



Is Teaching A Profession? A Look at Ghana's Situation.

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Abstract

This article focuses on teaching as a profession in Ghana by weighing it against the characteristics of professions. The objective was to seek to advance the view that teaching in Ghana is a profession by discussing key characteristics that make teaching a profession. We concluded that some challenges such as the proliferations of non-professionals in the classroom militate against teaching as a profession. We recommended that the National Teaching Council (NTC) should be involved in the teacher recruitment process to ensure strict adherence to its standards. Again, teachers should be given a higher degree of autonomy to get involved in curriculum development and implementation in classrooms.

Keywords: Ghana; profession; professionals; teaching; teachers

I. Introduction

Over the years, there have been growing concerns among educators, scholars, and researchers about whether teaching as an occupation should be considered a profession or not. While some believe it should be regarded as a full profession, others also seem to have opposite beliefs. For teaching to be described as a profession, it needs to be measured against the standard characteristics of a profession (Esia-Donkoh et al., 2021). This means that one must weigh the features of teaching against those of other professions before concluding on the fate of teaching as a profession or otherwise. Before we look at such characteristics of professions, let us first consider some conceptual definitions of teaching and profession. Teaching can be thought of as a process that facilitates learning (Farrant, 1980). This implies that in teaching, the goal is for learning to take place. As learners master new knowledge and skills because of their interactions with relevant materials and

resources, under the guidance of a more knowledgeable peer or adult (teacher), teaching can be said to have taken place. Teaching can be described as an activity or activities of imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to learners (Tamakloe, Amedahe, & Atta, 2005). Generally, teaching entails many activities, including but not limited to the preparation of notes, classroom management, selection of content and learning activities, construction of test items, and giving of feedback to students. In all these activities, the primary aim is for learners to acquire knowledge, develop skills and competencies, and harness attitudes, and social and moral values. On the other hand, profession according to Otterlei (2018), refers to "occupations with a long formal education, ethical guidelines, and great freedom and autonomy in their work" (p. 34). This connotes that a profession is a type of job with its own set of rules or operational standards and freedom to make decisions, and one can only become part [and practise] after receiving advanced education and special training.

Our view on this seemingly endless debate is that, considering the general characteristics of professions (as will be outlined in the next paragraph), teaching as an occupation could best be described as a full profession or otherwise if we looked at it from the perspective of how it is practised in specific countries. This paper seeks to point out some unique features of teaching and teachers in Ghana as it attempts to justify why teaching in Ghana is a profession.

II. Characteristics of professions

Based on the writings of renowned authorities over 35 years, the following are the characteristics of a full profession (Corwin, 1965;



Howsam et al., 1976; Rosenholtz, 1989, as cited in Ornstein & Levine, 2008).

1. A sense of public service; a lifetime commitment to a career
2. A defined body of knowledge and skills beyond that grasped by laypersons
3. A lengthy period of specialised training
4. Control over licencing standards and/or entry requirements
5. Autonomy in making decisions about selected spheres of work.
6. An acceptance of responsibility for judgments made and acts performed related to services rendered; a set of performance standards
7. A self-governing organisation composed of members of the profession
8. Professional associations and/or elite groups to provide recognition for individual achievements
9. A code of ethics to help clarify ambiguous matters or doubtful points related to services rendered
10. High prestige and economic standing

To narrow it down to teaching attributes in specific countries such as Ghana, perhaps a fair assessment can be done if a checklist could be created and ticked for those features that teaching **satisfies (Esiadonkoh et al., 2021)**. We admit that teaching in Ghana may not meet all the above-stated characteristics squarely on a full scale. However, we are of the view that meeting about 70% of them is satisfactory and enough to consider it as a full-scale profession.

III. Teaching in Ghana

Teachers are extremely important in all educational systems. They act as state agents, educating citizens and imparting knowledge and skills that are important, but they also act as change agents and commonly assume the role of public intellectuals, especially in rural areas or urban slums. As young scholars, we believe that in Ghana, teaching as an occupation is a profession and teachers [as its practitioners] are professionals. The following reasons are advanced to support our position and belief.

