

Do Social Studies Teachers' Variables Influence Students' Performance in Senior High School Social Studies in Ghana? Evidence from Students' Performance Test in Social Studies

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Abstract

The study concerned itself with the role of Social Studies teachers' variables on the performance of Senior High School students' in social studies in Ghana. The purpose of the study was to find out if social studies teachers' variables had any influence on the performance of Senior High School (SHS) students' performance in social studies.

A descriptive survey design was used for the study which involved 635 social studies teachers and 74,249 Senior High School 2 students across the 36 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDA'S) Ghana. A total of 2,253 SHS 2 students and 75 social studies teachers (30 female and 45 male) from 25 SHS were sampled through multi-stage sampling procedures. Two researcher-designed instruments tagged: Teacher Demographic Variables Questionnaire (TDVQ) and Students' Performance Test in Social Studies (SPTISS) were used in data collection. Data was analysed with the aid of frequencies and percentage counts. The results showed that, teacher variables exerted some influence on students' performance in social studies. It was therefore concluded that social studies teachers' variables exerted significant influence on the performance of Senior High School students in social studies.

Based on the results and conclusion, it is suggested for consideration of relevant stakeholders in education, that social studies teacher variables should be considered in the recruitment of teachers for the teaching of social studies at the SHS level.

Keywords: Teacher, Variables, Students', Performance, Social Studies

1. Introduction

Social studies is a core subject that a candidate need to pass by (obtaining grades between **A1-C6**) before gaining admission into most post-secondary schools in Ghana. However, according to The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) (2011), 17% (25,808), 24% (31,568), 39% (53,010), 22% (34,811) and 17% (26,056) of students in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011 respectively could not obtain grades between A1-C6 in Senior High School (SHS) social studies.

It has therefore become imperative to ascertain whether the observable trend of students' performance in social studies is traceable to the prevailing teacher variables in the Ghana in the light of the general belief that teachers are the most strategically positioned in the educational system to determine students' performance.

The concept of performance of students has caught the attention of education stakeholders. Performance is relative to what is being measured and how it is measured. In most cases, the temptation has been that, performance is used interchangeably with achievement in educational parlance. According to Jabor, Machtimes, Kungu and Buntat (2011), measuring achievement is a significant part of the education process and it informs educators of students' ability and progress towards educational goals. According to Arain (2011) and Jacob (2012), school administrators are well aware that teachers matter for students' achievement and are therefore careful in hiring the services of teachers.

According to Jacob (2012), large-scale longitudinal studies on the role of teachers in students' performance, in places such as Texas and New Jersey, have provided robust evidence of the extent to which teachers matter for student academic success. Teacher variables are also the gauge used by educators to guide the advancement of students through the education process. According to Nzabihimana (2010), teachers are central to any considerations of schools and a majority of education policy discussion focus directly or indirectly on the role of teachers. In the opinion of Nzabihimana, there is a prima facie case for the concentration on teachers in education, because they were the single budgetary element in schools. Yet there remained little consensus among researchers on the characteristics of a good teacher, let alone on the importance of teachers in comparison to other determinants of students' academic performance in schools.

McEwen (2004) advocated that assessment of schools should indicate how effectively educational programmes are achieving their goals. The results of the assessment should inform the educator that if this is done it could and should lead to improvements in the teaching/ learning process. Performance could also be explained as the results a student obtains in any given academic encounter. In both cases of performance and achievement, the

teacher is still central to their realisation. It must however be added that the teacher at all time facilitates or stimulates students to perform in a given learning task and cannot be said to be imparting knowledge. In a study carried out in rural China by Park and Hannum (2001), it was discovered that about one quarter of the variation in students' achievement in mathematics was due to overall teacher differences. These differences included gender, experience and academic qualification.

Researches over the years have increasingly shown that teachers are among the most important players influencing students' achievement and holding the key to sealing the gaps in students' achievement outcomes (Ferguson, 1991, 1998; Sanders, 1998, 2000; Goldhaber, 2008). However, according to Akbari and Alivar (2010), Ogunboyede (2011), Gbore and Daramola (2013) little if any empirical evidence exists to enable researchers determine which set of teacher variables correlated with positive student learning outcomes. This therefore calls for further research into the influence teacher variables have on students' performance. However, results from a study conducted, Adams (2012) found that despite the challenges in identifying and accurately estimating the effect of teachers, research from across the globe suggests that teachers really matter in students' performance.

