

## Factors Contributing to Early Career Teachers' Attrition in the Cape Coast Municipality, Ghana.

Samuel Bismark Larbi<sup>1</sup> Maxwell Dah<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of Science, Mfantshipim School, Box 101, Cape Coast, Ghana
  2. Department of Science Education, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana
- \*E-mail of the corresponding author: [Greatmaxxy@gmail.com](mailto:Greatmaxxy@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The study aims to draw from the rich experiences of head teachers concerning the factors contributing to early career teachers' attrition. Early career teacher are those teachers who have spent five (5) years or less in the teaching field. The study employed qualitative approach in conducting the study. Thirty-six basic (Primary and Junior High) school headteachers in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana were involved in the study. Open-ended item questionnaire was used for data collection. It was found that poor working conditions and environment, unattractive/low salary, political influence were among the common issues that drive teachers away from the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** attrition, early career teachers, head teachers, Cape Coast, Ghana.

**DOI:** 10.7176/JEP/15-11-06

**Publication date:** October 30th 2024

### 1. Introduction

The issue of teacher retention and attrition is a pressing concern not only in the Cape Coast municipality of Ghana but also nationwide and globally, as highlighted by recent reports. In England, the Education Policy Institute's 2021 report underscores the significant challenges facing the teaching profession, with retention problems worsening since 2010. The report reveals a concerning trend where teachers, particularly early-career ones, are increasingly leaving the profession. For instance, in 2019, only two-thirds of early-career teachers remained in the profession five years after joining, down from 72% in 2010 (Fullard & Zuccollo, 2021). In the United States, states such as Washington, Maryland, Louisiana, and North Carolina have witnessed a significant increase in teacher departures, with Washington experiencing the highest number of departures in three decades (Barnum, 2023). This trend is exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which initially caused a dip in turnover in 2020 due to economic factors but saw a return to normal or slightly above-average levels in 2021 (Barnum, 2023). The Education Policy Initiative at Carolina notes a clear jump in teacher attrition rates in several states between the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years (Barnum, 2023).

Similarly, on a global scale, the UNESCO report projects a staggering need for 44 million primary and secondary teachers by 2030, with a significant portion of this demand concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa. This region is estimated to require 15 million new teachers by 2030, reflecting a critical shortage of educators (UNESCO, 2024). In Sub-Saharan Africa, teacher attrition has reached crisis levels, as highlighted by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). The rapid departure of teachers from schools in this region presents a significant obstacle to providing quality education (Pitsoe & Machaisa, 2012). Developing nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, face even higher shortages of teachers, with attrition rates ranging from 5% to 30% (Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Ghana is also facing a crisis of teacher attrition, with attrition rates ranging from 7% to 15% according to the Ghana Education Service Archive, 2022 (Ngmenkpieo, Tseer & Gyei, 2023). The magnitude of departures is evident, with almost 44,000 basic school teachers leaving the profession in 2021 alone (Ghana News Agency, 2022). This exodus poses a significant threat to the nation's education and development, as highlighted by the Registrar of the National Teaching Council, Dr. Christian Addai-Poku. Dr. Addai-Poku's observation of tens of thousands of Ghanaian teachers seeking employment abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom, underscores the severity of the situation (Aklorbortu, 2023).

The departure of skilled and experienced teachers has profound implications for educational quality and socio-economic development. Teachers play a crucial role in achieving educational goals, and their absence can hinder progress in delivering quality education (Salifu, 2013). Moreover, the loss of teacher expertise through attrition and retirement poses a risk of valuable knowledge and experience being lost to other professions, which can further exacerbate educational challenges (Ramsey, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001; Williams, 2002). Several factors influence teachers' decisions to stay or leave the profession. These include attractive salaries, job recognition, job

security, work-life balance, and the desire to make social contributions (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Claeys, 2011; Ibidapo-Obe, 2007; Mathew, 2005; Watt & Richardson, 2007, 2012).

