

DRIVING MOTIVATION FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TO PURSUE A CAREER IN JOURNALISM

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Abstract

Journalism today appears to have a peculiar fascination for young people in search of careers. This study is about the driving motivation for high school students to pursue a career in journalism. It further determined if the students are aware some of the challenges inherent with the journalism profession. The snowball sampling was used to get data. 200 high school students in Sunyani Municipality in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana were randomly selected and interviewed face-to-face and via phone. It was observed among other things that though majority of the respondents plan to pursue a career in journalism, they did not know that journalists are poorly paid and under-resourced. Moreover, it was recommended among other things that schools should start publishing newspapers to serve as "learning avenues" for students who aspire to be journalists.

Key Words: *Journalism; High School Students; Motivation; Career.*

Background

Deputy Chief Sub-Editor of *The Express on Sunday* magazine and part-time lecturer in journalism at University of Westminster, David Stephenson observed journalism is one of the most difficult professions to enter, demanding high standards of literacy, hard work and determination to succeed. Would-be journalists are attracted by the glamour, excitement and fast pace of journalism and the thrill of seeing their names in print. However, according to him, there is far more to journalism than its sexy image (How to Succeed in Newspaper Journalism, 1998). Notwithstanding the demanding and challenging nature of journalism, the poor pay of journalists, particularly in Africa and elsewhere and the incessant, unwarranted and chilling attacks on journalists while they work, journalism now appears to have a peculiar fascination for high school students in search of careers.

Like Stephenson, some say the students' (would-be journalists) driving motivation to pursue a career in journalism is largely informed by the glamour, excitement and fast pace of journalism and the thrill of seeing their names in print. Some even say the students' driving motivation to pursue a career in journalism is just because of the cash some news sources give to journalists. Others however think differently, arguing the students are attracted to journalism because journalists today can compete with their counterparts in other professions like medicine, law and engineering. Others too contend it is essentially because the students believe journalism will not only give them solid academic background, but also help them develop the skills to succeed in any industry because many employers are looking for persons who can write and communicate well or demonstrate entrepreneurial vision. Moreover, they contend the students think journalism can also help them pursue other career opportunities such as working in the

communication departments of non-profit organisations fighting for causes that they believe in or public relations and social media. Perhaps more convincing enough; others, representing the major deem the arguments advanced as neither here nor there as they lack scientific basis.

The debate about the driving motivation for high school students to pursue a career in journalism will not be fully comprehensive if journalism and motivation are not described briefly. According to Oxford Online Dictionary (2016), journalism is the activity or profession of writing for newspapers, magazines or news websites or preparing news to be broadcast. Journalism is important to society because it informs us of events happening around the world. Even when it is ugly, journalism is arguably beautiful. The website sparknotes.com defined motivation as an internal process that makes a person move towards a goal. Motivation, like intelligence, cannot be observed directly. It can rather be deduced by noting a person's behaviour.

Henningham (1996) found that many students choose journalism as a major and a career based on their belief in their ability to write. Furthermore, high school newspaper experience was a factor in students' decision to pursue journalism as a career in college. Journalistic experiences provide students an opportunity to test their ability and determine if journalism is a suitable career choice (Cranford, 1960; Weigle, 1957).

Moreover, Vernon (2011) recorded that socio-economic status and salary expectations were strong predictors among all students in both their decisions to pursue journalism and their commitment to journalism. In addition, several studies claimed that the desire and ability to write continues to be a motivating factor for students to pursue journalism (Lubell, 1959; Lubell and Kimball,

1960; Rice, 1967; Bowers, 1974; Parsons, 1989; Splichal and Sparks, 1994; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Adams, Brunner and Fitch-Hausser, 2008).

Besides, according to Weaver et al (2007), more than 1 in 5 respondents said a love for writing was the primary reason for pursuing a career in journalism. They also found that people are equally attracted to journalism because of activities like news gathering, researching, talking to and meeting new people and the chance to tell stories. Again, Dodd et al (1990) observed that high school students ranked journalism as their number one career choice in respect of interest of work. The students' own reading was observed to be an important factor in their decision to pursue journalism.

