TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS, EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS AS PREDICTORS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SHS FRENCH CURRICULUM IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum implementation has been bedeviled with myriad of challenges in recent times. The focus and purpose of this study was therefore to ascertain the extent to which three teacher-related factors predict the French curriculum in the SHS. Twenty one (21) French teachers, representing 45% of entire French teacher population in the Western region of Ghana were purposively selected and surveyed. The findings revealed that the majority of teachers were experienced with at least first degrees even though the study found that teachers had negative beliefs and perceptions about the French programme due to their perceived non-involvement in national curriculum programmes. Teachers' qualification was found to be the best predictor of implementation (B= 0.857, $p = 0.044$). It was concluded that teacher variables affect curriculum implementation and so governments should imbibe the concerns of teachers in the design of curriculum so as to ensure successful implementation of national curricula.

KEYWORDS: French Curriculum, Innovation, Implementation, Diffusion of Innovation (DOI), SHS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Curriculum implementation is the process of putting a document or an instructional programme into practice (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Curriculum implementers adopt the fidelity approach to curriculum when teachers are required to implement the content of the curriculum to the letter. Some authors in the literature assert that curriculum implementation occurs when teachers deliver both the content and instructional strategies of the curriculum in the same way that they were designed to be delivered. For Vaughn, Klingner, and Hughes (2000), most teachers perceive that there are many ways to teach students and that there is little consensus from research that would warrant change in their instructional practice. In addition, researches have also shown that the ability of teachers to implement the curriculum is dependent on variables such as teacher qualification, experience, perceptions, and school support measures among others (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992; Vaughn et al., 2000). For instance in Ghana, some heads of second cycle institutions do all they can to promote the learning of French by providing teachers with the

requisite materials and giving teachers support on issues pertaining to the study of French. However, some also, by their actions and inactions, tend to discourage learning of the subject in their institutions. For these reasons, it is admittedly true that school support can affect how well curriculum is implemented in a particular institution.

A number of problems have bedeviled the implementation of curriculum programmes in SHSs in Ghana. Notable among these implementation set-backs include conservatism on the part of programme implementers (teachers), lack of commitment from teachers, lack of clarity about the curriculum programme to be implemented, teachers' capability to implement the curriculum, and lack of required curricular materials in the implementation, among others (Yiboe, 2011). The issues of teacher qualifications, teaching experience and their perceptions about the content of the subjects they teach are tied to this point. In Ghana, a number of people claim the title 'teachers' but as to whether they have the requisite professional qualification and skills is another matter. Wang and Cheng (2005) noted that of all the factors that determine curriculum implementation, the teacher's qualification and experience, which are a product of their orientation and skill was probably the most crucial. The argument, in the Ghanaian context, is likely to engender debate as to teachers' intellectual capacity to implement curriculum programmes. This study therefore focused on exploring some factors that determine implementation of the SHS French curriculum.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Chief Examiner's Report in French on the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (May/June 2007 WASSCE Report) showed a decline in students' performance compared with the previous years' performance in the subject. The report, among other things, stated certain weaknesses of French candidates such as lack of vocabulary leading to the coining of French words from English, for example *"remembrer"* to mean "to remember" instead of "se rappeler". The report also indicated candidates' weakness in spelling, omission or misuse of accents, poor grammar, especially the use of the past tense (passé composé), and poor punctuation marks among other things. However, literature has revealed little work on the subject implementation. The current status quo therefore creates a knowledge gap that the current research intends to fill.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was therefore to find out the extent to which teachers' qualification, experience and perception about the innovation could predict effective implementation of the SHS French curriculum.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The problem under investigation is very significant because it seeks to: provide insight into the complexity of curriculum implementation by helping researchers and educational practitioners gain better understanding of how and why a programme works, and the extent to which outcomes can be improved. Again, the study would serve as rich source of literature for future research discourse on the subject.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