The various reports on teacher attrition collectively underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address teacher retention and attrition globally. To mitigate the adverse effects of teacher attrition, it is crucial for policymakers and education stakeholders to find out the causes and implement strategies aimed at improving working conditions, providing professional development opportunities, and offering competitive remuneration to retain skilled and high-performing teachers (Elyashiv, 2019; Farmer, 2020). Addressing teacher attrition is a pressing global educational priority that requires concerted efforts from policymakers, education stakeholders, and the international community. By prioritizing teacher welfare and retention, countries can strengthen their education systems and contribute to sustainable development. It is against this background that this study was carried out to investigate the factors contributing to basic schoolteachers' attrition in the Cape Coast municipality, Ghana. Investigating basic schoolteacher attrition in Cape Coast, Ghana, is crucial due to the city's status as an educational hub. High turnover rates can disrupt education quality, strain resources, and destabilize the teaching workforce. Understanding attrition factors helps improve teacher well-being, inform policies, and maintain a stable learning environment, benefiting both teachers and students.

## **2. Methodology**

Qualitative approach was employed in carrying out this study to ascertain the factors contributing to teacher attrition. Out of 133 basic schools (70 Primary and 63 Junior High Schools), there were 80 basic schools having headteachers at the time the study was conducted. These schools were spread across 6 circuits in the Cape Coast metropolis. Six school were selected from each of the circuits. Data was therefore gathered from headteachers of 36 basic schools in the Cape Coast Municipality through the use of open-ended item questionnaire. All the head teachers involved in the study had been teaching for more than 10 years and have taught in more than 5 different basic schools before becoming head teachers in their current school. This is to suggest that all these head teachers had been in the teaching profession for more than a decade. They had gained lots of teaching and administrative experience and are in the best position to provide the needed information on the topic under study.

The questionnaire items consisted of three main questions as follows:

- i. What is the most pressing issue that drives early career teachers away from the teaching profession?
- ii. What are the reasons why teachers leave the teaching profession?
- iii. What must be done to retain teachers in the teaching profession?

Due to the busy schedules of head teachers, they were made to write down their responses at their own convenient time. The items were therefore written and printed as open-ended questionnaire items. This also enabled them to verify from their archive, important information needed to provide the appropriate response. The open-ended questionnaire items allowed the head teachers to provide detailed and personal responses on factors contributing to teacher attrition and solicit their view on what should be done to retain teachers in the teaching profession. The use of the open-ended questionnaire led to a richer understanding of the topic under study.

To ensure it reliability and validity, the questionnaire items were clear, concise and easy to understand. Opportunities were also provided for the headteachers to contact the researchers to provide further clarification on any of the questions.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **3.1 Analysis of Data Obtained from Interview**

A summary of the themes that guided the analyses and discussion are as follows.

Table 1. Summary of themes

Items	Themes
Most pressing issue that drives early career teachers away from the teaching profession	Poor working conditions and environment Unattractive/low salary Lack of motivation Political influence Poor working relationship
Reasons why teachers left the teaching profession	Further studies Personal reasons
What must be done to retain teachers in the teaching profession?	Improved working conditions Good working relationship Motivation Good salary/incentives

Themes were generated from data obtained through the questionnaire. The themes are present in Table 1.

### 3.2 Most Pressing Issue That Drives Teachers Away from the Teaching Profession

#### 3.2.1 Poor Working Conditions and Relationship

Poor working conditions and environment have been suggested as one of the most pressing issues which makes teaching unappealing to early career teachers. Specifically, one head teacher cited *“Poor school environment”*, thus unclean environment for teaching and environment not being conducive for teaching. Others raised concerns about the unattractive conditions attached to study leave with pay. For instance, one head teacher stated that: *“conditions attached to study leave with pay is not attractive”* while another head teacher who was not happy with conditions associated with posting of teachers to certain localities which lack certain basic social amenities had this to say: *“Since in our work, postings are done where your services are needed sometimes put people off”*.