What is more, the desire to be in a profession that has a significant social or political role motivated people to pursue journalism (Bowers, 1974; Becker, Fruit, Caudill, 1987; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996; Weaver et al, 2007). Others chose to pursue journalism because they viewed it as an exciting profession (Becker, Fruit and Caudill, 1987; Weaver et al, 2007).

Last but not least, people have been attracted to journalism through socialisation with journalism by early influential experiences (Splichal and Sparks, 1994; Weaver et al, 2007). Because it is perceived that high school students are driven by motivation to pursue journalism, there is the need to find out the actual driving motivation for high school students to pursue a career in journalism.

Methodology

As the study is of an exploratory nature, the snowball sampling was employed to gather data. That is, friends and acquaintances were called upon to help in getting high school students planning to pursue a career in journalism who could be interviewed. 200

high school students in Sunyani Municipality in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana were randomly selected and interviewed face-to-face and via phone.

Respondents were asked if they plan to pursue a career in journalism, why they want to pursue a career in journalism, which areas/aspects of journalism they would like to specialise in and if they were aware that journalists are poorly paid and also under-resourced. They were also asked if they knew that journalists are attacked, maimed

or even killed while they work. Besides they were asked if they were aware that journalists sometimes end up in prison while doing their work. Moreover, they were asked about their top career choices, how they would rate the journalism profession and their likes and dislikes about the profession.

The interview was conducted on July 30, 2016 and August 20, 2016 by the researcher. All the 200 respondents, representing 100 percent response rate, answered questions correctly.

Findings

Frequency Tables

Are you planning to pursue a career in journalism?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	124	62.0	62.0	62.0
	No	63	31.5	31.5	93.5
	I don't know	13	6.5	6.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Why are you planning to pursue a career in journalism?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Because I have the desire and the ability to write	44	22.0	22.0	22.0
	Because of my love for writing and reading	37	18.5	18.5	40.5
	Because I want to earn good salary and be respected as well in society	41	20.5	20.5	61.0
	Because of my high school newspaper experience	20	10.0	10.0	71.0
	Because of the importance of journalism	12	6.0	6.0	77.0
	Because of the opportunity to witness important historical events and the potential to effect social change	30	15.0	15.0	92.0
	Because I love activities like news gathering, and the chance to tell stories	16	8.0	8.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Which areas/aspects of journalism would you like to specialise in?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Broadcast Journalism	34	17.0	17.0	17.0
	Newspaper Journalism	29	14.5	14.5	31.5
	Magazine Journalism	34	17.0	17.0	48.5
	Investigative Journalism	29	14.5	14.5	63.0
	Sports Journalism	42	21.0	21.0	84.0
	Photo Journalism	32	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Are you aware that journalists are poorly paid and under-resourced?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	69	34.5	34.5	34.5
	No	131	65.5	65.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Do you know that journalists are attacked, maimed or even killed while they work?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	150	75.0	75.0	75.0
	No	50	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Are you aware that journalists sometimes end up in prison while doing their work?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	148	74.0	74.0	74.0
	No	52	26.0	26.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

What are your top career choices?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Journalism	24	12.0	12.0	12.0
	Medicine	35	17.5	17.5	29.5
	Engineering	14	7.0	7.0	36.5
	Teaching	51	25.5	25.5	62.0
	Nursing	76	38.0	38.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

How would you rate the journalism profession?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Prestigious Profession	38	19.0	19.0	19.0
	Financially rewarding profession	22	11.0	11.0	30.0
	A profession with economic security	52	26.0	26.0	56.0
	An interesting profession	21	10.5	10.5	66.5
	A dangerous Profession	48	24.0	24.0	90.5
	An extremely important profession	19	9.5	9.5	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	
What do you like about journalism profession?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The respect and influence journalists have in society	29	14.5	14.5	14.5
	The importance of journalism	68	34.0	34.0	48.5
	The opportunity to witness historical events and the potential to effect change	61	30.5	30.5	79.0
	The opportunity to meet people and make new friends	42	21.0	21.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	
What do you dislike about the journalism profession?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Poor pay for journalists	46	23.0	23.0	23.0
	Attacks on journalists while they work	55	27.5	27.5	50.5
	Imprisoning journalists while do their work	37	18.5	18.5	69.0
	Journalists receiving bribes to report falsehood or change the coverage of an event to the advantage or disadvantage of a third party	44	22.0	22.0	91.0
	Inadequate resources for journalists to work with	18	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