No matter the type or level of education, improvement of students' achievement has always been one of the targets. It is important to admit that in the past, researchers and educators had conducted many studies and experiments to determine the factors that affected either in a positive way or in negative way students' performance. The findings from these studies as other studies on teacher influence had been interesting, complex, dynamic and largely inclusive (Tyler, Taylor, Kane & Wooten, 2009). Tyler, Taylor, Kane and Wooten (2009) found large differences in teachers' effectiveness at increasing students' achievement. They also contended that many people experiences and structures contributed to an individual student's achievement. In their opinion, the contribution of teachers however, had increasingly become a focal point as a number of studies have found large differences in teachers' effectiveness at increasing students' achievement.

One factor that is associated with students' performance in school is their socioeconomic status (SES). According to Machin and McNally (2008), socioeconomic status could be defined as a person's overall social position. However, according to Machin and McNally when used in studies of children's achievement, it is referred to the SES of the parents or family. Earlier Studies by Amato (1987), Mukherjee (1995) made it clear that children from low SES families were more likely to exhibit lower levels of literacy, numeracy, comprehension, and problematic school behaviour.

In Ghana, the School Based Assessment (SBA) consists of; class tests, projects and the end of term examinations. All these add up to be part of the final achievement of the student at the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The internal assessment procedures are referred to as continuous assessments and they constitute thirty per cent (30%) of the final mark a student obtains in the external examination while WAEC examinations constitute 70% of the final score.

2. Research Question

Based on the problem identified from the literature, the study was guided by the following research question:

1. Do social studies teacher variables influence SHS students' performance in social studies in Ghana?

3. Method

A descriptive survey design was used for the research. The collection of research data using a survey enables a researcher to generalize the findings from a sample of responses to a population. Descriptive survey also enables a researcher to identify attributes of a population from a small group of individuals (Bradburn & Sudman, 1985; Fowler 1988, Babie 1990 & Sambo, 2008). In this study, a descriptive survey design was used because all the schools in the study area were government public schools. In addition, all the schools were under the same agency Ghana Education Service (GES) and therefore, data collection and the ability to identify attributes of the population did not pose problems.

The population for the study was made up of fifty-one public Senior High School (SHS) in 36 Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDA'S) across the country (Ghana) with a total student population of 74,249 and 635 social studies teachers.

A multi-stage sampling technique which involved a combination of simple random, purposive and proportional sampling techniques were used in selecting a sample size of 2,253 SHS 2 students, 25 SHS and 75 social studies teachers. The instruments for data collection involved the use of a researcher-designed questionnaire tagged: "Teacher Demographic Data and Variable Questionnaire" (TDDVQ) and "Students' Performance Test in Social Studies" (SPTISS). The TDDVQ was used to collect information on teacher demographic data. The TDDVQ covered the gender of teachers, subject specialisation, professional qualification, exposure to post-qualification professional development and years of teachers' teaching experience.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Students' performance in PTISS in relation to social studies teacher variables

	Grades	A1-B3	C4-C6	D7-E8	F	Total
Gender	Male	1089 (67.14%)	282 (17.39%)	164 (10.11%)	87 (5.36%)	1622 (100.0%)
	Female	478 (75.75%)	107 (16.96)	29 (4.60%)	17 (2.69%)	631 (100.0%)
Specialization	Specialists	1037 (69.51%)	251 (16.82%)	131 (8.78%)	73 (4.89%)	1492 (100.0%)
	Non specialists	530 (69.65%)	138 (18.13%)	62 (8.15%)	31 (4.07%)	761 (100.0%)
Professional status	Qualified	413 (70.84%)	104 (17.84%)	46 (7.89%)	20 (3.43%)	583 (100.0%)
	Not qualified	1154 (69.10%)	285 (17.06%)	147 (8.80%)	84 (5.04%)	1670 (100.0%)
Experience	Less than 4 years	993 (67.23%)	272 (18.42%)	134 (9.07%)	78 (5.28%)	1477 (100.0%)
	5-8 years	238 (61.98%)	88 (22.92%)	40 (10.42%)	18 (4.68%)	384 (100.0%)
	Above 8 years	336 (85.70%)	29 (8.01%)	19 (4.85%)	8 (2.04%)	392 (100.0%)
Professional Development Exposure	Exposed	677 (72.87%)	122 (13.13%)	81 (8.72%)	49 (5.28%)	929 (100.0%)
	Not exposed	890 (67.22%)	267 (20.17%)	112 (8.46%)	55 (4.15%)	1324 (100.0%)