Some head teachers also indicated that, the stressful nature of lesson notes preparation and short maternity leave period is also a pressing issue that drives teachers away from the teaching profession. Precisely, one head teacher mentioned: *“Delayed promotions/unapplied transfers”* while another indicated that: *“The stress in preparing of lesson notes and marking is a pressing issue that drives teachers away from the teaching profession”*. Also, another head teacher highlighted that: *“when there is bad working relationship between teachers and school administration (Head)”*, it could lead to high teacher attrition.

#### 3.2.2 Unattractive/Low Salary

Most of the basic school head teachers are of the general opinion that low salaries of basic school teachers account for the reason why early career teachers quit the teaching profession. Most of the head teachers describe basic school teachers’ salaries as *“unattractive, low, inadequate and poor”*. These and many more adjectives were used to define salaries of most basic school teacher which head teachers believe is driving teachers away from the classroom to other jobs which promise attractive salaries and other incentives. One of the head teachers also indicated specifically that *“the teaching job does not attract higher remuneration even with higher qualification”*

#### 3.2.3 Lack of Motivation

Employee motivation is known to be phenomenal in ensuring increased productivity and is therefore an important aspect of every institution. Lack of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of employees could lead to low productivity and employee turnover. Findings from interview of basic school head teachers revealed that teachers in general lack enough motivation from head teachers, parents and the community in which they serve as teachers. According to one of the head teachers, there is *“lack of appreciation for teachers’ work by the public”* while one other head teacher is of the view that *“head teachers often criticize teachers instead of praising them”*.

#### 3.2.4 Political Influence

According to one of the basic school head teachers, *“the teaching profession of today is full of political influence”*. Constant political interference and the frequent alteration in educational policies by government drives teachers away from the teaching profession. Another head teacher is of the opinion that *“Government policies on education and teachers”* is a driving force that increases the rate of teacher attrition.

### 3.3 Reasons Why Teachers Left the Teaching Profession

Head teachers were asked to provide details of some teachers who have recently quit teaching in their school. When asked why some teachers left the teaching profession, head teachers of the schools where teachers left indicated that, teachers left the teaching profession for further studies in the education to be able to continue teaching at a higher level whilst others enrolled in other programs such as nursing. A teacher is reported to have left the teaching profession to become a priest while another female teacher had to quit teaching to enable her join her husband elsewhere. Other teachers left the teaching profession on personal reasons which were not disclosed to or documented by their head teachers. Below are some specific responses of some head teachers when they were asked to state the exact reasons why some teachers left the teaching profession.

Head teacher 1: *"It was personal, for he never gave any reason(s) for his leaving"*.

Head teacher 2: *"He left for further studies to become a priest"*

Head teacher 3: *"She enrolled in the nursing training college. That was 1991 so I don't have her contact"*.

Head teacher 4: *"She left to join her husband"*

### 3.4 What Must Be Done to Retain Teachers in the Teaching Profession

Head teachers from the selected basic schools in the Cape Coast Municipality were asked to suggest what must be done to retain teachers in the teaching profession. A number of suggestions were made. Worth noting among them is the need for good working relationship among teachers and school administration, improved working conditions and increase in salaries of teachers among others.

#### 3.4.1 Improved Working Conditions

Head teachers believe that, in ensuring that the working conditions of teachers are pleasant and improved, teachers should be provided with housing units at affordable cost, an enabling environment, a flexible means of Promoting teachers and making lesson note preparation easy by providing handout that will serve as a guide for teachers to follow. Some head teachers suggest that the following steps be taken to ensure improved working conditions for teachers. *"Schools should be adequately resourced, Expansion of maternity leaves, Impromptu transfers without transfer grants should be avoided, Lesson note handout should be given to teachers to follow and Social amenities should be provided in the rural areas to enable teachers enjoy their stay in the rural areas"*. According to the head teachers, these and many other interventions geared towards improving the working conditions of teachers could help lower teacher attrition.