It was revealed that 124 out of the 200 students, representing 62 percent of the respondents planned to pursue a career in journalism; 63 of them, made up of 31.5 percent of

respondents did not plan to pursue a career in journalism while 13 students who consisted 6.5 percent of the respondents

said they did not know if they plan to pursue a career in journalism.

In addition, it was observed that 44 students, representing 22 percent of the respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because they have the desire and the ability to write; 37 of them, who consisted 18.5 of respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because of their love for writing and reading and 41 students, comprising 20.5 percent of the respondents indicated they plan to pursue a career in journalism because they want to earn good salary and be respected as well in society.

It was also found that 20 students, made up of 10 percent of the respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because of their high school newspaper experience; 12 of them, representing 6 percent of respondents indicated they plan to pursue a career in journalism because of the importance of journalism while 30 students, who consisted 15 percent of the respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because of the opportunity to witness important historical events and the potential to effect social change. Moreover, it realised that 16 students, comprising 8 percent of the respondents planned to pursue a career in journalism because they love activities like news gathering and the chance to tell stories.

Furthermore, it was discovered that 34 students, representing 17 percent of the respondents would like to specialise in broadcast journalism; 29 of them comprising 14.5 percent of respondents would like to specialise in newspaper journalism while 34 of them who consisted 17 percent of respondents would like to specialise in magazine journalism. It was also seen that 29 students, made up of 14.5 percent of respondents would like to specialise in investigative journalism; 42 students

representing 21 percent of respondents would like to specialise in sports journalism, and 32 of them, consisting 16 percent of respondents would like to specialise in photo journalism.

Moreover, the survey established that 131 of the 200 students, representing 65.5 percent of the respondents did not know that journalists are poorly paid and under-resourced, while 69 of them who consisted 34.5 percent of respondents knew that journalists are poorly paid and under-resourced.

Besides from the survey 150 out of the 200 students, made up of 75 percent of the respondents knew that journalist that are attacked, maimed or even killed while they work. 50 of them representing 25 percent of respondents however did not know that journalists are attacked, maimed or even killed while they work.

The survey showed as well that 148 out of the students, consisting of 74 percent of the respondents knew that journalists sometimes end up in prison while doing their work, while 52 of them, who consisted 26 percent of the respondents did not know that journalists sometimes end up in prison while doing their work.

Again, it was learned that 24 students, made up of 12 percent of the respondents chose journalism as their top career choice; 35 of them consisting of 17.5 percent of respondents opted for medicine, while 14 students who comprised 7 percent of the respondents chose engineering. Besides it was established that 51 students representing 25.5 percent of respondents chose teaching as their top career choice, and 76 of them, who consisted 38 percent of respondents selected nursing.

It was also realised that 38 students representing 19 percent of the respondents rated journalism as a prestigious profession; 22 of them, made up of 11

percent respondents believed journalism is a financially rewarding profession, while 52 of them, who comprised 26 percent of respondents opined journalism is a profession with economic security. What is more, 21 students, representing 10.5 percent of respondents argued journalism is an interesting profession; 48 of them, made up of 24 percent respondents suggested journalism is a dangerous profession and 19 students, who comprised 9.5 percent of the respondents, claimed journalism is an extremely important profession.

The survey again brought to the fore that 29 students representing 14.5 percent of respondents said what they like about journalism is the respect and influence journalists have in society; 68 of them, made up of 34.0 percent of the respondents indicated what they like about journalism is the importance of journalism and 61 students who consisted of 30.5 percent of the respondents said what they like about journalism is the opportunity to witness historical events and the potential to effect change. However, 42 students, comprising 21 percent of respondents said what they like about journalism is the opportunity to meet people and make new friends.