3.1 Teachers in Ghana go through a lengthy period of education and training.

Teachers receive advanced training from accredited teacher training institutions such as Colleges of Education (CoE) and Universities. There are 48 Colleges of Education (CoE) in Ghana (**Buabeng et al., 2020**) and some other higher education institutions amongst which are two traditional teacher education institutions (the University of Cape Coast and the University of

Education, Winneba). These institutions are required to prepare teachers to teach students at the basic and senior high schools; they offer diploma and degree programmes in various subject areas to equip graduates with the needed knowledge and skills to teach students. The minimum entry qualification at the basic level used to be Diploma in Basic Education (D. BE) This was before the introduction of the new teacher education reforms that took effect in 2018. However, “the minimum entry requirement for teaching is Bachelor in Basic Education and no longer a Diploma” (**Buabeng et al., 2020, p.92**). At the secondary level, the requirement is a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) in a specialized subject area(s) or a Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)- which is usually for those who did not read education at the undergraduate level but have a B.A /B.SC qualification in a teaching subject(s). Such requirements demand that pre-service teachers spend many years in school to go through rigorous training and skill development for teaching. Pre-service teachers spend four years in colleges of education while their counterparts in universities also spend four years (for bachelor of education) and a range of two to three years for DBE and PDGE. In a study conducted by Cobbold in 2015 on teachers' views of themselves as professionals, the majority (89.5%) of the respondents (N=230) who were teachers in Ghana agreed that teaching in Ghana entails a long period of specialized training (**Cobbold, 2015**). Some teachers even after completing a four-year training, proceed to do two years of Master’s degree in related teaching areas to advance their knowledge for classroom teaching. Take for example a teacher who holds a 3-year diploma certificate from CoE (before reforms in 2018) who went on to do a 2-year top-up programme for a degree certificate and now has gone through a 2-year master of education programme, would have spent seven (7) years in training. In this regard, teachers spend a minimum of about three years and a maximum of about seven years in training.

3.2 Teachers in Ghana write Licensure Exams to receive license to teach.

According to **Mensah et al. (2020)**, “licensure is the mark of a professional, it is an important requirement for any profession such as the law, medicine, nursing and teaching” (p.119). Most countries in the world require trained teachers from colleges of education or universities to pass the mandated licensure examination before they are considered “highly qualified” and eligible for employment as teachers and be conferred the title of professional teacher (**Aquino & Balilla, 2015**). In Ghana, the National Teaching Council (NTC) is



mandated to design and execute professional development programmes and licensing pre-tertiary teachers; develop and periodically review teaching practices and ethical standards for teachers and teaching (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2019). It was established by the 2008 Education Act (ACT 778) and has the overall responsibility to license teachers by law (National Teaching Council, 2021). The Professional Teaching Licence is the highest recognition of professional achievement and admits the teacher to a wider network of accomplished educators influencing the field (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000) and people's lives. It indicates that a teacher has met all the standards required for the profession (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2015).

The teacher licensure examination in Ghana is designed and conducted by the National Teaching Council (NTC) [Fredua-Kwarteng, 2019] and covers three areas-Essential teaching skills (basic knowledge in teaching and pedagogy), Numeracy (basic mathematics) and Literacy (aptitude test on English proficiency). Since 2018, the council has ensured that prospective teachers pass a professional licensure examination before the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ghana Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Service hire them as teachers, even if they had diplomas, bachelor's degrees, or post-graduate degrees from teacher colleges or universities. Kelly (2017) indicated that the licensing of professional teachers is important in education because it allows the right professionals to be hired for teaching jobs. It therefore can be said that the teacher license has become a prerequisite for teaching in Ghana. After the successful completion of a certain number of professional development courses, teachers who were already in the service before the inception of the licensure could obtain a full professional license. A teaching license is renewable every year after satisfactory completion of specified professional development courses, along with teaching appraisal reports (NTC, cited in Fredua-Kwarteng, 2019). Just as drivers need a license to drive and doctors need a license to work, so do teachers. Therefore, the introduction of the teacher licensure examination has added to the professionalism of teachers in Ghana.

