







ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Selected Demographic Variables as Predictors of Ghanaian Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of the Teacher Licensure Test

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Ethical Statement

Participants provided written informed consent prior to participation in the study.

Funding Information

No funding was received for the study.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest to disclose.

ABSTRACT

This study examined Ghanaian preservice teachers' perceptions of the newly introduced teacher licensure test in 2018. Data were obtained from an online survey of third-year preservice teachers selected from 16 of 46 public colleges of education in Ghana. By adapting an existing instrument, we created an 11-item scale, which was theoretically categorised into five components: utility of the test, college preparation, consequences, emphasis on the test, and other certification tests. The participants' scores on each component were regressed on four predictor variables: information about the test, student's sex, prior teaching experience, and programme of study. The results showed that students' sex was predictive of the utility of the test, college preparation, and emphasis on the test. Prior teaching experience was also predictive of the emphasis placed on the test and the need for other certification tests. Preservice teachers' exposure to information about the test was associated with their perceptions of the utility of the test, the need for college preparation, and the use of other certification tests. Implications for teacher preparation and education are discussed, especially in relation to the identification of alternative certifications.

Keywords: Demographic variables, teacher licensure test, preservice teachers, predictors.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of teachers in education systems throughout the world has long been identified as the most important school factor affecting student learning outcomes (Chen et al. 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2016; UNESCO, 2019). As a result, governments continue to develop teacher education systems to improve teacher quality. Also, the supply of qualified teachers is linked to SDG 4c goal of increasing the supply of qualified teachers to developing countries (UNESCO, 2016). One way in which governments have tried to do this is by using initial teacher entry standards and certification as mechanisms to enhance and ensure teacher quality. These entry and certification standards often use different assessment formats (e.g. paper-and-pencil tests, performance assessment, and portfolios) and have been extensively applied in Western contexts, such as the United States and Canada (Childs et al., 2002; Clayton, 2018; Libman, 2012). Recently in 2018, Ghana introduced a policy that requires preservice teachers to be certified through paper-and-pencil tests after they successfully complete a traditional university/college-based teacher education programme (Government of Ghana, 2019). While the Ghanaian Ministry of Education considers the teacher certification tests to be a means of ensuring that only competent teachers are employed, their introduction was met with strong resistance from the teaching workforce. This resistance is not surprising, given the fact that in some Western contexts (e.g., Canada), paper-and-pencil certification tests have been considered controversial (Childs et al., 2002), as they do not produce a valid measure of what teachers know and can do. Instead, others have advocated for the use of alternative certification tests, such as one- or two-year postbaccalaureate programmes with continuous integrated coursework, mentoring, and supervision or short vacation programmes that give teachers assignments with full responsibility for student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002).

Despite the introduction of the licensure test in Ghana, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to it. Notably, Amoah's (2017) study explored the perceptions of senior high school teachers towards the introduction of the test, while Mensah et al., (2020) conducted a literature review on the licensure tests and their fit for the Ghanaian context. However, to date, no research has specifically examined the perspectives of preservice teachers towards the licensure test, indicating a gap in the research on teacher certification examinations in Sub-Saharan Africa and developing regions. Furthermore, the Ghanaian initiative has garnered attention from various African education systems regarding teachers' perspectives of such tests. Therefore, exploring what Ghanaian preservice teachers think about the teacher tests can help inform relevant adaptations or improvements to the test itself and, more generally, to teacher quality in Ghana. Although preservice teachers' general views of licensing tests are important, understanding them in relation to demographic characteristics could better explain how individual expectations and values vary, and how we can use the expectancy-value theory to explain them. This will also contribute to expanding empirical research in this area and in the sub-Saharan African context.