H_0: Teachers' qualification, experience and their perceptions about the content of the
French curriculum do not have any significant effect on the implementation of the curriculum.
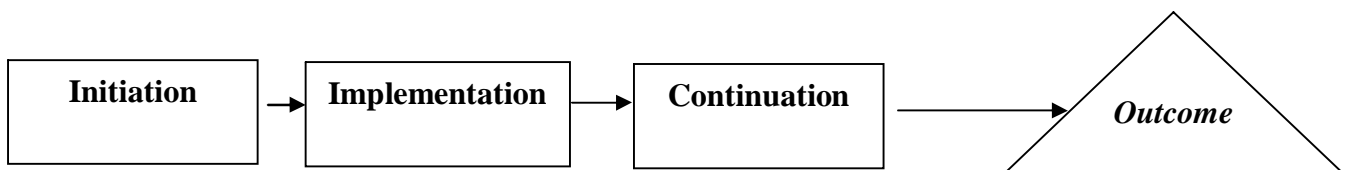
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Rogers' (1995) Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The theory guiding this study is Rogers' diffusion of innovations (DOI) theory which was formalized in his first publication in 1962. Yates (2001) noted that as far as DOI theory was concerned, Rogers was probably the most cited author. According to Rogers (1995) diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. He defined an innovation as an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption (Rogers, 1995). Individuals in the social system judge an innovation by the perceived attributes or characteristics it possesses and these attributes help to predict the rate of implementation and adoption of innovations (Rogers, 2003). In fact, Rogers' DOI theory offers valuable information in understanding why some innovations are adopted at an increasingly faster rate than others, and why others are rejected even though benefits may be obvious. While numerous studies have used perceived attributes of innovations as factors in innovation adoption over the past years, the perceptions of innovations have also been found to be important factors in the implementation of a wide range of innovations.

2.2 The Issue of Implementation

Curriculum implementation history begins with becoming aware that it does not take place. It is not unfair to say that usually most of the attention and energy of early curriculum developers was focused on the production side of their enterprise, on the materialized "plan" or "product". The idea was: If the product is good and if it is widely enough disseminated, it will be adopted by the realm of practice. However, history showed that many – some say: most (e.g. Fullan & Pomfret, 1977) – curriculum projects of the 60s and 70s have not been put into practice in a way curriculum developers had hoped. In the past, practitioners were not even always aware that they violated the developers' intentions (Reinmann-Rothmeier & Mandl, 1999). For innovating classroom practice, attention must obviously not only be given to the *production phase* of a curriculum, but also to what happens after the production. What processes happen under what circumstances if practitioners are supposed to "adopt" a curriculum?

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│  Initiation  │ ──▶ │  Implementation  │ ──▶ │ Continuation │ ──▶    ╱Outcome╲
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Fig. 1. A simplified overview of the change process according Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991)

Thus, the term implementation in a broad sense conceptualizes the process through which a proposed concept, model, topic, theory etc. is taken up by some practice. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) distinguished three sub-processes in which an innovation is made work (or not) in order to produce outcomes as shown in Figure 1. The processes that eventually lead up to and end with the decision to take up a specific innovation proposal have been called initiation phase (mobilisation or adoption). In the implementation phase ("implementation" in a more narrow sense) participants attempt to use the innovation proposal (or the curriculum in our case) in order to change their practice. Frequently, extra support for translating the innovatory ideas into reality is offered on a project basis. Thus, while the initiation phase is concerned with the nominal use of a curriculum, the implementation phase focuses on the actual use. The study of implementation processes is

concerned "with the nature and extent of actual change, as well as the factors and processes that influence how and what changes are achieved." (Fullan, 1994, p.2839) Thereby, it aims to find out what type of extra support in the 'project phase' is appropriate to promote actual use of the innovation. In the continuation phase (called institutionalization, incorporation, or routinisation) the innovation (or what has been made out of the innovation during implementation) is built into the routine organisation, and extra support (if there had been any during the implementation phase) is withdrawn. Thus, while implementation is concerned with initial use of the innovation under project conditions, continuation deals with mature use under standard conditions.

2.3 General Strategies of Implementation
Following Fullan (1983), two different general approaches may be contrasted: the programmed approach (fidelity approach) which aims to solve the implementation problem by concentrating on flaws in the specification of the 'product' such as gaps in the existing specification of innovations practices; failure to articulate the innovation's implication for teachers behaviour, and theoretical inadequacies with respect to identified means for achieving the intended outcomes of an innovation. (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1980). In other words, the specification of the curriculum and of the implementation process is the problem; had they been clearer, problems of implementation would be fewer.