3.3 Teachers in Ghana have Standard Code of Ethics that guide their professional practice.

A code of ethics is a guide of principles designed to help professionals conduct business honestly and with integrity (Hayes, 2022). They are a set of guidelines that are put in place to enable employees to conduct themselves appropriately to

ensure the protection of the reputation of an organization. The rules must be successfully carried out, effectively communicated, and firmly enforced with impartiality to ensure employee commitment to the organization; otherwise, the codes will look to be merely "cosmetic dressing" for the organization (Kumasey et al., 2017). In Ghana, teachers also have a professional code of ethics prescribed by the Ghana Education Service (GES). This code of ethics governs and regulates the behaviours of teachers, headteachers and even administrators in various levels of offices. These codes are generally grouped into conduct and misconduct. Conduct refers to the behaviour, attitude(s), and character displayed, for instance, by anyone inside and outside of the working environment (GES Council, 2017). In GES, indicators of [good] conduct include leadership, self-control, comportment, integrity, impartiality, fairness, and honesty concerning their work and the position of their profession. While misconduct includes any act or omission by an employee that results in a failure to perform properly any official duty that has been delegated to him or her as such, or that violates any rules, regulations, or laws about the Ghana Education Service, or that otherwise jeopardises the effective operation of the Education Service and brings it into disrepute (GES Council, 2017). Research shows that the majority of teachers in Ghana are of the view that the teaching profession in Ghana has a code of conduct that sets out acceptable standards of conduct for its members (Cobbold, 2015).

Members who fail to comply with the code of ethics are summoned before the professional disciplinary proceedings and the necessary punishment(s) are meted out to them (Esia-Donkoh et al., 2021). For instance, in 2018 four male teachers of Ejisuman Senior High School in the Ashanti region were found to have sexually harassed some female students; a breach of the provisions of Article 3.8, Clause C, Section (i) of the GES Council (2017) code of conduct for GES staff members, which stipulates that "no employee shall directly or indirectly do anything that may constitute sexual harassment of a pupil/student" (p.21). When issues of sexual misconduct were levelled against these four teachers, a disciplinary committee was set up to look into the matter and upon investigations and evidence that the committee had received, they were sacked. This confirms earlier views of teachers in Cobbold's (2015) study that teaching in Ghana has a code of conduct that sets out acceptable standards of conduct for its members.



3.4 Teachers in Ghana have some degree of Autonomy.

Autonomy in professional practice means that practitioners “should be sufficiently free from bureaucratic and political constraints to act on judgements made in the best interests (as they see them) of the clients” (Hoyle & John, 1995, p. 77). In teaching, the ability, willingness, and independence of teachers to take charge of their own instruction and student learning are referred to as teacher autonomy (Huang, 2005). In Cobbold’s (2015) study, the majority of the teachers “believed that they enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy and decision-making power in carrying out their work” (p.130). It could be inferred from the study that teachers have some degree of freedom in their classroom practices. However, there is a sharp contrast to this belief as teachers are expected to faithfully comply, use, and implement the official curriculum as intended by the authorities without any deviation (Cobbold, 2017). This raises the issue of freedom with which teachers teach in the classroom. Teachers are largely not autonomous when it comes to curriculum development in Ghana. This is because teachers in Ghana are not directly involved in the curriculum decision-making process (Agormedah et al., 2022). The reality is that while teachers may have some level of autonomy in classroom decision-making, the freedom teachers have to make decisions regarding curriculum change, development and implementation in Ghana is not enough. Therefore, as with other professions, teachers in Ghana should have a higher degree of professional autonomy.