Although few studies have examined teachers' perspectives on certification tests, those that have (e.g., Childs et al., 2002; Churchward & Willis, 2019; Petchauer, 2016) explored variations in teachers' perceptions of the importance of the tests, preparations for the tests, whether failing the test should have consequences for teachers, and whether other test formats are more appropriate than paper-and-pencil ones. This study builds on previous research by examining Ghanaian preservice teachers' perceptions of the current licensing tests, particularly the relationship between their perceptions and selected demographic variables (i.e., student sex, prior teaching experience, and programme of study) and their exposure to information about the test. Based on the literature (Abdallah & Musah, 2021; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010) our hypothesis is that preservice teachers' genders and prior teaching experience are associated with how they perceive the test. However, given Ghanaian teachers'

resistance to the tests when they were introduced, we assume that the teachers' programme of study would not influence their perspectives (Petchauer, 2018).

Theoretical framework: Expectancy-value theory

Following an adapted version of Child et al.'s (2002) survey, we examined preservice teachers' perspectives on the importance of the test, preparations for the test, consequences for not doing well on the test, and the use of other certification tests. We examined preservice teachers' perceptions of the licensure test through expectancy-value theory, which assumes that students' achievement-related choices are determined by two factors: expectations for success and subjective task value. According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), expectation for success is a competence-related belief towards a particular task and can be measured as self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in his or her capabilities to successfully engage in a task (Bandura 1997). In the context of this study, if preservice teachers considered their ability to succeed on the test to be dependent on college-level preparation, then this would have implications for the structure of the initial teacher education curriculum.

Task value is differentiated into four components: (a) attainment value relates to the importance of doing a task well; (b) intrinsic value is the personal enjoyment an individual derives from engaging in the task; (c) utility value is the perceived usefulness or relevance of the task for future or immediate goals; and (d) cost refers to the required effort, lost alternative opportunities, and negative consequences resulting from engaging in the task (Eccles & Wigfield 2002). These components are useful for understanding preservice teachers' perspectives on licensure tests. For instance, for teachers to appreciate the significance of the test, they need to perceive the value of taking the test and not view it as an unnecessary step toward teacher qualification and practice for the profession. At the same time, their perceptions about the consequences of failing the test have implications for the effort they put into preparing for it. Understanding whether they think other certification tests have more value is important for policy discussions on teacher quality in Ghana.

Expectancy-value theory also highlights the importance of demographic characteristics in explaining individuals' expectations and values. Applying the theory to preservice teachers' perceptions about the licensure tests suggests that their views are not just generally explored, but also examined in relation to their demographic characteristics, which allows us to understand variations in their responses.

Perceptions About Licensure Tests

Although in some systems, testing teachers before they are certified to teach is considered a way of ensuring that schools have competent teachers, some argue that these tests do not provide insight into their potential to be effective teachers. Proponents of the teacher licensure test argue that it can be used as a quality assurance mechanism and regulatory measure to achieve teacher quality and professionalism, which results in improved learner achievement (Childs et al., 2002; Loeb et al., 2005; Petchauer, 2015). However, when subjected to research, these assertions have yielded mixed results, with some studies (e.g., Buddin & Zamarro, 2009) reporting positive significant links between teacher licensing tests and children's learning achievement, and others showing non-significant associations (e.g. Clayton, 2018; Goldhaber et al., 2017; Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). Such mixed findings raise questions about the effectiveness of licensing tests in predicting teachers' competence and whether other certification tests are more appropriate or should be considered alongside licensing tests. Childs et al. (2002) explored Canadian preservice teachers' perspectives on licensing tests and found that about two-thirds of them

disagreed with the importance of the test, and about half also disagreed that some other certification would be more effective in evaluating teachers' competence. In another Canadian study, Portelli et al. (2005) found that teachers believed that high-stakes testing was not a good measure of teachers' competence and suggested that performance-based evaluations were much better. Similarly, in Ghana, Amoah (2017) found that although in-service teachers considered the licensure test an important screening tool, more than half (59%) disagreed that the test would improve teacher competence.

