

138 teachers participated in the survey. WhatsApp platforms were carefully selected to reflect the geographic distribution of the teachers' respondents in the Agotime-Ziope District. However, we acknowledge that the sample may not fully represent the district's teaching population. With a total population of 214 public school teachers in the district, our sample of 138 teachers represents approximately 64.5% of the population. The respondents were diverse, covering a broad spectrum of career phases ranging from early-career, mid-career, to late-career stages, representing both primary and secondary educational levels. Teachers were asked about their intended duration of teaching, and various response options were provided. Those who indicated an intention to leave the profession were also asked to specify their reasons. This sample of 138 responses was analyzed thematically to identify common factors influencing the decision to leave teaching and also strategies that could mitigate the issues leading to teacher attrition.

Analysis

To analyze teacher motivations, we employed a deductive thematic approach (Proudfoot, 2023). Researchers reviewed the data repeatedly to identify common themes and patterns related to why teachers might leave the profession (push factors). This became particularly relevant after most respondents indicated an intention to depart. The thematic analysis then shifted to explore potential solutions (mooring factors) based on teachers' suggestions for improvement. Here, researchers looked for approaches, practices, and solutions that could incentivize teachers to remain in the profession.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this discussion, we primarily examine the factors influencing respondents' decisions to leave the teaching profession. As described by those intending to leave, these factors often appeared together. For instance, heavy workloads were frequently mentioned alongside the negative impact on health and well-being and frustrations related to the perceived core responsibilities of teaching. Low salaries and poor working conditions were also commonly linked to diminished professional status and job satisfaction. We also analyze potential mooring factors that might encourage retention, as suggested by all respondents. These combined insights offer a nuanced understanding of the challenges and possible solutions for improving teacher retention.

Table 1. Teachers' intentions regarding their tenure in the profession

Duration	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1 year	20	14.49%
5 years	30	21.74%
10 years	20	14.49%
I do not intend to leave	50	36.23%
Other	18	13.04%
Total	138	100%

Source: Survey 2024

The data from the questionnaire indicates a concerning trend in the teaching profession in the Agotime-Ziope District. Only 36.23% of respondents have no intention of leaving the profession, which suggests a relatively stable core of teachers. However, a significant portion of the respondents, 63.77%, are considering leaving within the next ten years, with various timelines indicated (1 year, 5 years, and 10 years), and the 'Other' category representing those who are conditional about staying depending on improvements to their problems.

Short-Term Departures (1 Year): The 14.49% of teachers who plan to leave within a year represent a critical issue. Such imminent departures could lead to significant disruptions in the educational process, impacting student learning and continuity of instruction. This short-term turnover could create a problematic vacuum to fill promptly, leading to increased workload and stress for remaining teachers.

Medium-Term Departures (5 Years): 21.74% of teachers intend to leave within five years. While not immediately disruptive in the short term, this medium-term turnover indicates that a substantial portion of the workforce is dissatisfied or seeking other opportunities. It also signals potential future shortages that the education system needs to start preparing for now. **Long-Term Departures (10 Years):** Another 14.49% plan to leave within ten years.

This group may include those who are possibly nearing retirement age or those looking for career changes. While this timeframe allows for some planning and adjustment, it still represents a significant loss of experienced educators. **Conditional Departures (Others):** The 13.04% in the 'Other' category highlights teachers who are ambivalent about their future in the profession and could be persuaded to stay if their issues are addressed. This group is crucial because it represents an opportunity for intervention. Effective policies and improvements in working conditions could reduce the overall attrition rate.

Implications for Quality of Education and Learning Outcomes

Disruption of educational continuity hurts students' achievement. High turnover rates can lead to inconsistency in teaching, which negatively affects student learning outcomes. Frequent changes in teaching staff can disrupt the continuity of instruction and the development of student-teacher relationships, which are crucial for effective learning environments. Experienced educators' loss negatively impacts quality instruction (Vagi et al., 2019). The departure of experienced teachers who have accumulated years of pedagogical expertise and classroom management skills can severely impact the quality of education. Newer, less experienced teachers may struggle to fill the gap left by their more seasoned counterparts, leading to a potential decline in instructional quality.