3.5 Teachers have a Defined Body of Professional Knowledge

According to Sachs (2003), “teachers possess a cogent body of knowledge that they apply in classrooms, working with students [and that] enables them to make judgements about student learning and their performance as teachers” (p. 9). This form of professional knowledge is described by Shulman (1987) as pedagogical content knowledge. Other forms of teacher knowledge include curricular knowledge, knowledge of learners, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). Teachers also know theories of learning which they apply in classrooms. Again, they possess knowledge of psychological theories of child development which informs their choice of methodology in teaching, taking cognisance of the ages and developmental stages of the children they teach. People who have not received professional training as teachers do not possess such forms of

knowledge that professional teachers wield a monopoly over because such forms of teacher knowledge are exclusive to the teaching profession alone. An analogy could be given of a layperson who is not a pharmacist but happens to work at an over-the-counter drug store. He can give prescriptions, but the consequences may be dire because he/she does not possess expert knowledge in pharmacy/pharmacology. The same applies to teaching in Ghana. There may be some non-professional teachers in the classrooms who teach [for survival] but cannot teach effectively because the forms of teacher knowledge required to bring effective teaching are beyond their grasp as laypersons. “In other words, to practice as a professional teacher, one needs a core of specialized knowledge, practical orientation and a relatively high level of literacy” (Esia-Donkoh et al., 2021). Pedagogical knowledge for instance equips teachers to select appropriate learning techniques and activities that are relevant to achieve the lesson’s objectives. In a study conducted by Appiah and Mfum-Appiah (2019), teachers who teach Religious and Moral Education (RME) at Junior High Schools for instance, were found to “possess adequate pedagogical knowledge which could be used in the classroom” (p.10). The majority of teachers who teach integrated science and mathematics in Ghana have pedagogical knowledge in their field of teaching (Mensah, 2021). Teachers as professionals have knowledge of lesson note preparations, pedagogies for early grade learners and assessment strategies which ordinary people lack.

3.6 Teachers have a Self-Governing Organization Composed of Members of the Profession

A teacher union is a group of educators who have joined forces to represent their members' interests in matters of pay and working conditions by advancing and defending their members' rights and welfare (Jemisiham, 2019). At the pre-tertiary level, six teacher unions are registered under the Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651) in Ghana. They are the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT), Coalition of Concerned Teachers (CCT), All Teachers Alliance Ghana (ATAG), Teachers Forum-Ghana (TF-G), and Innovative Teachers (IT) [Boateng, 2023].

However, three main teacher unions are vibrant in pushing for the welfare of teachers in Ghana. These are GNAT, NAGRAT and CCT. The membership of GNAT and CCT constitutes all persons who teach in Ghana while the membership of NAGRAT is open to only graduate teachers serving



in Ghana. Graduate in this sense implies a holder of at least a diploma certificate from a recognized institution. This however does not mean that a graduate teacher cannot join any of the other groups. Teachers have the freedom to join any group usually by considering the dues members pay, and the benefits members enjoy from such groups. Teacher unions are mostly formed with the motive of seeking the general welfare of their members in the teaching profession. They hold the collective bargaining certificate, on behalf of all teachers in the GES thus, ... negotiating better conditions of work for teachers including salary increments and allowances (**Boateng, 2023**). They serve as a mouthpiece for teachers on national issues, act as a body to influence state educational policy, and serve as bargaining agents for teachers and school districts (**Jemisiham, 2019**). In recent times, these teacher unions have had to stand their ground on many occasions to engage the government through its agencies such as the National Labour Commission (NLC), Ghana Education Service (GES), Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations (MELR) on matters that border on teachers' welfare. A few of the issues were payment of continuous professional allowance to teachers, placement of teachers on the right scale of payment after promotion or upgrade, and the demand for a 60% salary increment, which later was reduced to 30% after a series of back-and-forth negotiations. Usually, these concerns are channelled via press conferences, media releases and strike actions. Therefore, it can be said that teachers in Ghana have a self-governing body that comprises members of the teaching profession with the sole aim of advancing the welfare of teachers with one voice.