Table 1 displays the performance of students based on the influence of teacher variables. From the table it can be observed that teacher variables influenced students' performance in different ways. In relation to teachers' gender, students' performance showed different performance across grades. In the same way, teacher specialisation also had influence on the performance of students as the grades obtained by students have indicated. The other teacher variables (professional qualification, exposure to professional development and teaching experience) also exerted some influence on students' performance across grades; A1-B3, C4-C6, D7-E8 and F. The details of the influence of teacher variables on students' performance in SPTISS are displayed in Figures 1-5

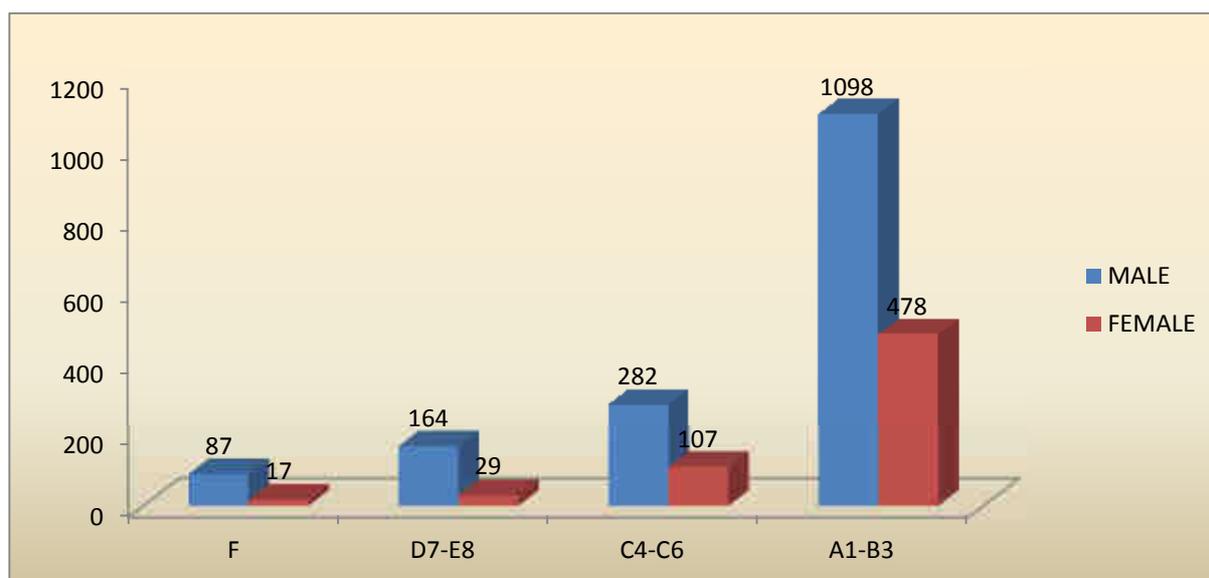


Figure 1: A Bar Chart Showing Students' Performance in SPTISS In Relation to Social Studies Teachers' Gender.

Figure 1 displays detailed performance of students taught by male and female social Studies teachers in terms of grades obtained in a researcher designed SPTISS. Although more males had more number of passes as shown by

the bars compared to that of females, the quality of percentage passes for students taught by female teachers significantly exceeded that of students taught by male teachers as shown on table 1.

