



‘Because I Love Children’: Understanding Motivations to Become Preschool Teachers in Ghana.

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ABSTRACT

This study explored preschool teachers’ motivations for deciding to teach in early childhood education centres. Teachers were asked their reasons for choosing to become preschool teachers and their likes and dislikes on the job. Participants of the study were 175 preschool teachers who attended a capacity building workshop in Accra, Ghana. Data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire with open ended questions. A content analysis was done to identify and group similar responses under themes. The results revealed that teachers’ decisions were influenced by an interaction of intrinsic, extrinsic and socio-cultural motivational factors influencing their career choice. The results are discussed in relation to preschool teacher education and recruitment.

Key words: motivation, preschool, teacher, early childhood institution.

Introduction

There are reasons that have guided individuals’ choices of a profession which “energise and give direction to behaviour” pp 698 (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem & Nolen- Hoeksema, 1996). People have always had diverse inspirations for whatever profession or career path they chose. Becoming a teacher (especially of young children) is not exempted. Many factors influence a person’s decision to become a teacher. These factors otherwise known as motivations, can be characterised under three broad categories- intrinsic, extrinsic and imposed motivations. *Intrinsically* motivated individuals chose teaching because they loved doing it, not for the salary or any other outside rewards or consideration (Mayers, 1993). One of the main reasons for choosing the teaching profession was a desire to serve (Olitalia, Wijaya, Almakiyah, & Saraswati, 2013). *Extrinsically* motivated individuals chose teaching because benefits of teaching, such as salary, vacations, a respected profession or because they found no career alternative (Ronness, 2011). *Imposed motivation* is the motivation of those individuals who chose teaching because of other people (Maxim, 1989).

Two theories help in explaining intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory refers to the social and environmental factors that dictate the extent of task completion or behaviour (Migliorini, Cardinali & Rania 2019). The degree at which a person performs an activity varies extensively based on inner drives and expected rewards (REF...2013). SDT although developed through laboratory experiments, has been supported in applied to social issues. This extends to health behaviour change, education, exercise etc. Operant theorist B.F. Skinner, proposed that rewards drive all activities (Santrock, 2016). In the case of intrinsically motivated activities, the reward lies in the activity itself; feelings of satisfaction, competence and autonomy. If an activity satisfies intrinsic needs such as the need to feel competent and autonomous, it has a higher chance of being performed based on intrinsic forces (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Watt and Richardson (2008) identified three main categories of motivations for entering teaching and these were: 1. Intrinsic (wanting to feel competent or to satisfy curiosity). 2. Extrinsic (external praise, external rewards, and external influences), and 3. Altruistic (contribution to society).

Other studies have identified factors such as social utility value (Lin, Shi, Wang, Zhang & Hui 2012), intrinsic value, a perceived teaching related ability, a desire to make a social contribution, a desire to work with children and young people and previous positive teaching and learning experiences (Watt, Richardson, Klusmann, Kunter, Beyer, Trautwein, & Baumert, 2012). Lin et al. (2012) argued that understanding pre-service teachers' motivation for entering teaching creates a knowledge base for developing teacher education policies and programs. Socio-cultural contexts have also been found to influence the motivations for career choice and the persistence in pursuing it (Watt and Richardson, 2012).

Studies on teacher motivations in Australia by Manuel and Hughes (2006) showed that pre-service teachers' decision to choose teaching as a career was inspired by their own personal aspirations to work with young people, wishing to make a difference in their lives, to enhance, engage and maintain knowledge in a given subject area and to attain personal fulfilment. Watt and Richardson (2008) further found that Australian teachers who were classified as 'highly engaged' were those who were in the profession for intrinsic reasons and rewards. Evidence was seen in these teachers' enthusiasm for working with children and young people. The story was different for Chinese student teachers as Gao and Trent (2009) found. These student teachers were motivated to enter the profession by extrinsic rewards. Among other things they saw the skills acquired from teacher training as transferable to other professions (Gao & Trent, 2009). In the Netherlands adaptive and maladaptive motivations for becoming a teacher were documented by Fokkens- Bruinsma and Canrinus (2012). Altruistic social utility was recorded in Turkey as the main motivation for entering the teaching profession (Kilinç, Watt & Richardson, 2012). Teachers in Turkey were influenced by the role and the status ascribed to teachers and the teaching profession. In Malaysia, Azman, (2013) among other reasons why student teachers chose teaching, found altruistic reasons to be paramount.