Increased workload for remaining Teachers exacerbates teacher burnout (Scott, 2019). As teachers leave, their duties often fall to the remaining staff, increasing their workload and stress levels. This can lead to burnout, further exacerbating turnover rates. Overburdened teachers, according to Bakker et al. in "*Job Demands - Resources Theory and Self-regulation: new explanations and remedies for job burnout explanations and remedies for job burnout*" are less effective, and their ability to provide high-quality instruction diminishes, impacting student performance and engagement. Recruitment and Training Challenges often put a strain on scarce resources. The education system must invest heavily in recruiting and training new teachers to replace those who leave. This can strain resources and may lead to a focus on quantity over quality in hiring practices. New teachers require time to acclimate and develop their skills, which can affect short-term educational outcomes.

Push factors

Teachers considering leaving the profession cited several reasons. The most prominent included low salaries, overwhelming workloads, and negative impacts on health and well-being. Teachers also expressed feeling under-appreciated and disrespected. Poor working conditions and a growing disillusionment with the education system's priorities and practices concerned teachers (see **Table 2**).

Table 2. Reasons why teachers are considering leaving their profession

Reason	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Low Salaries	50	36.23%
Poor Working Conditions	30	21.74%
Workloads	20	14.49%
Health and Wellbeing Concerns	18	13.04%
Low Professional Status	10	7.25%
Job Dissatisfaction	5	3.62%
Total	138	100%

Source: Survey 2024

Discussion

Low Salaries/ Poor Working Conditions

Low salaries and poor working conditions are significant push factors driving teachers in the Agotime-Ziope District to consider leaving their profession, as reflected in the data presented in Table 2. Specifically, 36.23% of respondents cited low salaries, and 21.74% pointed to poor working conditions as their primary concerns. These figures align with broader trends documented in empirical research regarding the teaching profession in Ghana. Low salaries are a pervasive issue that significantly impacts the motivation and retention of teachers in Ghana. Numerous studies have documented teachers' financial struggles, highlighting the disparity in remuneration compared to other professions with similar educational requirements. For example, a study emphasizes that teachers in many African countries, including Ghana, are often paid poorly (Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019).

This financial instability forces many teachers to seek additional sources of income or leave the profession altogether. The starting salary for teachers in Ghana is relatively low, and salary increments over time do not adequately reflect the rising cost of living or the profession's demands. This issue is exacerbated by delayed salary payments and insufficient allowances, further contributing to financial insecurity among teachers (Rosmanida et al., 2022). The impact of low salaries extends beyond financial stress, affecting teachers' ability to maintain a standard of living that supports their professional responsibilities and personal needs. Financial instability can lead to diminished morale, reduced job satisfaction, and decreased productivity. These factors collectively undermine the quality of education students provide, as financially stressed teachers are less likely to be fully engaged and effective in their roles.

Poor working conditions are another critical factor driving teachers away from their profession. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of teaching materials, and overcrowded classrooms characterize the teaching environment in many Ghanaian schools. Previous research underscores that many schools lack basic amenities such as electricity, water, and proper sanitation, making the teaching and learning process arduous and less effective (Mukhiya & Mainali, 2023). These substandard conditions hinder teachers' ability to deliver quality education and negatively impact student learning outcomes. Additionally,

administrative tasks and extracurricular responsibilities often fall on teachers, increasing their workload without corresponding compensation or support. This situation is further aggravated by limited opportunities for professional development and career advancement, leaving teachers feeling undervalued and unsupported (Maxwell, 2020).

The lack of a supportive and resourceful work environment hampers teachers' ability to maintain professional satisfaction and deliver effective instruction. The interplay between low salaries and poor working conditions creates a vicious cycle affecting teacher retention and student outcomes. Teachers' morale and productivity decline when they are underpaid and work in substandard conditions. This, in turn, impacts the quality of education that students receive, perpetuating educational inequities and undermining the goals of national education policies such as the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework (NTECF). Empirical research suggests that addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach. Increasing teacher salaries to reflect the actual value of their work and ensuring timely payments are essential first steps.

