



RESEARCH ARTICLE

**SIGNIFICANCE AND DELIVERY TEACHING PRACTICE: PERCEPTION OF DISTANCE EDUCATION
TEACHER TRAINEES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST, GHANA**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast Ghana regarding the significance and mode of delivery of teaching practice at the institution. The study had three fold objectives; i) to find out the perception of distance education teacher trainees on the concept of teaching practice, ii) ascertain the perception of teacher trainees on the importance of teaching practice, and iii) examine the challenges facing distance education trainees in their teaching practice sessions. The study was premised on the theory of Learning propounded by Edward Thorndike in 1920 which provides insight into what makes people learn more effectively. The study used a descriptive research design. The accessible population comprised of the entire 1,764 final year Diploma in Education and post Diploma in Basic Education teacher trainees who completed their centre teaching practice during the 2012/2013 academic year. Stratified random sampling was used to select 25.28 percent of the population based on the sector (Northern or Southern), region, centre and type of programme. A structured 4 –point Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect primary data from respondents. The quantitative data was analyzed using the computer package for social sciences (SPSS)-version 20.0 to generate both descriptive and inferential statistics. The major findings of the study were that majority of teacher trainees of the Centres for continuing education, University of Cape Coast perceive teaching practice to be an opportunity for them to practice what they are taught and acquire practical experience on the job by equipping them with requisite skills, knowledge and abilities to teach effectively. However, majority also pointed out several challenges that impede the smooth conduct of the teaching practice exercise such as untimely visits by some supervisors, heavy workloads and failure of university authorities to inform heads of their schools about the exercise. It is recommended that teaching practice supervisors should be given adequate resources to do their work as expected since teaching practice is perceived as a worthwhile experience that develops prospective teachers professionally. [338 words]

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The high premium attached to the quality of education measured using academic and non-academic indicators in institutions of higher learning in most African countries is neither achievable nor sustainable without the continuous assessment of these indicators on how they influence the delivery of quality education by school systems in those countries. Yet, while the academic learning merely concentrates on developing the cognitive domain of learning, the non-academic concerns usually focus on the development of both affective and psychomotor learning domains. One of the non-academic areas that is accorded less premium, yet it is important in developing both the affective and psychomotor learning domains is the co-curricular activities.

The common justification for ignoring the co-curricular activities is based on the false notion that it falls outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school education. Often a

range of activities in the form of classes, clubs and sports activities is available to learners which might occur during normal school hours, lunch break or after school (Nesan, 2009). Invariably, most of the co-curricular activities which are mostly voluntary are offered throughout the school career from the pre-primary to the secondary level (Taneja, 2000; Nesan, 2009).

There are two divergent viewpoints regarding co-curricular activities, some in favour and some opposed (Nesan, 2009; UNICEF, 2009). One of the arguments in favour is that these activities prepare learners practically for the future because they get used to working in teams, exercising leadership and taking initiative. The normal curriculum has limitations, with the result that learners who only experienced rigidly academic study may not be able to apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations (Nesan, 2009; Wolfik, 2010). Another benefit is that quite a number of activities have a strong physical (as opposed to mental) bias. Learners have to abandon their desks and face new challenges. By giving equal weight to co-curricular and formal academic activities the school system

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can turn out more versatile and well-balanced individuals who are more competent all round (Nesan, 2009).

In contributing to the contrasting arguments against co-curricular activities in schools, Nesan (2009) identifies the following arguments against co-curricular activities in schools: academic curriculum is much more important and must continue to be given more status in schools than the co-curriculum. Obtaining recognized qualifications is more essential than co-curricular activities. Higher education institutions place a greater importance on the curriculum than on the co-curriculum when selecting students, and so do employers when recruiting workers. These perceptions spurred the researchers to consider investigating the significance and delivery teaching practice in institutions of higher learning that train secondary school teachers focusing on the perception of distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana .

The importance of this study is varied. Firstly, the result of the study would inform policy formulators at the Centre for Continuing Education on specific guidelines needed to be adopted and implemented to streamline the teaching practice concept as part of the integral whole of the training of teachers for basic schools in Ghana. Secondly it would help identify some of the challenges faced by the student teachers of the Centre in the conduct of the teaching practice exercise. This would inform the centre to inculcate specific needs of the various centres in the design of the teaching practice package so as to give the requisite training for effective delivery in the basic schools. Finally, recommendations from the study would help improve the conduct of teaching practice in the University of Cape Coast as a whole.

Literature review

Basic Education in Ghana

Basic Education lays the foundation for all other levels of educational development. It is a pre-requisite for higher education. In the view of Great Education (2009), basic education should be given the highest priority because this is the children's stepping-stone in pursuance of higher goals. Great Education again opined that elementary education will serve as the children's primary weapon against illiteracy. It is therefore of extreme importance because it serves as the foundation for future academic achievements of the child.

According to McLaughlin and O' Donoghene (1996), developing countries have realized over the years, the importance of quality basic education for economic development and further transmission of technical skills. In view of this, the argument that the provision of quality basic school teachers should be given priority attention has received the necessary support in the development of the educational system of developing countries (p.23). All over the world, teachers in any society play a pivotal role in the development of the individual child. According to Dave & Rajput, 2000,

If they (teachers) acquire the professional competence and attitudes that enable them to effectively perform their multiple tasks in the classroom, in the school and in the community, teachers become the single most important contributing factor in ensuring quality educational provision.

It is expedient, therefore, to have competent and committed professionals in the teaching-learning enterprise, with high concern and dedication to the psychological, social and intellectual prosperity of future leaders the world over. In principle therefore, teachers should be practitioners with high educational wisdom or solid knowledge base (Huisheng, 2007).

It is clear that basic school teachers have a huge responsibility. Specifically, basic school teachers have a great responsibility of developing an individual holistically. Their preparation therefore should be more on the practical applications of teaching. A critical aspect of this professional competence is the practicum. This calls for a hand on experience compared to theoretical based preparations. As observed by Kinggundu (2007) the practical preparation provides the student teachers the opportunity to practice the theories they were taught. Again Kinggundu and Nayimili (2009) noted that teaching practicum grants the student teachers "experience in the actual teaching and learning environment" (p.25). Thus, teachers "must stay current in educational theory and practice" (Good and Weaver 2003, p.439). According to Ball, Thames and Phelps (2008), there is a strong relationship between teachers' professional quality and the quality of student achievements. This view is supported by Feiman-Nemser (2001), who intimated that "What students learn depends on what and how teachers teach; and what and how teachers teach depends on the knowledge, skills and commitments they bring to their teaching and the opportunities they have to continue learning in and from their practice". Good teaching, according to Osguthorpe (2008), requires a teacher to be knowledgeable in content, skilled in method and virtuous in character. He underscores that "...a deep understanding of subject matter and an ability to effectively employ methods to convey that subject matter might increase a student's opportunity to learn" (p.288).

The underlying principle of teacher education in Ghana is:

To provide teachers with better knowledge and skills, together with better incentives to use their knowledge and skills for the benefit of children, through the creation of an accessible, integrated teacher education and training system which provides a structure for continuous professional development throughout their teaching careers. (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 1993)

The statement above demands the development of adequate competencies and skills in the student teacher. These skills should include classroom management and control, collegial relations, as well as teacher-parent-community interactions.

It is against this background that the Centre for Continuing Education of the University of Cape Coast has made the concept of teaching practice, an integral part of the training of its teachers on its distance education programme. According to Brown and Koomson (2009), teaching practice forms the practical component of the Centre's teacher education programme. Brown and Koomson reiterated that it is a period of internship and apprenticeship during which the teacher trainees undergo training and acquire practical skills to become effective teachers. It is therefore compulsory for all student teachers of the University to take part in the teaching practice activities. This exercise is scheduled to take place in two forms. These are the On-centre teaching practice and the Off-centre teaching practice.