2.4 Predictors of Curriculum Implementation
Curriculum implementation due to its multidimensional nature is likely to be influenced by a diversity of factors. Investigating on this issue, Evans (2001), for instance, demonstrated that implementation of a programme was higher when teacher perceptions, driven by attitude, was more positive and years of experience was less. Others, on the other hand, explained that almost half of the implementation successes observed in early childhood education classrooms are underpinned by teacher characteristics such as level of education, years of experience, and teacher beliefs/perceptions among others. Whatever the general strategy of implementation might be, it makes sense to know more about factors affecting implementation. Although there are a lot of individual and often contradictory research results in different implementation localities, there is, nevertheless, some convergence of research findings about key factors some of which include characteristics of the innovation, teacher qualification and teaching experience teachers' beliefs and decision-making in implementation, (Fullan, 1994)

2.4.1 Characteristics of the innovation
Characteristics of the innovation itself, in our case of the curriculum, affect the process of implementation. It is not surprising that the higher a (perceived or felt) need for the solutions the innovation proposes is, the better the chances for implementation are. Usually, a general feeling of need or the expression of need by some political body or by academia is not enough, rather this need must be perceived by the constituencies directly involved in the implementation. It follows that careful examination of whether or not [the changes] address priority needs (Fullan 1994) lays important groundwork before and during the production phase of a curriculum; and that frequent communication and open discussion of the curriculum's merit for coping with felt need must maintain and develop an awareness of this topic during the implementation process.
However, there are three complications with straightforwardly addressing needs (Fullan 1994): First, there is a need for the solutions offered by a curriculum must not just be 'one among many others'. Among the "overloaded improvement agendas" of today's schools there is often competition between various innovation proposals which leads not too rarely to vague development agendas

within which no critical mass of improvement energy can be accumulated behind any of the projects. Developing a vision could be used as an instrument to prioritize among a set of desirables. Secondly and especially in the case of complex changes, both precise needs and solutions offered by the curriculum are not clear from the beginning. Thirdly, need interacts with other factors.

Another crucial factor is the innovation's clarity (about goals and means). Curriculum research unearthed examples of educational innovations where practitioners were not clear about what they were expected to do differently – what change meant for them in practice. At least in initial implementation phases teachers relish concreteness and tangibility. They expect that teaching strategies are clearly described and material is well-thought of. The proposal should be clear about ways of doing, but not too linear and restricting in the sense that just one way of doing is advocated and no alternatives are possible. This need for clarity has been interpreted as expression of a feeling of role ambiguity in a situation of uncertainty produced by the new challenges of the innovation on one side and by the partly lacking competencies on the teachers' part. It was also found that a more flexible approach may be appropriate in later phases of implementation when teachers have strengthened their feeling of competence with respect to the innovation (Lütgert & Stephan, 1983). Stenhouse (1975) advocated the curriculum as an 'intelligent proposal' and certainly meant it should to be as clear as possible about what the proposal is. But at the same time, he thought, teachers should be encouraged and supported by resources and structure to evaluate this proposal under specific circumstances and to develop it further. A third factor is complexity which reflects the amount of new skills, altered beliefs und different materials etc. required by an innovation. "… simple changes may be easier to carry out, but they may not make much of a difference. Complex changes promise to accomplish more, but they also demand more effort, and failure takes a greater toll. The answer seems to be to break complex changes into components and implement them in a divisible and/or incremental manner." (Fullan, 1994; Thomas, 1994).

A fourth factor lies in the (perceived) quality and practicality of the innovation proposal. Again, it is not (only) the quality a panel of curriculum developers would attribute to the curriculum proposal, but the quality as it is perceived by the relevant actors supposed to implement the curriculum. One might distinguish several aspects of quality in this respect. Firstly (but not always foremost), there is conceptual quality flowing from plausibility and coherence of the conceptual elements employed. There is formal or communicative quality coming from the language, graphical and social design of the presentation of the innovation before and during the implementation process. And there is practical or logistic quality stemming from the availability of materials and other resources, such as, for example, time for development work or the consultation of external experts. As most innovation address 'urgent and ambitious needs', it happens that decisions are frequently made without the follow-up or preparation time necessary to generate adequate materials (Fullan, 1994).