Flores and Niklasson (2014) explored the motivations and expectations of student teachers in Portugal and Sweden regarding the teaching profession. One hundred and twelve (112) and 157 student teachers from Portugal and Sweden respectively participated in the study. The authors developed a questionnaire that elicited student teachers' responses on the underlying reasons for entering a teaching degree. The factors or motivations Flores and Niklasson (2014) found to influence student teachers' decision for choosing teaching as a profession include working with children, enhancing knowledge in a given field, contributing to society, employment opportunities and personal choice. Service to society and a willingness to help others dominated their responses. These reasons are intrinsic as explained by Maxim (1989). Developing interest in certain subjects (28%) was not rated high but is seen as intrinsic by Watt and Richardson (2008), reason being that student teachers were satisfying a personal curiosity about a subject. In comparison, pre-service teachers in both countries ranked working with children as the highest factor that motivated their decision to choose teaching as a profession. When it came to motivation, the Portuguese participants had three competing factors ranking highest- personal choice, employment opportunities and working with children. Whilst the first and third have intrinsic attributes, the second is more extrinsic. For the Swedish participants working with children was distinctly the highest ranked. Clearly employment opportunities which is an extrinsic motivation was second ranked, followed by a personal choice. These participants were intrinsically motivated first and foremost but were also very much concerned about the security the job offered.

In Malawi, Mtika and Gates (2011) reported extrinsic rewards as motives behind choosing teaching as a profession among student teachers. These motives were associated with i. Failure to follow up on the desired career choice, ii. As a springboard for a career elsewhere, iii. To upgrade one's qualifications and, iv. To acquire a sense of vocation. It was reported that intrinsic adaptive motives were positively correlated with the quality of the teacher training programme and the classroom teaching experiences. Implying recruitment of student teachers should be targeted at individuals with intrinsic motivations who when given exhaustive training opportunities and classroom experiences will in turn excel (Flores & Niklasson, 2014). In this sense all stakeholders involved stand to benefit. Studies on teacher motivation in Ghana, have mainly documented the effects of motivation on teaching practice (Salifu & Agbenyega, 2013; Kingful & Nusenu, 2013) as well as performance of students (Adamu, 2018).

There has been a myriad of research on motivation of teachers in many countries including Ghana, however, studies on what motivates people to choose teaching in preschool as a career is scant. It is on this premise that this study sought to understand what Ghanaian preschool teachers' motivation(s) for the job were. The specific objectives were to find out what preschool teachers' motivation for the job were; what excited them as well as what they disliked about their job.

Method

The research design for the study was a cross-sectional survey which adopted a quantitative approach to data collection. A questionnaire with both open and close ended questions was developed to assess information on; i. teachers' background characteristics, (age, gender, religion)

ii. the reasons teachers chose to be preschool teachers, iii. teachers' likes and dislikes on the job. Two hundred (200) preschool teachers' who teach crèche to kindergarten were recruited conveniently from nationally accredited certificate training and capacity building programmes in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. One hundred and seventy-five (175) preschool teachers responded to the questionnaire.

Participants were informed of their rights to voluntarily consent or decline to participate, and to withdraw participation at any time. The purpose of the study was explained, and participants were assured of minimal risks or costs. Participants were identified by numeric codes and not their names. Prior to the study the instrument was administered and analysed using responses of 10 teachers from two preschools with similar characteristics to the study sample. This helped the researchers to ensure clarity of the questionnaire. Since these were self-administered, copies of the questionnaire were left with the participants to fill and returned within 24 hours.

The Greater Accra Region was the target population. Greater Accra Region records a high population density with 1,236 persons per square kilometre a 13% increase for the year 2000 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Accra, the capital of the Greater Accra Region is the largest city in Ghana. The official language is English and nine other indigenous languages are also recognised in Ghana. (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Purposive sampling was used to select participants. This approach became necessary because of the general objective of the study which was to explore, understand and document the motivations of teachers to teach in preschool. This required a specified target population with specific characteristics (preschool teachers) as suggested by Palys (2008).

Coding and content analysis were done for the open-ended questions to develop themes to understand teachers' reasons for choosing to become preschool teachers, their likes and dislikes, and what excites them on the job. These questions were open ended as such had no word limit on responses from the participants.

Results

Respondents demographic Information

The mean age and standard deviation calculated were 31.12 and 10.08 respectively. Of the total of 175 respondents 128(73%) were between the ages of 20-39. These were young adults who were in their early career stage. The rest 47(27%) were aged 40 and above. Majority 167(95%) were females and 8(5%) were males. Females seem to dominate in the early childhood institutions (Nyarko, 2018). Also, 152 (86%) were Christians and 6 (4%) were Muslims. The rest (16%) gave no response for their religion. The roles of teachers were lead teacher 122(70%) whilst 53 (30%) were assistants. Respondents were teachers of children ages 0-3(creche and playgroup), 3-4(nursery), and 4-5(Kindergarten) year olds.

This section reports on the themes that evolved from teachers' answers to the following questions: Why did you choose to be a caregiver? What excites you about your job? What do you dislike most about the job? Results are presented in the form of tables and supported with texts where appropriate.

Respondents' reasons for choosing to become a preschool teacher.

The motivation behind teachers' decision to become preschool teachers varied. Seven themes evolved when the content of teachers' responses were analysed. These themes are reported in table 1. About 143 respondents representing 82 % reported a motivation that stemmed from love. Love children (49%), have passion for children (6%), enjoys being with children (15.4%), loves to impart knowledge (7%) and loves the job (5%). Those who attributed their motivation to spirituality formed 11% of respondents. Seven per cent had personal motivations.