#### 3.4.2 Good Working Relationship

Various headmasters who responded to the interview were of the view that, good (cordial) working relation among teachers, head teachers and school administration could go a long way to help retain teachers in the teaching profession. Some head teachers had this to say:

Head teacher 1: *"There should be good working relationship between teachers and heads"*.

Head teacher 2: *"Attitudes at work places should be cordial"*

Head teacher 3: *"School administrators/heads must often provide emotional support for teachers"*

#### 3.4.3 Motivation

There is a general held view among the head teachers that the following can serve as a source of motivation to retain early career teachers in the teaching profession. Listed below are some specific responses from some of the head teachers.

- i. *"Teachers' work should be more appreciated by the public"*
- ii. *"They are to be encouraged to further their education"*
- iii. *"Teachers must be periodically recognized and rewarded for their hard work"*
- iv. *"Automatic promotion of teachers with higher qualification"*
- v. *"Promotions and incremental jumps should come with attractive motivation"*

#### 3.4.4 Good Salary and Incentives

A review of the interview responses from head teachers suggests that increase in teachers' salaries, provision of adequate incentives and allowance for extra duties can motivate teachers and retain them in the teaching profession. This conclusion was arrived at from the responses of some head teachers when they were asked what they suggest should be done to retain teachers in the teaching profession. Below are some precise responses from some head teachers.

Head Teacher 1: *"Government must provide adequate incentives"*

Head Teacher 2: *“Provision of more incentives”*

Head Teacher 3: *“Extra duty allowance should be revised”*

Head Teacher 4: *“Teachers need to be paid well, better than before”*

#### **4. Summary of Findings**

Head teachers of basic schools have expressed their opinion concerning early career teacher attrition and teacher attrition in general. Through interviews with head teachers, it was revealed that poor working conditions and environment, Unattractive/low salary, Lack of motivation, Political influence in the educational sector among others are the most pressing issues that drive early career teachers away from the teaching profession. Head teachers were also asked if they could provide records of teachers who have recently left the teaching profession. The few available records indicate that teachers left the teaching profession for two major reasons namely; personal reasons and for further studies. While some teachers left the teaching profession to join their spouses leaving elsewhere, others had to quit in order to further their education so they could either qualify for other or better opportunities in or outside the educational sector. The interview with head teachers also revealed that in order to maintain teacher in the profession, there should be improved working conditions, existence of good working relationship among teachers and between teachers and school administration, regular motivation, good salary and other incentives for teachers.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The findings highlight several factors contributing to early career teacher attrition, including poor working conditions, inadequate motivation, ineffective leadership, low salary, and political influence in the educational sector. These factors collectively create an environment that is not conducive for teachers, leading to dissatisfaction and ultimately, high turnover rates within the teaching profession.

It is evident from the findings that improving working conditions, providing adequate motivation, addressing salary disparities, and reducing political interference are crucial steps towards mitigating teacher attrition. These efforts are essential not only for retaining experienced teachers but also for attracting new talent into the profession.

#### **6. Recommendation**

Based on the key findings and the conclusions drawn from the study, the researcher would like to make the following recommendations.

1. **Improving Working Conditions:** Educational institutions should prioritize creating conducive working environments for teachers. This includes ensuring adequate resources, infrastructure, and support systems to enhance teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction.
2. **Enhancing Motivation:** Employers should implement strategies to motivate teachers beyond financial incentives. Non-monetary rewards such as recognition, promotion opportunities, and professional development should be emphasized to boost morale and engagement.
3. **Fostering Effective Leadership:** School administrators should undergo training to develop strong leadership skills. Cultivating positive working relationships and effective communication channels between teachers and school leadership is vital for creating a supportive work culture.
4. **Addressing Salary Disparities:** Governments and educational authorities should review teacher salary structures to ensure competitive compensation that reflects the importance of the teaching profession. Fair and attractive remuneration packages are essential for retaining skilled educators.
5. **Reducing Political Interference:** Educational policies should be formulated based on educational research and consultation with relevant stakeholders rather than political agendas. Minimizing political interference in educational matters can promote stability and trust within the teaching profession.
6. **Long-Term Planning:** Educational institutions and policymakers should adopt long-term strategies to address systemic issues contributing to teacher attrition. This may involve comprehensive workforce planning, investment in teacher training and development, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement within the education sector.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards creating a supportive and rewarding environment that encourages talented individuals to pursue and remain in teaching careers, ultimately benefiting students and the education system as a whole.