It must be stressed that "quality" with respect to implementation points to the perceptions of the different stakeholders: Thus, an essential feature of quality is contextual suitability: It has been frequently demonstrated that imported programs rarely work equally well in all contexts (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Innovation proposals must fit to available funds, specific student characteristics, the communities' language patterns, teachers' abilities, parents' expectations, cultural values and much more (Thomas, 1994).

"Quality" also means that a curriculum can pass the test of the 'practicality ethic of teachers' (Doyle & Ponder, 1977): Teachers appreciate these ideas, proposals or teaching methods which have proven to "work" in practice or which promise by their appearance of practicality to do so. Those proposals are considered as 'practical' which "address salient needs, that fit well with the teacher's situation, that are focused and that include concrete how-to-do-possibilities. 'Practical' does not necessarily mean 'easy' but it does mean the presence of next steps." (Fullan 1994)

### 2.4.2 Teacher Qualification and Teaching Experience

The teaching profession in developing countries consists of under qualified, unqualified and qualified teachers. Teachers in the first two categories usually enroll in courses to upgrade their qualifications, and identify skills required in their sector of operation. Sometimes, by upgrading their professional instincts, they are able to perform even better than the professional teacher who has had an esoteric body of knowledge at the training college. Findings of many research works have revealed that the qualification of a teacher determines his/her competence in the classroom. In a research conducted by Penuel, Fisherman, Yamaguichi & Gallagher (2007), it came out that the educational attainment of teachers affects their class performance. By extension, professional/academic qualification of the teacher influences his/her classroom competence. In that research, it was revealed that teachers with professional qualifications tended to associate and commit themselves more to curriculum implementation requirements. In our opinion however, this stance is contestable given that there have been counter arguments that the individual's qualification per se cannot determine how effective they become in the classroom. The individual's intellectual ability cannot and should not be discounted. Penuel, et al. (2007) noted that issues of professionalism and non-professionalism are closely linked to teacher qualification. We sincerely believe that professional/non-professional teachers also respond to curriculum implementation in diverse ways. For Ipaye (2002) and Penuel, et al. (2007), teachers ignore, refuse, adopt, and adapt the official curriculum. They contended that teacher qualification affects curriculum implementation. The issue about relationship between years of experience on the job and implementation has not been a recent phenomenon. Investigations of teacher experience have been conducted in a wide range of developed and developing countries (Hanushek, 2003). Several studies conducted in the past showed that teacher experience has a more positive relationship with quality teaching or implementation, but still the overall picture is not that strong (Hanushek, 2003). While a majority of the studies finds a positive effect, only a minority of all estimates provides statistically significant results. Hanushek also pursued a nonparametric investigation of experience and found that experience effects are concentrated in the first few years of teaching.

2.4.3 Teachers' Beliefs and Decision-Making in Implementation

Belief, defined differently by numerous researchers, is referred to as a messy construct by Pajares (1992), noting the following: "…defining beliefs is at best a game of player's choice. They travel in disguise and often under alias-attitudes, values, judgments, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertories of understanding, and social strategy, to name but a few that can be found in the literature" (p. 309).

Teachers' beliefs have been described by Kagan (1992) as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught. Teachers' beliefs are related to their classroom practice (Burns, 1992; Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992). Pajares (1992) emphasised that there is a "strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices" (p. 326) and that educational beliefs of teachers especially pre-service ones play a pivotal role in their acquisition and interpretation of knowledge and subsequent teaching behaviour. Nespor (1987) argued that teachers' beliefs are likely to influence their future behaviour. Nevertheless, Fang (1996) pointed out inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs and their practices. Woods (1996) also argued that what teachers do in their classroom practices is shaped by what they think, and that teachers' perceptions and beliefs serve as filters through which instructional judgments and decisions are made. To this end, it might