Moreover, improving working conditions by investing in school infrastructure, ensuring adequate provision of teaching materials, and reducing class sizes can enhance the teaching environment (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020). Policies that provide continuous professional development and career growth opportunities can help retain teachers by making the profession more attractive and sustainable. Addressing the issues of low salaries and poor working conditions is crucial for improving teacher retention and the overall quality of education in Ghana. By tackling these push factors, stakeholders can create a more supportive and effective educational environment that benefits teachers and students.

Workload Pressures in the Ghanaian Context

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that workloads are significant reasons teachers in the Agotime-Ziope District consider leaving their profession, with 14.49% of respondents citing workloads as their primary concern. This reflects broader trends identified in empirical research on the teaching profession in Ghana, where excessive workloads are a common issue. In Ghana, the workload for teachers includes direct teaching responsibilities and a significant number of administrative duties, extracurricular activities, and compliance with educational policies. Teachers often describe their workload as excessive, unrealistic, and unsustainable, aligning with findings from international research (Perryman & Calvert, 2018).

The intensification of teachers' work has been well-documented, with teachers facing overwhelming tasks beyond the classroom. These include lesson planning, grading, parent-teacher meetings, and participation in school management committees (Stacey et al., 2020). The cumulative effect of these responsibilities often leads to extended work hours, encroaching on personal time and affecting teachers' overall well-being. One critical aspect of the workload that teachers in Ghana highlight is the administrative burden. 'Adminivia' refers to the unnecessary or excessive administrative tasks that teachers must complete. These assignments detract from their primary teaching duties and diminish professional autonomy, as they are often seen as controls and adherence measures.

In Ghana, administrative tasks are frequently considered redundant and not directly linked to improving student outcomes. Teachers report spending a significant portion of their time on paperwork, data entry, and reporting, which they feel undermines their professional autonomy and does not contribute meaningfully to their teaching effectiveness. This administrative overload is a significant source of frustration and demoralization, leading to higher attrition rates. Teaching is emotionally intensive, requiring constant interaction with students, parents, and colleagues. The emotional labor involved in managing classrooms, addressing student needs, and coping with the demands of educational reforms can be overwhelming (Wang et al., 2023). The emotional toll of teaching can lead to burnout, stress, and a decline in mental health.

Teachers frequently express that the emotional demands of the job, compounded by heavy workloads, leave them with little time to rest and recuperate. The lack of time for self-care and personal activities exacerbates stress and leads to serious health consequences. Teachers report feeling exhausted and unable to maintain a healthy work-life balance, which is crucial for sustaining long-term professional engagement (Scott, 2019). The imbalance between professional and personal life is a significant concern among teachers in Ghana. The expectation to perform extensive work outside of regular school hours, including nights, weekends, and holidays, leaves teachers with little time for their families and personal interests. This imbalance affects their health, job satisfaction, and professional commitment.

A healthy work-life balance is essential for improving teachers' performance and job satisfaction. However, achieving this balance is challenging in the Ghanaian context due to the constant extension of work into personal time. Teachers' narratives reflect a continuous struggle to manage their professional responsibilities without sacrificing their personal lives, leading to an unsustainable situation that drives many to leave the profession. Excessive workloads are a significant push factor in the Ghanaian education context, significantly affecting teacher retention. Addressing these issues requires systemic changes to reduce administrative burdens, provide better support for emotional labor, and promote a healthier work-life balance. By tackling these challenges, the education system in Ghana can create a more sustainable and supportive environment for teachers, ultimately improving educational outcomes.

Health and Wellbeing in the Ghanaian Teaching Profession

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that health and well-being concerns are significant reasons teachers in the Agotime-Ziope District consider leaving their profession. Specifically, 13.04% of respondents cited health and well-being concerns as their primary issues. These figures reflect broader trends identified in empirical research regarding the teaching profession in Ghana. Teachers' physical and mental health is crucial for the effective functioning of educational systems. In Ghana, like many other countries, teaching is recognized as a demanding profession that often leads to significant stress and burnout. A study reveals that Ghanaian teachers frequently experience high levels of job-related stress due to heavy workloads, inadequate resources, and poor working conditions (Chen & Ntim, 2023).