Another important factor related to licensure tests is preparation. In its current form, teacher candidates in Ghana are expected to prepare for the test on their own. Therefore, whether preservice teachers consider it important to be introduced to the test as part of their educational training remains an open question. The literature has divergent views as to whether teacher training institutions should prepare preservice teachers in this way (Abdallah & Musah, 2021; Goldhaber & Hansen, 2010). On the one hand, some researchers, such as Childs et al. (2002), argue that teacher training institutions are not always successful in preparing preservice teachers for such tests. On the other hand, others (e.g. Libman, 2012) maintain that college preparation for licensure tests could overload the content of the initial teacher curriculum for graduates; hence, individual teacher candidates should prepare on their own. Understanding Ghanaian preservice teachers' views on this issue will help in the review of the teacher testing policy and how it can contribute to improved teacher quality within Global South contexts.

In addition to the above issues, the consequences of the test for teacher candidates are crucial, since they are required to pass the test before they can start their teaching career. One study that explored Canadian teachers' perspectives on the consequences of their teacher tests found that most teachers (87%) disagreed that they should be barred from teaching if they did not meet the pass mark (Childs et al., 2002). In its current form, Ghanaian teacher candidates who fail the test are made to "resit" until they pass or find themselves out of the profession, even though they have successfully completed a teacher preparation programme. The consequences of not passing the test go beyond eligibility to teach in a public school, with the added costs of preparation time, examination fees, and other consequential costs if they end up not being hired to teach in public schools. This can leave preservice teachers unsure about their future aspirations in education (Shuls & Trivitt, 2015). These perceived concerns about failure or success on the licensing test can also influence their preparation (Petchauer, 2016). Therefore, understanding Ghanaian teachers' perspectives will be useful in identifying possible alternatives to address this issue and dissuade prospective teachers from exiting the profession. Furthermore, the findings could help inform stakeholders about whether the test is a welcome addition to policy to improve teacher quality. The study will also shed insight into the way in which these tests influence how preservice teachers prepare for and experience the process, as well as how they relate to the outcomes and their consequences.

The Ghanaian Context

The 2008 Education Act 778 mandated that the National Teaching Council (NTC) develop and establish frameworks for employing qualified teachers and for their professional development. It was not until 2018 that the government of Ghana initiated a teacher licensing policy, the goal of which was to improve teacher quality in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 4c, which sought to increase the supply of qualified teachers, especially in developing countries (UNESCO, 2015). In implementing the policy, the government developed a national teachers' standards framework through the NTC, which sets clear standards for teacher certification and outlines three areas of teacher testing to be developed: professional values and attitudes, professional knowledge, and professional practice. The licensing test has three areas: numeracy, literacy, and essential professional skills, and a candidate must pass all areas in order to be licenced.

Since the introduction of licensing tests, about a third of teachers have failed the tests. For example, according to the NTC (2019) report, of the 28,757 who sat for the first test, 26 per cent (7,432) failed to meet the pass mark of 50 per cent. In March 2019, about 3,987 (33%) of the 12,076 who wrote the test failed. While this number decreased to about 21 per cent in September 2019, it shot up again to about 30 per cent (8,442) out of a total of 27,455 in October 2020. Thus, a sizeable proportion of teachers fail the tests and may not be able to take up teaching appointments, which exacerbates the problem of inadequately qualified teachers. The findings from our study provide insights that can help teacher education institutions improve their programme and the performance of preservice teachers on these tests.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Participants for this study comprised third-year preservice teachers enrolled in colleges of education, which prepare teachers in Ghana. These students were selected because they were the first cohort of the four-year Bachelor of Education programme introduced at these colleges in 2018. Prior to 2018, College-based teacher training in Ghana was three years, awarding Diploma qualification. However, as part of government teacher education reforms, a four-year Bachelor of Education curriculum was introduced in the colleges of education in 2018. Participants were selected using a two-stage sampling design. The first stage was the random selection of 16 out of the 46 public colleges of education using computer-generated random numbers from five regional zones – Northern, Volta, Western/Central, Eastern/Greater Accra, and Ashanti/Brong Ahafo. Following this, preservice teachers from two strands of educational programmes offered at all the colleges – primary and junior high – were invited to participate in the study. In total, 1,183 preservice teachers participated. Thirty-two per cent (32%) of the respondents were enrolled in a primary teacher education programme, and 68 per cent were enrolled in junior high school programmes. Forty-two per cent (42%) of the respondents were female. In terms of female preservice teachers' enrolment by programme of study, 55 per cent and 41 per cent were enrolled in primary education and junior high programmes, respectively. About 42 per cent of all respondents had teaching experience prior to enrolling in a teacher education programme.