be significant to realize that their perceptions about the materials they implement contribute in no small way to how well they implement curriculum (Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Kagan, 1992; Owusu, 2012). Woods found that the decisions made in planning and carrying out the course were consistent with deeper underlying assumptions and beliefs about language, learning, and teaching; yet each teacher's decisions and beliefs differed dramatically from the other along a number of specifiable dimensions (Woods, 1996). The framework for the variables of interest in this study and their individual interaction processes predict curriculum implementation. The framework for this has been conceptualised in Figure 2.
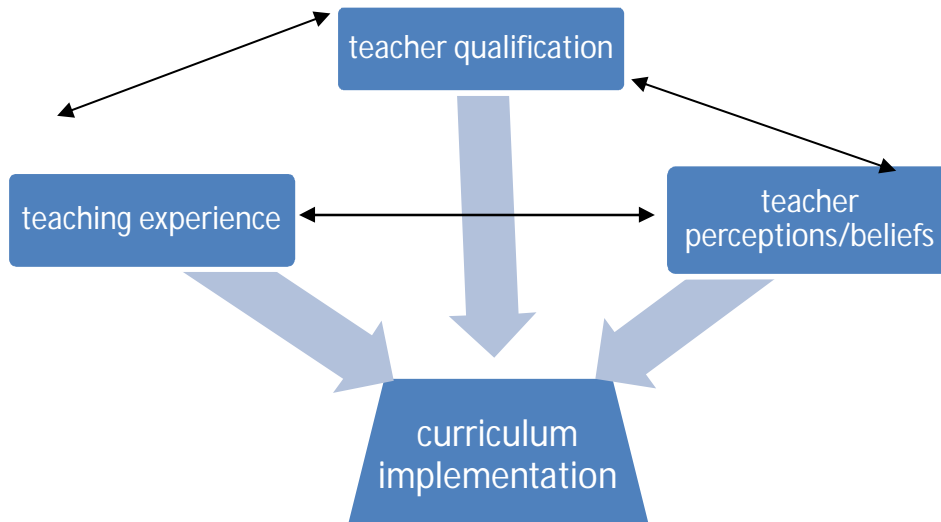
Figure 2. Conceptualised predictors of curriculum implementation

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design
The study used a simple descriptive survey design for the collection of data and the analysis of information because the design helped to focus only on a portion of the population which eventually enabled us to collect data in order to test the hypothesis (Creswell, 2003).

3.2 Population
The target population comprised all 46 French teachers in the 24 public SHSs in the Western Region. The accessible population of the study consisted of all 21 French teachers in the eleven (11) public SHSs in the Takoradi Metropolis. The sample represented 45.6% of the target population for the study.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure
We used the census technique to select 21 teachers in the participating schools. The procedure allowed the researchers to include everybody as subjects or respondents for the study (Hatch, 2002). The use of this technique was advantageous for the researchers in many ways. For instance, census allowed the researchers to undertake the study when the subjects for it were found to be small in number due to the insufficiency of SHS French teachers. The questionnaire was used because it was

the appropriate tool for gathering data that could guarantee confidentiality of respondents. In order to validate the instrument, it was pilot-tested in three randomly selected SHSs in the Cape Coast Metropolis (Oguaa Sec. Tech., Adisadel College and Ghana National College). Pilot-testing of instruments yielded reliability co-efficient of .847.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

In terms of data collection procedure, the researchers briefed the respondents on the rationale for the study and appealed to them for their maximum cooperation during the data collection period. This ensured a good rapport between the researchers and the respondents. We then administered the questionnaires to students.

3.5 Data Analysis

The Multiple Regression, an inferential statistical tool was used to test the hypothesis for the study. This tool was employed to ascertain the extent to which the independent variables contributed to teachers' implementation of the French curriculum. Testing was done at 0.05 level of significance or at 95% confidence level.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We used multiple regression analysis to explain the effect of various teacher-related variables on implementation. In this regard, the results were summarized in Table 1. The results allowed us to ascertain the contributions of the independent variables to implementation.

4.1 Testing the Hypothesis

H_1: *Teachers' qualification, experience and their perceptions about the content of the French curriculum have a significant effect on the implementation of the curriculum.*

Table 1: Regression Analysis Predicting Curriculum Implementation from Qualification, Experience and Teacher Perceptions.