These stressors are compounded by the emotional labor inherent in teaching, which can lead to severe burnout. Stress and burnout are significant factors contributing to teacher attrition in Ghana. Teachers routinely describe their work as exhausting and overwhelming, which aligns with international findings. In the Ghanaian context, the combination of large class sizes, lack of administrative support, and inadequate infrastructure exacerbates these feelings. Many teachers in Ghana are responsible for teaching multiple subjects and managing oversized classrooms, leading to chronic fatigue and a sense of professional inadequacy. Burnout manifests as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, as detailed by (Edú-valsania et al., 2022).

Ghanaian teachers report that the constant pressure to meet educational targets and manage students' diverse needs without sufficient support leads to perpetual exhaustion and disillusionment with the profession (Buabeng et al., 2020). The emotional toll of managing student behavior, addressing individual needs, and dealing with challenging classroom situations can profoundly affect teachers' mental health. The emotional labor required in teaching can lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Teachers in Ghana often express concern for their students' mental health and well-being, adding to their stress (Tsang et al., 2021). The emotional burden of worrying about students' problems and the pressure to provide adequate support without sufficient resources contribute to teachers' mental health issues.

A study highlights that many teachers feel overwhelmed by the emotional demands of their job, leading to chronic stress and anxiety. Role-family conflict is another significant issue affecting teachers' well-being in Ghana (Pogere et al., 2019). The demands of the teaching profession often extend beyond school hours, encroaching on personal and family time. Teachers frequently report working late into the night, on weekends, and during holidays to complete administrative tasks, lesson planning, and grading. According to McGrath-Champ et al. in "*Understanding Work in Schools. 2018 Report to the NSW Teachers Federation*" this conflict is particularly pronounced for female teachers, who often bear the dual burden of professional responsibilities and family care. Empirical studies highlight that the inability to balance work and family responsibilities increases teacher stress and dissatisfaction.

For instance, Research found that many Ghanaian teachers struggle to maintain a healthy work-life balance, resulting in strained family relationships and reduced job satisfaction (Ankomah & Dzikunu, 2024). The gendered nature of family responsibilities exacerbates this issue, as female teachers are more likely to experience significant role-family conflict. The health and well-being of teachers are critical factors in their decision to remain in the profession. High levels of stress, burnout, and role-family conflict contribute to teacher attrition, affecting the quality of education. When teachers leave the profession due to health-related issues, it disrupts the continuity of instruction and negatively impacts student learning outcomes.

Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy interventions. Improving working conditions, reducing administrative burdens, providing emotional and professional support, and promoting a healthy work-life balance are essential to enhance teacher retention. Providing adequate resources and support systems can help alleviate the stress and burnout experienced by teachers, enabling them to maintain their health and well-being and remain committed to the profession. Improving working conditions means investing in school infrastructure and ensuring teachers access to necessary teaching materials (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020).

Reducing administrative burdens involves streamlining paperwork and allowing teachers more time to focus on teaching and personal development (Fitzgerald et al., 2019). Emotional and professional support can be offered through counseling services, mentorship programs, and professional development opportunities that address personal and career growth. Promoting a healthy work-life balance requires policies that respect teachers' time, such as reasonable work hours and sufficient holidays. These measures can create a more supportive and sustainable working environment, ensuring teachers can thrive personally and professionally, ultimately benefiting the entire educational system in Ghana.

Low Status and Public Perception

The data presented in Table 2 indicates that low professional status concerns are significant reasons teachers in the Agotime-Ziope District consider leaving their profession. Specifically, 7.5% of respondents cited low professional status as their primary concern. These figures reflect broader trends identified in empirical research regarding the teaching profession in Ghana. The status of the teaching profession in Ghana is perceived to be low, which has far-reaching implications for teacher retention and effectiveness. Teachers often feel demoralized by how the public, media, and policymakers perceive their work. A study indicates that Ghanaian teachers frequently express frustration over the lack of recognition and respect for their profession (Boateng, 2019).