We used an online questionnaire to collect data from a relatively large number of respondents. We contacted principals of the selected colleges of education to negotiate access to preservice teachers. The survey link was shared with students on their WhatsApp platforms with the help of a designated tutor. Because responding to the survey was voluntary, the respondents cannot be considered a random sample from the college student population.

Measure

The instrument for data collection was adapted from a study conducted by Childs et al. (2002). For the purposes of our study, we adapted 11 items relevant to our context from the 21 perception items in the initial study. The selected items were slightly reworded to reflect the context of our study. In particular, we replaced the Canadian name for the test with the name used in Ghana. As shown in Table 1, we categorised the items under five themes: utility (3 items), college preparation (2 items), consequences (2 items), emphasis on the test (2 items), and other certification tests (2 items). In addition to the 11 items, we included five open-ended questions to enable respondents to include contextual information (e.g., "How important do you think the licensure test is to teaching?" and "What preparation do you think you will need before writing the licensing test?"). Generally, the possible

responses for the study items were 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. We included a “don’t know” option, and following common practice (e.g., Deanna et al. 2018), we recoded it as missing. For each category, an additive scale was generated for analysis.

We explored students’ exposure to the licensing test using three items: class discussions about the test, reading examples of the test, and whether they had examples of the tests from past teacher candidates. These items had response options of yes = 1 and no = 0, which were used to create a count variable to indicate the amount of information students had been exposed to. For content validity, the questionnaire was tested by two experts and their opinion was sought to ascertain that the items in the scale were comprehensible and measured the intended construct. The questionnaire was modified based on the feedback received from the experts. To ensure reliability, we administer the questionnaire to 40 student teachers in the University of Cape Coast. The overall internal consistency was acceptable with a Cronbach alpha $\alpha=7.81$ (Hair et al., 2019).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the 11-item perception scale was performed using Stata 14.2. First, we conducted a preliminary analysis using descriptive statistics (percentages) to essentially describe participants’ overall responses to each item. Next, we conducted bivariate correlations between all the licensure perception items and predictors (i.e., information about the test, preservice teachers’ sex, teaching experience, and programme of study). Third, we used multiple regression to assess the relationships between the predictors and the outcome variables.

For the open-ended items, we used Microsoft Excel to segment the responses with predetermined codes based on thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These were informed by direct quotes from the respondents that aligned with the five categories on the scale. Some examples of these responses have been included in the descriptive analysis section to complement the findings.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Table 1 reports the frequency distribution (in percentages) of preservice teachers who disagreed, agreed, or selected “don’t know” for each of the items. Most preservice teachers disagreed with the usefulness of the test in terms of the reasons why it was administered, its provision of accurate results for licensing, and its ability to predict the competence of preservice teachers.

Table 1.

Frequency distribution of preservice teachers’ responses to each licensure item

Variables (Table bodies use 6.5-point size)	Strongly disagree/Disagree	Strongly agree/Agree	Don't know
Utility of test			
The reason(s) the licensure test is/are being administered are important	58%	34%	8%
The licensure test provides accurate results for preservice teachers	70%	16%	14%
The test predicts the level of competence of teachers	74%	19%	6%
College preparation			
Teacher education should prepare preservice teachers to take the licensure test by aligning their coursework to the test content specifications	25%	72%	6%
Teacher education institutions should prepare preservice teachers to take the test through practice examples (e.g., test taking skills)	15%	79%	6%
Consequence			
A teacher candidate who fails the test should be allowed to teach on an interim certification and be made to resit	20%	76%	4%
Teacher education institutions whose preservice teachers fail the test should be	66%	21%	12%