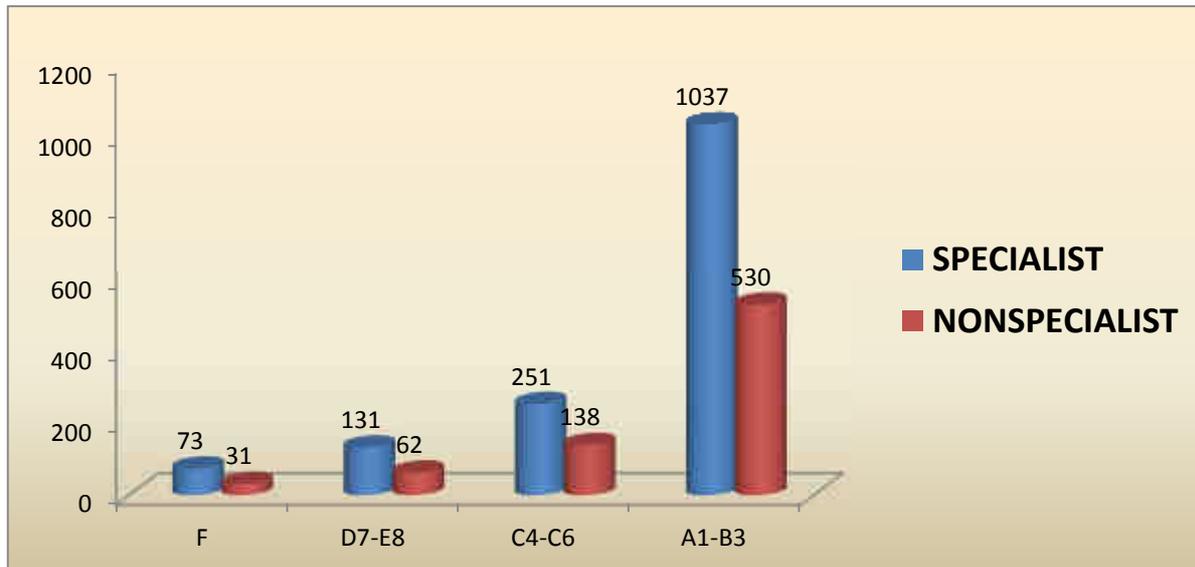


Figure 2: A Bar Chart Showing Students' Performance in SPTISS in Relation to Social Studies Teachers' Subject Specialization Status

The Performance of students based on teacher specialization in social Studies in terms of grades obtained in a researcher designed SPTISS is displayed in Figure 2. Students taught by non-specialists social studies teachers performed significantly better than students taught by specialists' social studies teachers notwithstanding the appearance of the bars. The bars show the number of passes and not necessarily the quality of the passes. The quality of the passes can be ascertained from the percentage passes per grade category as displayed in table 1.

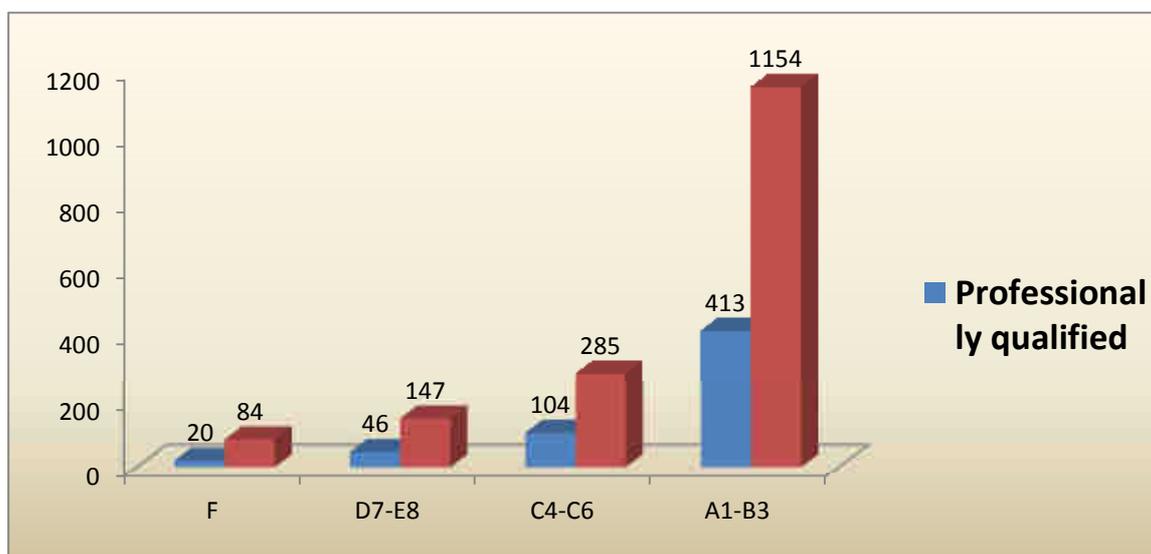


Figure 3: A Bar Chart Showing Students' Performance in SPTISS in Relation to Social Studies Teachers' Professional Qualification Status.