This sentiment is echoed by respondents who feel their expertise is undervalued, and their professional autonomy is not respected. Negative media portrayals contribute significantly to this issue. Like their counterparts in other countries, teachers in Ghana are often depicted negatively, focusing on supposed inefficiencies, long holidays, and light workloads. Such portrayals undermine the public's appreciation of the complexities and challenges of teaching. According to previous research, these negative perceptions discourage young people from entering the profession and lead to higher attrition rates among current teachers (Räsänen et al., 2020). The under-appreciation of teachers has direct consequences for their morale and job satisfaction. Research highlights that many teachers in Ghana feel undervalued and under-appreciated by the community, policymakers, and even students and parents (Kim et al., 2023).

This lack of recognition contributes to professional demoralization, making managing workload and well-being more difficult. Teachers report that their professional expertise is often questioned, and their contributions to student success are overlooked. This devaluation is further exacerbated by the lack of adequate professional development opportunities and support from educational authorities. As noted by another research, the absence of a supportive professional environment leads to feelings of isolation and disillusionment among teachers. There is an apparent disconnect between policy and best practice in the Ghanaian education system (Nápoles, 2022). Teachers frequently point out that educational policies do not reflect the realities of classroom teaching and fail to provide the necessary support for effective teaching and learning.

This mismatch contributes to the perception that teachers are not trusted or respected as professionals. The lack of policy and practice alignment diminishes teachers' professional autonomy and efficacy (Paufler, 2018). Addressing this issue requires a shift in public discourse and policy. Recognizing the complexity of teaching and valuing teachers' expertise and contributions are essential to improving their status. Empirical studies suggest that public trust in teachers remains relatively high, but this trust is not adequately reflected in public and policy discourse (Wiggin et al., 2021). Bridging this gap is crucial for enhancing the status of the profession. Efforts to improve the status of teachers in Ghana should include public campaigns to raise awareness about the critical role of teachers in society and the challenges they face.

Additionally, policies should be developed to ensure teachers are adequately compensated and provided with opportunities for continuous professional development. Creating a culture of respect and recognition within schools and communities can help elevate the profession's status. By valuing teachers' contributions and supporting their professional growth, it is possible to foster a more positive perception of the teaching profession, leading to better teacher retention and improved educational outcomes.

Potential remedies

To address the challenges identified in this study and retain teachers in the profession, we have structured our analysis around four prominent themes: low salary/working conditions, workload, well-being, and the profession's status. These mooring solutions are derived from the data and tailored to the push factors highlighted by respondents. We acknowledge the historical policy trend imposed on teachers without incorporating their perspectives. Research indicates that teachers often occupy the lowest rung in the policymaking hierarchy (Reckhow et al., 2021). Therefore, our approach emphasizes teacher expertise and voice in developing these strategies. Instead of imposing external solutions, we advocate for teacher-identified strategies to address the retention crisis.

This method ensures that the solutions are relevant and effective, rooted in the experiences and insights of the teachers themselves. By centering teacher voices, we aim to create supportive and sustainable policies that address their real needs and challenges. Inadequate remuneration and poor working conditions drive teacher attrition in Ghana. Research shows that the average teacher's salary is often insufficient to cover basic living expenses, leading to financial stress and low job satisfaction (Mabaso & Dlamini, 2021). Inadequate salaries undermine teacher morale and commitment, increasing turnover rates (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

Delays in salary and benefit payments add to the financial insecurity experienced by teachers. Teachers suggest several strategies to address these issues. Firstly, salaries should be increased to reflect the cost of living and inflation. Enhancing conditions of service by providing adequate teaching materials, reducing class sizes, and ensuring timely payment of salaries and benefits can significantly improve job satisfaction. Additionally, implementing housing allowances and health insurance can alleviate financial burdens and improve overall well-being. These measures are essential for creating a supportive and stable work environment that can attract and retain talented educators. Excessive workload is another critical factor affecting teacher retention in Ghana. Studies indicate that teachers are often overwhelmed by administrative tasks, extracurricular activities, and large class sizes, extending well beyond their contractual hours (Stacey et al., 2023). This work intensification leads to stress, burnout, and diminished job satisfaction.