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Emphasis on test

Teacher education institutions are putting too much emphasis on the licensure test	31%	55%	14%
The GES/NTC are putting too much emphasis on the licensure test	16%	73%	11%

Other certification tests

Some other certification tests would increase the prestige of the teaching profession	31%	53%	17%
Some other certification tests would increase the quality of the teaching profession	32%	56%	11%

In the open-ended responses, those who disagreed with the importance of the test felt that it was a means of denying them employment, and that college curriculum examinations were enough to become a qualified teacher. According to one respondent, "They are saying the exam is used to check the quality of teachers, which I disagree with because all the exams that preservice teachers write should be enough for the teaching profession". In contrast, those who agreed with the utility of the test believed it enhanced teacher professionalism, internationalism, prestige for the teaching profession, and "quality control". As one preservice teacher explained, "I believe it will only certify teachers in the country and thus would be easy to distinguish teachers from any other graduates not by mere word of mouth or certificate, but a teacher licence. It makes sense only in that direction to me".

In terms of how preservice teachers should be prepared for the test, the majority agreed (over 70%) that preparation for the licensure test should be incorporated into college course activities, which could "...brief the prospective preservice teachers on the nature of questions, marking, and past questions available and clarify areas the test will cover and, better still, add it to the course we study during training". About three-quarters of preservice teachers agreed that those who failed the tests should receive an interim certification, and two-thirds of the students did not think college institutions whose students failed the test should be scrutinised for their results. Regarding the emphasis placed on the licensing test, about 18% held the view that the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the NTC were putting too much emphasis on the test compared with examination outcomes from colleges of education. About half of the respondents agreed that other certification tests were better at enhancing the quality and status of teaching than the current teacher licensing tests.

Table 2 displays the correlations among all variables. All licensure perception variables were positively correlated, showing small to moderate associations. Regarding the predictors, preservice teachers' sex was positively correlated with the utility of the test and negatively correlated with the emphasis on the tests (with small correlations). In addition, preservice teachers' prior teaching experience had small positive associations with other certification tests. The programme of study was negatively correlated with college preparation for the test.

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among variables

	M or %	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Utility	4.96	1-12	—							
2. College preparation	5.74	1-8	0.29	—						
3. Consequence	4.72	1-8	0.25	0.39	—					
4. Emphasis on test	5.38	1-8	0.09	0.25	0.22	—				
5. Other tests	4.76	1-8	0.32	0.33	0.27	0.25	—			
6. Information about the test	0.81	0-3	0.07	-0.06	-0.02	0.01	0.07	—		
7. Student is female	46%	—	0.13	-0.05	-0.03	-0.08	0.04	-0.06	—	
8. Student has teaching experience	42%	—	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	0.05	0.06	0.12	-0.08	—
9. Programme of study (primary education)	32%	—	0.03	-0.06	-0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.02	0.13	-0.02

Note: Bold coefficients are significant at $p < .05$

Multivariate analyses

The regression results for the licensure perception variables and predictors are presented in Table 3. A positive and significant relationship was observed between the utility of the test, preservice teachers' sex, and information about the test, but not teaching experience and programme of study. Specifically, female students and those who had more information about the test thought it was useful ($\beta = .133$, $SE = .133$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .081$, $SE = .062$, $p < .01$, respectively).

Table 3.

Regression results of predictors of licensure variables

	Utility	College preparation	Consequence	Emphasis on test	Other tests
Information about the test	0.081** (0.062)	-0.069* (0.053)	-0.027 (0.044)	-0.007 (0.056)	0.065* (0.055)
Student sex (female)	0.133*** (0.133)	-0.052 † (0.114)	-0.023 (0.094)	-0.078 * (0.121)	0.049 (0.118)
Teaching experience	-0.009 (0.134)	-0.013 (0.115)	-0.001 (0.095)	0.054 † (0.122)	0.055 † (0.118)
Programme of study (primary education)	0.019 (0.142)	-0.055 † (0.122)	-0.016 (0.100)	0.010 (0.128)	0.026 (0.125)
R ²	0.024	0.011	0.002	0.009	0.011
Adj. R ²	0.021	0.007	-0.001	0.006	0.007
Num. obs.	1155	1155	1154	1113	1088