What is more, it was detected that 46 students representing 23 percent of respondents said what they dislike about journalism is the poor pay for journalists; 55 of them, made up of 27.5 percent of the respondents alluded that what they dislike about journalism is the attacks on journalists while they work, while 37 students who consisted 18.5 percent of respondents indicated what they dislike about journalism is imprisoning journalists while they do their work.

Last but not least, it came to the fore that 44 students, representing 22 percent of respondents said what they dislike about journalism is journalists receiving bribes to report falsehood or change the coverage of

an event to the advantage or disadvantage of a third party and 18 students representing 9 percent of respondents said what they dislike about journalism is the inadequate resources for journalists for work with.

Discussions

The revelation that 62 percent of the respondents planned to pursue a career in journalism shows that the high school students' driving motivation to pursue a career in journalism appears to override the challenges inherent with the journalism profession. It further seems to render baseless the claim by some people that the students' driving motivation to pursue a career in journalism is simply informed by the cash news some news sources give to journalists. In fact, the action of these students is worthy of emulation and commendation. It makes us realise that the moment you decide to follow a particular career path, you are likely to hear all sort of things from people, aimed at discouraging you from pursuing your dream. But what should matter is your driving motivation for your dream and not the judgments of others. Indeed, it is safe to conclude that if more young people will emulate the example of these students, we will have professionals working in places, they feel satisfied and our determination to make society better will be realised.

Furthermore, the observation that 22 percent of the respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because they have the desire and the ability to write, while 37 of them, who consisted 18.5 percent of respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because of their love for writing and reading makes valid the numerous studies' claim that the desire and ability to write continues to be a driving motivation for students to pursue journalism (Lubell, 1959; Lubell & Kimball, 1960; Rice,

1967; Bowers, 1974; Parsons, 1989; Splichal & Sparks, 1994; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1996; Adams, Brunner & Fitch-Hausser, 2008). Moreover, the observation gives authenticity to the revelation by Dodd et al (1990) that the students' own reading was observed to be an important factor in their decision to pursue journalism.

In addition, the revelation that 10 percent of the respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because of their high school newspaper experience backs the observation by (Cranford, 1960; Weigle, 1957) that high school newspaper experience was a factor in students pursuing journalism as a career in college.

Moreover, the discovery that 17 percent of respondents would like to specialise in broadcast journalism; 14.5 percent of respondents would like to specialise in newspaper journalism; 17 percent of respondents would like to specialise in magazine journalism; 14.5 percent of respondents would like to specialise in investigative journalism while 21 percent of respondents would like to specialise in sports journalism, and 16 percent of respondents would like to specialise in photo journalism, portrays that apart from overcoming people's determination to discourage them from pursuing a career in journalism, these students have researched extensively about journalism and perhaps, weighed their strength and weakness against the varied areas of specialisation in the field. On that score, we can these students are really poised to making their dream of becoming journalists a reality. Arguably, it also dispels the notion held by some people that most young people do not know what they want in life.

Besides the observation that 65.5 percent of respondents did not know that journalists are poorly paid and under-resourced may compel one to assume that the students

cannot be taken seriously with regard to their decision to pursue a career in journalism. This is because in most instances before someone decides to pursue a particular career, he/she must have found out about how much he/she is likely to earn monthly, the resources available to work with and the work environment. Naturally, people are reluctant to work where they will be poorly paid and also made to work with inadequate resources. Indeed, failure of the students to have known that journalists are poorly paid and under-resourced creates some doubt about their decision to pursue a career in journalism. Even so, how could persons who aspire to be journalists not do such homework? On the other hand, others may argue that how much journalists earn and the resources they work with ought not to be the concern of these would-be journalists for now as they will cross the bridge when they get there.

Again, the realisation that 75 percent of the respondents knew that journalist are attacked, maimed or even killed while they work is a positive development for two reasons. First of all, it may have prepared the minds of the students towards the journalism profession making them well positioned to find their feet. Secondly and unfortunately, it may have caused the faint-hearted among them to decide to never chase stories that are likely to incense people to want to get back at them however important the stories may be to society. Such scenario will not augur well for society's developmental agenda as there is no substitute for the media's role in development. Anyway it does appear that considering how the students overcame certain utterances aimed at discouraging them from pursuing a career in journalism, none of them is faint-hearted. Whether people will get back at them for doing their job as journalists or not, their minds are made and there is no turning back.