In Ghana, similar findings show that teachers are burdened with heavy workloads that hinder their ability to focus on effective teaching (Danku, 2022). The pressure to meet extensive administrative requirements and the lack of support staff exacerbate these challenges. Data analysis revealed respondents suggested reducing workload, even when not explicitly stated. These included "decluttering" the curriculum, reducing class sizes, focusing on "the basics," clarifying the role of a teacher, and reducing the social and support services that have been subsumed into school work over time. For instance, respondents' comments about feeling overwhelmed by the quantity of marking, reporting, assessment, and differentiating for complex classrooms connect logically to their suggested solution of smaller class sizes.

However, addressing this at a systemic scale is unlikely. A more feasible approach is reducing tangential tasks related to the surveillance and monitoring teaching and learning. These extraneous tasks, often referred to as "administrivia" by respondents, have been described as threatening teachers' capacity to focus on student learning (Heffernan et al., 2022). Comments about "decluttering" the curriculum and clarifying the teacher's role aim to refocus teachers' work. Removing requirements to teach highly prescriptive curricula or assessment practices and enabling teachers to focus on "what matters" align with recommendations about supporting teachers to reclaim their professional autonomy over their teaching practices (Heffernan et al., 2022). This approach would have a positive "anchorage" effect on members of the profession.

The perceived low status of the teaching profession significantly influences teacher retention. Research shows that negative public perceptions contribute to a sense of demoralization among teachers. This lack of appreciation and respect undermines their professional identity and motivation. In Ghana, the teaching profession is often viewed as a last resort for those who cannot secure more prestigious jobs, diminishing its status. This perception affects how teachers are treated by students, parents, and the community, leading to frustration and disengagement. Alongside a meaningful reduction in workload, an increased understanding or awareness of the complexity of teachers' work and a subsequent shift in how the broader public perceives schools and teachers could influence teachers' decisions to stay in the profession, highlighting significant concerns within the teaching profession regarding status and perceptions of their work.

Respondents specifically suggested a campaign to raise the status of the teaching profession, noting the connection between status, satisfaction, and how teachers are perceived by the wider public, including the media and politicians. Students hardly respect teachers in this climate when politicians and parents are constantly badmouthing the profession? The media's portrayal of teachers is concerning. The number of negative stories compared to positive ones reflects a sense of being under-appreciated and untrusted. These reflections on trust were interwoven with a lack of respect for the profession more widely. There is minimal respect from the broader community for what teachers do. While raising awareness about the complexity of teaching or raising the profession's status alone would not be sufficient to reduce turnover, it could mitigate some stress and burnout issues in several ways.

First, it could provoke a shift in how people interact with schools and teachers—raising respect and awareness of the work done by teachers could lead to more positive interactions and understanding between teachers and students, parents/carers, or the wider community. Second, issues raised as push factors could be reduced if teachers feel their work is appreciated and the workload and emotional intensity are recognized. Teachers gained a positive status when they felt trusted and appreciated by colleagues and parents/carers. Appreciation for the excruciating workloads described by respondents would not alone improve teacher satisfaction and retention. However, a more positive portrayal of the profession, combined with an actual reduction in workload, a refocusing of teachers' work, and a focus on teachers' health and well-being, could significantly impact how teachers feel about their work and careers in the long term.

CONCLUSION

The study on teacher retention in the Agotime-Ziope District reveals significant challenges facing the teaching profession. These issues lead to job dissatisfaction and diminished professional status. The implications for educational quality are profound. High turnover disrupts student learning, leads to a loss of experienced educators, increases the workload for remaining teachers, and strains recruitment and training resources. Addressing these push factors through better compensation, improved working conditions, and enhanced support systems is crucial for stabilizing the teaching workforce and ensuring consistent, high-quality education for students.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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