Notes: Standardised coefficients reported. Standard error in parentheses. Having no teaching experience was used as the reference category for the teaching experience variable. Offering junior high programme was used as the reference category for the programme of study.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

In terms of preparation for the test, male students were marginally significantly supportive of some form of college preparation ($\beta = -.052$, $SE = .114$, $p < .10$). Also, information about the test and programme of study negatively predicted preservice teachers' support for college preparation, with those with less information about the tests and in junior high programmes more supportive of college preparation for the tests ($\beta = -.069$, $SE = .053$, $p < .05$; $\beta = -.055$, $SE = .122$, $p < .10$, respectively).

Moreover, in our model, emphasis on the test was negatively predicted by preservice teachers' sex ($\beta = -.078$, $SE = .121$, $p < .05$) and positively and marginally predicted by teaching experience ($\beta = .054$, $SE = .122$, $p < .10$). This indicates that male preservice teachers and those with prior teaching experience felt that there was too much emphasis on licensure tests. Finally, using other certification tests was significantly positively associated with information about the test ($\beta = .065$, $SE = .055$, $p < .05$) and teaching experience ($\beta = .055$, $SE = .118$, $p < .10$), but not students' sex or programme of study.

DISCUSSION

While the introduction of the licensing test in Ghana was met with a mixture of responses from stakeholders (i.e. some positive and some negative), little is known empirically about what prospective teachers think about the test. In our study, we sought to examine preservice teachers' perceptions of the licensing test. Our descriptive analysis suggests that preservice teachers were generally not supportive of the utility or importance of the tests. However, the regression results showed that more female preservice teachers believed the tests were relevant for determining qualified teacher status compared to their male counterparts. This finding contrasts with evidence from a study in the United Arab Emirates (Abdallah & Musah 2021), where male and female preservice teachers held similar beliefs about the importance of certification tests. It is conceivable that because the teaching profession is

often considered a more female-friendly profession (Law & Chow 2008), the female respondents were more inclined to think of the tests as setting clear standards to determine who becomes a qualified teacher. Our results also suggest that preservice teachers with information about the test thought the test was important. This is consistent with findings from a similar study conducted with preservice teachers in Canada (Childs et al., 2002) and suggests that some preservice teachers appear to have a higher level of interest in the test. This shows that when preservice teachers are exposed to teacher licensing test samples, they tend to view them more positively as an effective way to determine qualification status.

Concerning the programme of study, the results suggested that preservice teachers in the junior high training programme felt it was more important for colleges of education to prepare them for the tests than those in the primary education programme. While this is puzzling and contrary to our expectations, this could be due to the unequal nature of male and female student representation in our sample. Our descriptive results show that 18% more males were enrolled in junior high school programmes compared with primary education. Interestingly, the results for student sex showed that male students believed that teacher education institutions should help them prepare for the test. Male students' support for college preparation could be attributed to beliefs about self-efficacy for self-regulated or individualised learning. Research suggests that females tend to have greater self-efficacy beliefs and engage in effective self-regulatory learning strategies (Pajares, 2002). It is therefore possible that the male students in our sample did not hold greater confidence in their capability to study on their own for the test. Broadly speaking, this seems to suggest the need to support students in fundamentally different ways. Where possible, for example, teacher training institutions could organise programmes such as orientations, workshops or seminars to provide information on the content, specifications, and format of the tests, with students being free to participate without any pressure. Future studies may address how students' perceived self-efficacy relates to their perspectives and performance on licensing tests.