However, the fact that it came to the fore that 25 percent of respondents did not know that journalists are either attacked, maimed or even killed while they work gives room for conclusion that though the students researched extensively about journalism, the challenges inherent with the profession might have escaped some of them.

Next, the observation that 74 percent of the respondents knew that journalists sometimes end up in prison while doing their work is good news. It will compel the would-be journalists (the students) to tread cautiously in future in order to avoid unwarranted incarceration. The recent sentencing of the Montie 3 to four months imprisonment by the Supreme Court for bringing the name of the court into disrepute and scandalising its work may have been an eye-opener for them. The students must be educated that there is no law which bars journalists from commenting on matters before the court (s). However, if and when commenting on matters before the court (s) and the journalists end up scandalise the court (s) intentionally or intentionally, it is an offence, which is punishable by imprisonment or a fine. Elsewhere journalists are imprisoned for highlighting incompetence or wrongdoings of governments. That is sad because if journalists cannot hold those in power accountable, then it will be difficult to strengthen and preserve democratic norms and ideals.

What is more, the detection that 23 percent of respondents said what they dislike about journalism is the poor pay for journalists is a wakeup call for media owners that it is not only the current crop of journalists, who are disgruntled about the poor pay of journalists but also would-be journalists. It also serves a clarion call for the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) to speed up processes to unionise in order to be in the position to negotiate for good pay for journalists, who have been cheated for far too long.

Lastly and interestingly, the revelation that 22 percent of respondents said what they dislike about journalism is journalists receiving bribes to report falsehood or change the coverage of an event to the advantage or disadvantage of a third party shows that at least some of the would-be journalists will help annihilate brown envelope journalism that has gained notoriety in Ghana. It will also help dispel the notion among Ghanaians that all journalists are corrupt.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examined the driving motivation for high school students to pursue a career in journalism. It was observed that majority of the respondents representing 62 percent planned to pursue a career in journalism, while a minority of them comprising 6.5 percent of respondents said they did not know if they plan to pursue a career in journalism. Strangely however, it was found that only 12 percent of respondents chose journalism as their top career choice and 19 percent rated journalism as a prestigious profession. It was also discovered among other things that 22 percent of the respondents said they plan to pursue a career in journalism because they have the desire and the ability to write.

Furthermore, it was revealed that majority of the respondents representing 21 percent would like to specialise in sports journalism, while the minority of respondents, who consisted of 14.5 percent would like to specialise in newspaper journalism. In addition, it was found that another minority of respondents, made up of 14.5 percent would like to specialise in investigative journalism. Based on this, it was concluded that the students have researched extensively about journalism and weighed their strength and weakness against the varied areas of specialisation in the field.

Besides, interestingly and strangely enough, it was realised that majority of the respondents did not know that journalists are poorly paid and under-resourced. However, it was recorded that majority of them knew that journalists are attacked, maimed or even killed or journalists sometimes end up in prison while they work.

Moreover, it came to the fore that 22 percent of the respondents said what they dislike about journalism is journalists receiving bribes to report falsehood or change the coverage of an event to the advantage or disadvantage of a third party.

Now that the driving motivation for high school students to pursue a career in journalism is known, society must endeavour to encourage the students who aspire to be journalists to pursue their dream as attempts to sabotage them just because of the challenges inherent with the journalism profession, will not augur well for them and society as a whole. Even so, there are no challenges-free professions anywhere in the world.

Schools should start publishing newspapers to serve as “learning avenues” for students who aspire to be journalists. Moreover, school authorities should create avenues for journalists to have engagements with students because the more young people are brainwashed about the journalism profession, the more difficult it will become getting replacement for the current crop of journalists when they retire. Besides media owners must pay their journalists well in order to make the journalism profession more attractive to more young people.

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