			Coefficients		
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coefficients	
	B	Standard Error		t	*Sig*
1. (Constant)	8.238	3.175		2.595	0.219
Teacher Percepts	-0.593	0.362	-0.357	-1.637	0.120
Teaching Experi.	0.259	0.397	0.133	0.640	0.531
Academic Quali.	0.857	0.707	-0.472	-2.172	0.044

Source: Field Data (2012)

As can be gleaned from Table 1, the importance of each of the independent variables (IV) predicting implementation of the French SHS curriculum is assessed through the reported t statistic and its associated *p*-value. The R, which indicates the correlation, was found to be 0.52 (indicating a weak linear relationship among the three independent variables). The R^2 was found to be 0.274 and therefore implied that 27.4% of the variance in curriculum implementation was accounted for by the teacher perceptions about the French curriculum, their teaching experience and academic qualification. In other words, the three variables explained 27.4% of the variability in curriculum implementation. The statistics showed also that of all the independent variables, only academic qualification is significantly related to implementation (B= 0.857, *p* = 0.044). The write up is $F(1, 21) = 8.142$, $p < 0.05$ (or: $F(1, 21) = 8.142$, $p = 0.044$) This suggests that each one point increase in academic qualification of the teacher is associated on average to 0.857 point increase in curriculum

implementation. Mathematically, the regression equation for the analysis is $\hat{Y}=8.238-0.593X_1+0.259X_2+0.857X_3$. By this, for any one increase in curriculum implementation, there is a corresponding decrease in teacher perception of 0.593, increase in teacher experience of 0.259 and increase in academic qualification of 0.857. It is clear from here that the best predictor of teachers' implementation of the French curriculum is teacher qualification. Teachers' perceptions and their experience, though are positively correlated with implementation, the relationship exists as a result of chance. Evans (2001) in his research however, demonstrated that implementation of a programme was higher when teacher perceptions, driven by attitude, was more positive and years of experience was less. Others on the other hand, explained that almost half of the implementation successes observed in early childhood education classrooms are underpinned by teacher characteristics such as level of education, years of experience, and teachers' beliefs/perceptions among others. This result is consistent with the strand of literature by a research conducted by Penuel, Fisherman, Yamaguichi and Gallagher (2007). In their study, they found that the educational attainment of teachers affected their class performance. It is also important to note the concurrence of this finding with another vital consideration in the case of experience on the possibility of a highly nonlinear relationship between the quality of instruction and number of years of teaching (experience) found in the literature.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The descriptive statistics showed that all teachers had the requisite qualification (at least the first degree) to teach French at the SHS level. Also, 17(80.9%) of them had taught French for more than ten (10) years and therefore have gathered a lot of experience in teaching. Almost all the teachers surveyed had negative perceptions about the French curriculum with most of them indicating that the structure of the syllabus does not enhance teaching and learning. Teacher qualification was found to be the best predictor of performance even though there was a positive correlation among the other two variables. The effect of experience and perception of teachers on implementation only happened by chance and not due to any statistical significance. Implicitly, academic qualification of the teacher influences their effective classroom implementation of the curriculum. In the current research literature, it has been revealed that teachers with requisite qualifications tended to associate and commit themselves more to curriculum implementation. Penuel, et al. (2007) noted in an earlier work that issues of professionalism and non-professionalism are closely linked to teacher qualification. In line with this reasoning, it is sincerely believed that professional/non-professional teachers respond to curriculum implementation in diverse ways.

5.1 Recommendations

The forgoing recommendations have been made in lieu of the findings:
   a. In an era of falling standards in education, government and other stakeholders in education should ensure that teachers have the requisite qualifications to teach in order to ensure effective implementation of educational policies and programmes.
   b. Also, teachers' perception was been found to have negative influence on the implementation of curriculum. The Ghana Education Service (GES) or the Ministry of Education (MoE) should ensure that curriculum is given its initial implementation momentum through the provision of teachers with the required motivation to implement it. However, this mandate

should be accompanied by clear guidelines so that teachers are not only unaware of their critical role in the implementation process.

c.   Specialist training institutions like the university of Cape Coast and the University of Education, Winneba should train teachers in their assigned locations to ensure that teachers receive ongoing support that equips them with the necessary competencies to implement educational programmes.

d.   Teachers who are already in the teaching service but are without the necessary qualification should be given the needed assistance they require by the GES to upgrade themselves through distance education.

e.   In the long run, the GES should aim at replacing all teachers without the necessary qualification in the SHSs by putting in place measures first to encourage them get the qualifications needed. If these are done, problems and challenges that have bedeviled curriculum implementation in our education sector for this long may be minimized if not eradicated completely.

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