Information about the test predicted students' perceptions in an expected direction, with those who had less information about the test thinking that preparation should be included in teacher training curricula. While this is not surprising, research suggests that embedding preparation for licensing tests can be difficult and sometimes unsuccessful (Childs et al., 2002; Churchward & Willis, 2019; Petchauer, 2016). Our results, therefore, suggest that policymakers in the Ghanaian education sector may have to consider other ways of making information about the test readily available to prospective teacher candidates if incorporating it into curricula activities would prove difficult. For instance, the NTC website could host short videos of successful students' experiences, sample test items, and other information concerning the professional benefits of tests to increase prospective candidates' self-efficacy in this respect.

Preservice teachers with prior teaching experience thought that colleges of education were overemphasising the need for the licence test. It is possible that their previous experiences with classroom teaching and learning activities led them to consider licensing tests as an oversimplification of teacher knowledge and practice. This is grounded in arguments that the licence test cannot adequately measure the knowledge and skills of teachers, since teaching is a complex activity involving interactions with learners with different backgrounds and characteristics (Cochran-Smith, 2001), along with the fact that empirical studies (e.g. Elpus 2015; Goldhaber & Hansen 2010) report mixed findings about the relationship between licensing teachers and student learning achievement. It is therefore not surprising that our results suggest that preservice teachers with some teaching experience believe that other certification tests would add value to the teaching profession. This insight could inform governments and policymakers in their initiatives to adopt more holistic and integrated approaches,

including performance-based evaluation. Again, our results showed that male students believed that teacher education institutions were overemphasising the need for teacher licensing tests. These results consistently reflect male preservice teachers' disapproval of the licensing test, and this is in keeping with expectancy value theory by highlighting the variations in the students' perceived value of the test. One implication of this finding is that male candidates may pay less attention to the test, which could negatively affect their performance and cause them to leave the teaching profession.

Finally, we found no link between preservice teachers' demographic characteristics and their perceptions of the consequences associated with failing the test, suggesting that regardless of the students' backgrounds, they held similar views and believed there should be no consequences associated with the test results. Although more research is needed on the whole, our findings have important implications for narratives around evaluating teacher quality in Ghana and whether alternative forms of assessment can be utilised.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this work illustrate preservice teachers' perceptions about the Ghanaian licensing test, considering their selected demographic characteristics. This work found that female students perceived the licensing test as more important for improving their teaching professionalism than males. Also, those who had some information about the test were more likely to hold that the test was relevant. In terms of preparation, we found that those in junior high programmes and male students considered it important for colleges to prepare them for the test. Moreover, students with some teaching experience believed that other forms of certification could help improve the quality of the profession. Interestingly, none of the students' characteristics were associated with the consequences of the test. Taken together, our findings provide a first step toward understanding how prospective teacher candidates relate to the test and can serve as a basis for further exploration of other stakeholders' views, including tutors, about the licensing test. Generally, the variations in our findings in terms of demographic characteristics point to the need for broader discussions on how to effectively evaluate the quality of teachers in Ghana.

Recommendations

The research on preservice teachers' perceptions of the Ghanaian licensing test recommends tailoring communication and training about the test to address gender differences in perception, emphasizing the importance of providing comprehensive information about the test to enhance its perceived value, and integrating test preparation into the curriculum of teacher education institutions. It also highlights the potential benefits of exploring alternative certification methods, especially for those with teaching experience, and underscores the necessity of including diverse stakeholder perspectives, such as those of tutors, in understanding the test's impact. Furthermore, it calls for broader discussions on effective teacher evaluation in Ghana, considering the varying perceptions based on demographic characteristics.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

There are some limitations to this study that are worth mentioning. First, this study used a sample of preservice teachers from colleges of education that train teachers only for primary and junior high schools. Future studies could include students in training universities, where students are trained for senior high schools, to obtain a broader picture of preservice teachers' perspectives on the test and help explore possible differences. We also found that having teaching experience was associated with the perceived need for other forms of certification. Thus, understanding perceptions about the test from in-service teachers who have already taken it will add value to the discourse on teacher licensing in Ghana. Finally, our findings are based on a convenience sample of college-based preservice teachers, and we should be cautious about generalization.

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