Displayed in Figure 3 is the performance of students taught by professionally qualified and unqualified social Studies teachers in terms of grades obtained in a researcher designed SPTISS. Students taught by professionally qualified teachers performed better than students taught by professionally unqualified teachers. The bars show the number of passes per each professional status. Although the bars representing professionally unqualified appear longer than that of the professionally qualified, in terms of the quality of passes and grades, students taught by professionally qualified teachers performed significantly better as can be seen in the percentage passes as against numbers in each grade category as displayed in table 1.

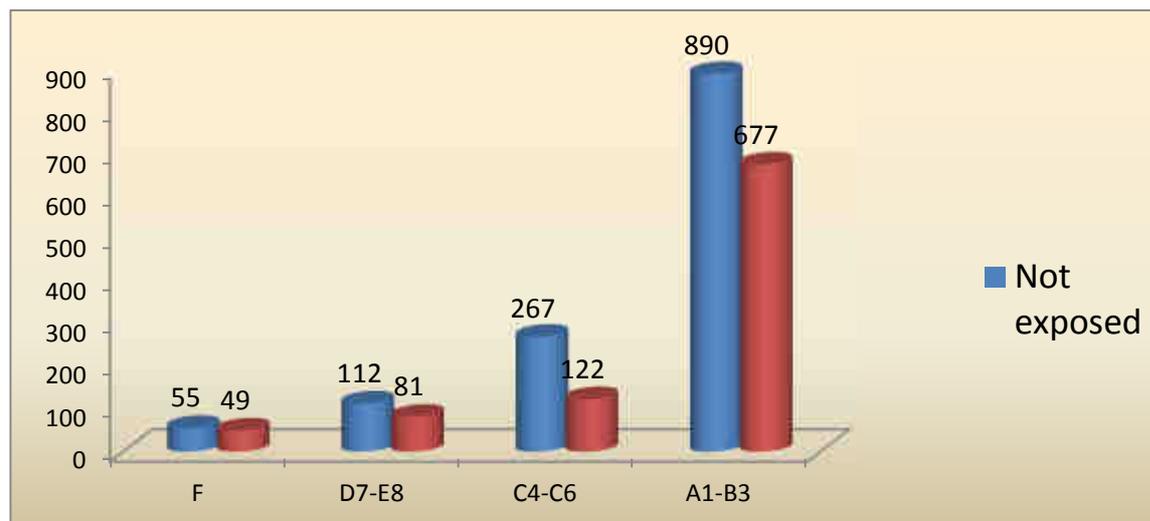


Figure 4: A Bar Chart Showing Students' Performance in SPTISS in Relation to Social Studies Teachers' Exposure to Professional Development.

Figure 4 shows the performance of students taught by social Studies teachers exposed to professional development and teachers who were not exposed to professional development in terms of grades obtained in a researcher designed SPTISS. Students who were taught by teachers exposed to professional development activities did better than those who were taught under unexposed teachers. Again, the bars indicate the number of passes and not necessarily the quality of passes. The not exposed bars are longer because majority of the students' were taught by teachers not exposed to professional development. However in terms of grades, students taught by teachers exposed to professional development did better as can be ascertained from the percentage passes as against the number of passes in each grade indicated in table 1.