The On-centre teaching practice is undertaken by the teacher trainees at their respective study centres during the first and second semesters of their second year (i.e. for the Diploma students), and the Post Diploma Students do same, during the first year of their programme. This is done through micro-teaching, where the student-teachers form groups and take turns to teach their own colleagues under the supervision of the course tutors who point out their mistakes to them and help equip them with the right teaching skills, knowledge and abilities (Brown & Koomson, 2009).

The off-centre teaching practice on the other hand, is the type of teaching practicum activity which takes place in the practicing teacher's own school of choice, under the supervision of specially trained mentors. These mentors move from school to school in a specifically designated geographical area, to sit in live classes of the teacher trainees and assess their teaching, make observation, score these teachers and discuss their performance with them after the teaching session. It affords these mentors the opportunity to rectify any anomalies they see during their observation (Nesan, 2009).

The Concept of teaching practice

The teaching practice concept has been and continues to be a major component in the complete training of "would be" teachers. It is usually referred to as the time spent by a student teacher in a school gaining practical teaching experience. According to MacMillan Dictionary (2011), teaching practice refers to the time that someone spends teaching as part of their training to become a teacher. Furlong et al (1988) opined that teaching practice occupies a key position in the programme of teacher education and thus, it's a culminating experience in teacher education. In effect, teaching practice is a process of teaching by a student teacher under the supervision of an experienced teacher. Performance during teaching practice provides some basis for predicting the future success of the teacher. It is important to note that during teaching practice, working with students in schools provides a high degree of involvement of a mostly positive nature.

Teaching practice initiates student-teachers into real school environment. It is regarded as a very important aspect of the teacher preparatory programme (Ogonor & Badmus 2006). It actually provides opportunities for the trainees to have a firsthand experience of all kinds of school routines. Through the teaching practicum exercise, the student teacher gets a feel of how teachers work together and how the school bureaucracy operates (DelGesso & Smith, 1993). It is a medium through which teacher trainees learn to translate the theories and principles they have learnt into practice. It actually offers them the chance to apply the numerous techniques, strategies, methods and approaches they have acquired or learnt in real performance.

According to Murtaza (2005), through the practicum programme, the student teachers will have the opportunity to link the theory with practice to resolve some of the noticeable inconsistencies. Teaching practice helps in the acquisition of skills. It prepares a career in education for the trainees in whom they translate the methods and theories acquired during their teacher preparation programme into practice (Tok, 2010). In the course of their practical experience, teacher trainees have first hand practical interaction with materials, equipments classroom

environment and curriculum. In addition, they socially interact with experienced teachers and their pupils (Sarcobam, 2010).

Another concept of the teaching practice exercise is the fact that it reduces the level of anxiety of among teacher trainees. They will feel more relaxed and less anxious about teaching when they later carry out the real teaching. To achieve this however, it is important that all parties are fully involved in this teacher preparation programme (Whittington et al, 1995)

According to Murtaza (2005), teaching practicum helps to enhance the teaching ability of the teacher trainee. It provides the best experience in teacher education in terms of influencing classroom behavior of the perspective teacher. Again, teaching practice is usually designed to provide opportunities and assistance in a typical school setting for the student-teachers to develop their professional competences, personal characteristics, understanding, knowledge and skills.

As observed by Trowbridge and Bybee (1994), student teachers feel themselves grow through experience and they begin to link to a culture of teaching during the teaching practice period. In the view of Stone and Morris (1977), the term teaching practice has three major connotations. These are the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the role of teacher, the whole range of experience and the practical aspect of the course as distinct from theoretical studies.

In summary, teaching practice refers to the preparation of student teachers for teaching by practical training. It involves the practical use of teaching methods, strategies, principles, techniques, training and exercise of different activities of daily school life.

Importance of teaching practice

The concept of teaching practice is a form of work-integrated learning that is described as a period of time when students are working in the relevant industry to receive specific in-service training in order to apply theory in practice. Researchers such as Marais and Meier (2004) have accepted teaching practice as a teacher training requirement. Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba (2007) describe teaching practice as an integral component of teacher training. Thus, in their opinion, a student teacher is required to do teaching practice in at least two schools in order to achieve the standards required for qualified teacher status.