Table 1. Respondents Reasons for Choosing to Become Preschool Teachers

Theme	N	%
Love		
Because I love children	85	49
I have a passion for it	10	6
Enjoys being with children	27	15
Loves to impart knowledge	13	7
Loves the job	8	5
Religious / Spiritual view		
	19	11
Personal motivation		
	13	7
Total	175	100

Motivation for choosing to become a preschool teacher

The responses of preschool teachers in table 1 above denote three themes; i. Love (82%) and ii. A reverence for God and his blessings (11%) and iii. personal motivation (7%).

Most respondents were motivated to become teachers because of Love. Some reported because “I love children”, “I have a passion for it”, “Enjoys being with children”, “Loves to impart knowledge” and “Loves the job”.

Making their focus religiously inclined others stated that they were motivated because of their belief in a supreme being -God. They saw teaching or caring for children as a God given assignment. One teacher’s reason for choosing to teach preschool children as a career was “To help train children in our country to grow to be God-fearing and to become good leaders in the country”. Other responses from teachers included statements like “It is a God given talent”, “Serving God through childcare”, “I chose to because it was a gift from God, and I love children”. The ability and willingness to work with children was a God given gift which had to be used to serve him. Others became teachers because as one teacher put it ‘I am God-fearing and I also feel for the plight of children’, another reported that “Being a caregiver you receive more blessing from God”. Others also agreed that “Children are gifts from God so if you take good care of children God will bless you”, “Children are special gifts from God”, “Also they are blessing from Jehovah God”. All these can be themed under revering God (religious view) by treating children as gifts from Him. Hence an opportunity to work for or with them was to ‘be chosen’ knowing that God would approve of and bless them.

What excited Teachers most about their job as Preschool Teacher?

Responses to the open-ended question what excites you about your job were analysed and categorised into themes presented in table 2.

Table 2: What Excites Preschool Teachers most about their Job (n=175)

Theme	N	%
<i>Enjoyment from being with children</i>		
Children make me happy	23	13
Children's behaviour	24	14
I love teaching children	22	12
Playing with children	23	13
Teaching and singing rhymes	21	12
Learning different things from children	6	3
Interaction between children and other teachers	7	4
Children	11	6
Love for the job	8	5
The job as caregivers	8	5
<i>Spirituality</i>		
Others	12	7
Total	175	100

From table 2, sixty-two percent (62 %) of the respondents had their excitement coming from children. Either when they interacted, played, taught, and learnt from them or just by observing their behaviour. About 6% of the respondents attributed their excitement to religiosity/spirituality reported as ‘because it is a God given talent’, ‘Serving God through childcare’, ‘To impart the knowledge of God and Christ in the children from early stage’, ‘because being a caregiver you receive more blessing from God’. Nine per cent of the respondents mentioned their excitement came from a ‘love for the job’ and ‘the job as caregivers’.

The responses of the teachers can be further categorised into two main themes: i) Enjoyment from being and working with Children ii) and Spirituality (Spiritual Moments).

Teachers’ dislikes about the job of teaching preschool children

In table 3 below teachers’ responses on their dislikes on the job of teaching preschool children are presented.

Table 3: Teachers’ dislikes about Teaching in Early Childhood Institutions

Reasons	N	%
Unsupportive Parents		
Parents look down on teachers	5	3
Parents do not co-operate with teachers	9	5
Verbally abusive parents	9	5
Parents pick children up late	26	15
Difficult parents	17	10
Children not making progress		
Stubborn / difficult children	8	5
Poor performance of children	20	11
Inattentive Children	8	5
Management Issues		
Job related issues	25	14
Salary	7	4
School / Directors	9	5
Others	14	8
Like everything about the job	9	5
Total	175	100

In table 3 above, 42% of the respondents attributed their dislike on the job to parents' negative attitudes and behaviours towards their own children and the teachers. Another 21% reported they didn't like it when children were stubborn or difficult, performed poorly or were sad. The rest reported job-related dislikes which included low salary, school directors' attitude/behaviours. Three themes emerged from reasons teachers disliked their jobs. These are unsupportive parents, children not making progress and administrative/ management Issues.

Discussion

These teachers put their love for children and God as the main motivation for choosing a career as a preschool teacher. Respondents' can be said to be motivated by both intrinsic (Flores & Niklasson, 2014) and altruistic factors (Maxim, 1989). Teachers' love for and of being around children kept them motivated whilst on the job. Though this study used in-service teachers, findings have implications for teacher recruitment, training, and retention. In terms of pre-service training there will be the need to admit students who have a desire to work with children and not just those with good academic grades. Hence those who were intrinsically as well as altruistically motivated should be encouraged. Periodic parent education conferences could be used to address the negative attitudes of some parents and to forge stakeholder spirit with respect to working as a team to meet the developmental needs of children.

Conclusion

The reasons behind teachers' choosing to become preschool teachers, their likes and dislikes on the job are presented and discussed. Findings may not be peculiar to Ghanaian in-service preschool teachers. As such future studies could investigate preschool teachers' motivation for choosing the career across different cultures. Further studies could investigate pre-service students' motivation for choosing to teach in preschool.

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