## References

- Aklorbortu, K.D. (2023). 'High attrition rate poses danger to education: 10,000 teachers relocate to UK this year — Dr Addai-Poku', *Graphic Online*, 5 October, viewed 12 October 2024, <https://www.graphic.com.gh>.
- Anthony, G. & Ord, K. (2008). Change-of-career secondary teachers: Motivations, expectations and intentions. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 36, 359–376.
- Barnum, M. (2023). Turnover hits new highs across the U.S.', *Chalkbeat*, 6 March, viewed 12 October 2024, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/2023/3/6/23624340/teacher-turnover-leaving-the-profession-quitting-higher-rate/>.
- Claeys, L. (2011). *Teacher motivation to teach and to remain teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students*, PhD thesis, University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas.
- Elyashiv, R.A. (2019). School and district leaders talk about teacher attrition, *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*, 8(3), 160-170.
- Farmer, D. (2020). Teacher attrition: The impacts of stress, *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 87, (1), 41-50.
- Fullard, J. & Zuccollo, J. (2021). *Local pay and teacher retention in England*, Education Policy Institute, viewed 12 October 2024, <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/local-pay-and-teacher-retention-in-england/>.
- Ghana News Agency (2022). Africa Education Watch (Eduwatch) decries high attrition rate among teachers, *Ghana News Agency*, 12 January, viewed 12 October 2024, <https://gna.org.gh/2022/01/eduwatch-decries-high-attrition-rate-among-teachers/>.
- Ibidapo-Obe, O. (2007). The challenge of teacher education in Nigeria—The University of Lagos Experience', paper presented at the Second Regional Research Seminar for Africa: UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, Ghana.
- Ingersoll, R. (2001). Teacher attrition and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis, *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), 499-534.
- Madigan, D.J. & Kim, L.E. (2021). Towards an understanding of teacher attrition: A meta-analysis of burnout, job satisfaction, and teachers' intentions to quit. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 105, 103425.
- Mathew, L.J. (2005). *The impact of higher salaries and performance-related pay on retention rate of graduate teachers of public schools in Singapore*, Master's thesis, Monash University, Australia.
- Ngmenkpiewo, F., Tseer, T. & Gyei, S. (2023). Addressing teacher attrition in the Nkoranza North District: Insights and strategies for retaining educators in Ghana', *British Journal of Contemporary Education*, 3(2), 58-77. DOI: 10.52589/bjce-lmepbn4.
- Pitsoe, V.J. & Machaisa, P.R. (2012). Teacher attrition catastrophe in Sub-Saharan Africa: A hurdle in the achievement of UPE, EFA policy goals and MDGS', *Education, Economics, Political Science*.
- Ramsey, G. (2000). *Quality matters: Revitalising teaching*, Sydney: NSW Department of Education and Training.
- UNESCO (2024). *Global report on teachers: Addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession*, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, viewed 12 October 2024, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000388832>.

---

Watt, H.M.G. & Richardson, P.W. (2007). Motivational factors influencing teaching as a career choice: Development and validation of the FIT-choice scale, *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 75, 167–202.

Watt, H.M.G. & Richardson, P.W. (2012). An introduction to teaching motivations in different countries: Comparisons using the FIT-choice scale, *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 40, 185–197.

Williams, C. (2002). *Telling tales: Stories from new teachers in NSW country schools*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, University of Queensland, 1-5 December.