3.7 Teachers in Ghana have high Economic Status

Baganiah (2019) observes that teachers in Ghana are among the poorly paid professionals in public service and may be ranked last when it comes to professional appeal and attractiveness to the average job seeker. This is further corroborated by **Esia-Donkoh et al. (2021)** when they admitted that in the past, teachers received less income as compared to their counterparts with similar degrees in health service, banking, and security services. The general (mis)conception in the public is that teachers in Ghana have fewer financial rewards as compared to other professionals. This is not entirely true as the teaching profession in recent times has seen some good economic upgrade.

Financial rewards for teaching have improved over the years and that, teachers earn better incomes than some esteemed professions (**Esia-**

Donkoh et al.,2021). The economic status of the teaching profession and for that matter teachers is far better than it used to be. Teachers have seen a tremendous rise in their base salary with a 30% salary increment. This increment means that there are teachers in Ghana who can earn as high as GHC6000 (equivalence of \$500) as a net monthly salary. The Ghanaian teacher also receives an additional GHC1200 annually as Professional Development Allowance (**Marfo, 2022**). Aside from these financial face-lifts, teachers in Ghana have received Teachers Mate (TM1) laptop computers to aid their teaching in the classroom. Some concerns have been raised by teachers regarding its quality, pricing and equitable distribution (as some teachers still have not received theirs after more than a year of its distribution). That notwithstanding, teachers now have an advanced life regarding research for classroom teaching and their academic activities with these TM1 laptops. That aside, teacher unions have introduced various mouth-watering packages for teachers all to ensure that the Ghanaian teacher is economically stable despite the storms in the economy. NAGRAT for instance, provides cars to its members as part of the Auto Loans Scheme, provides consumer durables and electronic appliances as part of its hire purchase package for members, and NAGRAT Fund loans for all members. Similarly, GNAT also has some good packages for all its members. Some of the packages include car loans, internet data packages, and GNAT loans. Thus, teachers can now drive expensive cars, build houses, pay for expensive educational expenses of their children and even pay for holiday trips abroad for vacation.

IV. Conclusion

Teaching can be measured against the characteristics of professions to ascertain whether it fits as a profession or not. This can best be judged if practices in peculiar countries are used instead of teaching in general terms. Teaching in Ghana is a profession as it meets the characteristics of professions. Having discussed such justifiable reasons above, we are not oblivious of several challenges that teaching as a profession in Ghana faces. Such challenges include:

The proliferation of unqualified/non-professional teachers in the classrooms. According to **Buabeng et al. (2020)**, "some graduates, who are not prepared to teach, from other universities find their way to the classroom to teach at either the primary, junior high, or senior high schools" (p.87). It must be noted that Senior High School leavers can even be found in our classrooms, especially in private schools.



The implications are very dire including but not limited to poor student performance.

As said earlier, teachers don't have absolute freedom regarding decision-making in their work. The teacher unions and even the NTC are unable to perform their gate-keeping functions of setting standards for inclusion and exclusion. Teacher unions have no power over the recruitment of teachers, and therefore cannot control the quality and quantity of teachers in Ghana (Cobbold, 2015). This situation makes it difficult for them to ensure occupational closure; where people without professional qualifications are barred from entry into the teaching profession.

Even though, the NTC is performing its mandate of licensing teachers and ensuring that teachers who are hired to teach have a professional licence, there still are many teachers who find their way into the classroom without writing the licensure examination, therefore, possessing no license to teach.

V. Recommendations

To ensure a continuous and effective professionalization of teaching in Ghana, we recommend the following:

1. Teachers must be highly involved in curriculum development at the national level. In classroom teaching, they must not be restricted. Instead, they should be allowed to use their expertise and experience to plan lessons, teach, and evaluate.
2. Recruitment of teachers must strictly follow the standards set by the National Teaching Council. As a matter of fact, the NTC should be in control of teacher selection and recruitment in the teaching profession. Or better still, it should collaborate with other recruiting bodies like the GES and TVET service to ensure strict adherence to professional standards. That said, we suggest that politicians, religious and traditional leaders, and other people of influence should stay away from teacher recruitment so that the appropriate authorities can do teacher recruitment solely based on merit.

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