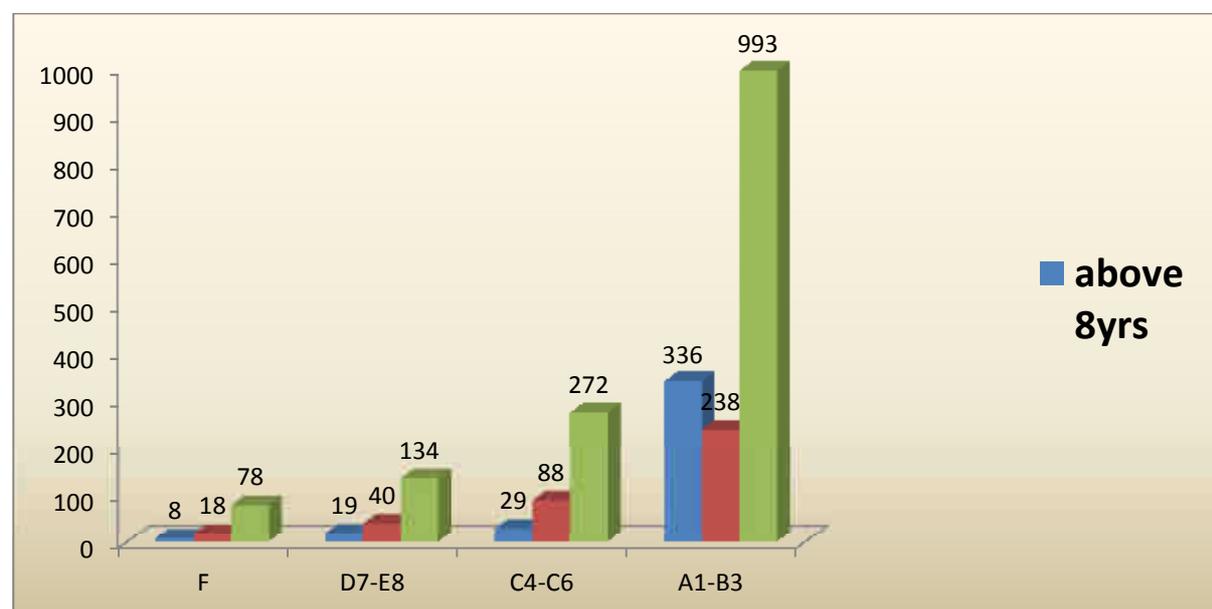


Figure 5: A Bar Chart Showing Students' Performance in SPTISS in Relation to Social Studies Teachers' Teaching Experience

Displayed in Figure 5 is the performance of students taught by social Studies teachers with respect to Years of teaching experience and grades obtained in a researcher designed SPTISS. Students taught by teachers with more than 8 years of experience actually did better than students taught by teachers with lesser years of teaching experience. The bars only show the numbers and not the quality or percentage passes. The bars representing 1-4 years is longer than the two other bars because more students were taught by teachers with 1-4 years teaching experience and not necessarily that the students' performed better than the other two groups of experience levels. Students taught by very experienced teachers performed significantly better in terms of percentage passes in the various grades as indicated in table 5.

5. Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Social studies teacher variables in general influence students' performance in social studies in different ways in Ghana.
2. Gender has a significant influence on students' performance in social studies as students taught by female teachers performed better than students taught by male social studies teachers, irrespective of a teacher's years of teaching experience, exposure to professional development, Professional status and area of subject specialisation.
3. Specialisation status of social studies teachers influence the performance of students' in SHS social studies as students taught by non-specialists social studies teachers performed better than their counterparts who were taught by specialists social studies teachers
4. Teachers' possessions of professional qualifications appeared not to matter as far as students' performance in SHS social studies is concerned.
5. Exposure to post-qualification professional development exerts significant influence on students' performance
6. Teachers' years of teaching is related to students' performance.

5. Recommendations

1. Based on the findings, discussion and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are proposed to relevant educational authorities and other stakeholders in education:
2. Social studies teacher variables should be considered in the recruitment of teachers for the teaching of social studies at the SHS level.
3. The Ministry of Education, (Ghana) should formulate a deliberate policy targeted at getting more female teachers into the teaching of social studies at the SHS level. This could be done by providing incentives such as reduction or waiver in school fees during teacher training for potential female social studies teachers.
4. The Ministry of Education through the (GES) should organise regular professional development programmes for social studies teachers.
5. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the GES should find ways of encouraging teachers to remain on the job by arresting those developments that may take them out of teaching social studies.
6. Teacher education based Universities should review their teacher education curricula, in a way that social studies teachers in training could combine social studies with courses drawn from other single subjects. This could include other social science/ arts subjects other than Economics, Geography and Political Science.
7. The Ghana Education Service will also need to work out study leave programme and fix a period of about five years within which the professionally unqualified teachers that constitute a majority in social studies teaching in Ghana, could be allowed to pursue Post-graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE).

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