Secondly, teaching practice inducts student teachers more fully into the professional work of the teacher (Perry 2004). It therefore affords the student teachers the opportunity to experience at first hand, the excitement of being a part of a real classroom setting, getting to know learners, planning and organizing the classroom tasks.

Thirdly, the teaching practice experience helps the student teacher to learn the skill of controlling and managing learners in the classroom situation. Also, it affords the teacher trainee the opportunity of establishing close working relationship with mentors and supervisors who would point out the trainee's strengths and weaknesses in the classroom delivery to him and guide him to improve on his subject delivery in the classroom

In the view of Kinggundu and Nayimah (2005) teaching practice helps student teachers to get involved in all aspects of the school, since teaching involves many experiences. This position is supported further by Buchner and Hay (1999) who asserted that teaching involved many experiences that simply

could not be replicated in a non-social environment, but teaching practice provides student teachers with opportunity to integrate the theory of education with that which they experience at first hand on the field. Still in support of this position, Perry (2004) also points out that, although students gain much specialized knowledge by attending lectures and doing assignments teaching practice adds meaning to this knowledge when a student teacher comes into contact with the real classroom situation. Thus, it is during teaching practice that knowledge is affirmed.

Challenges faced in teaching practice

Practicing teachers are usually confronted by varied challenges in the conduct of their teaching practice activities. Notable among them are those highlighted below:

Writing the lesson formally and then proceeding in the classroom accordingly bothers much to student teachers. Ampama (2007) opines that things that are put down on paper do not always match up with realities of the classroom. In his view, there are instances where the class may know more that what has been prepared by the student teachers and that alone is enough to make practicing teachers nervous since they mentally have to replan their already written lesson notes.

One of the major challenges faced by student teachers in their teaching practice is the ability to instill and maintain discipline in the classroom and dealing tactfully with the pupils who misbehave in class. In some schools, children may cause disturbances in the class and impede effective classroom management is his / her acceptance by the taught. In a study of student teachers conducted at the University of Exeter by Preece (1979) it was observed that discipline issues often led to high level of anxiety in student teachers. It is important to stress that, Preece (1979) also found evidence that in some cases, a high level of anxiety by student teachers at the start of their teaching practice, actually appeared to be a cause of discipline problem. The situation is even more serious if student teachers are not able to strike a chord with the children.

The other challenge facing teaching practice relates to heavy workload of teacher trainees and lecturers. It is an undeniable fact that teaching is multitasking. Activities such as lesson plan and teaching aids preparation assessment of work given by the student teachers and preparing charts and models often exhaust those (Kinggundu & Nayimili, 2009). Mental and emotional stress on the student teacher increases when supervisors write unfavorable comments on their assessment forms. Stephens (1996) points out how student teachers can sometimes be overwhelmed by a feeling of panic when they realize that a particular task is so difficult to perform by their students due to indiscipline of the class.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, teaching practice conduct among the University of Cape Coast distance learning students has been besieged with the challenge of low level of commitment from the teacher trainees to the ideals of entire exercise. This has resulted in absenteeism, poor lesson notes preparation, inadequate preparation and inappropriate use of Teaching –Learning Resources .This was revealed by the Centre for Continuing Education Teaching Practice Field Report (2013) . To data, the researcher is not aware of any study conducted to address this problem, especially at the University of Cape Coast distance

learning institution in Ghana. Therefore, the study is propitious in this dynamic world of the 21st century since its major thrust is to evaluate the conduct of teaching practice from the perspective of the distance education students, identify challenges they are confronted with, so as to equip them with the needed expertise for their profession and career.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain the factors influencing teaching practice delivery among distance education teacher trainees in the University of Cape Coast. The study had three fold objectives, namely:

1. To find out the perception of distance education teacher trainees on the concept of teaching practice.
2. To ascertain the perception of teacher trainees on the importance of teaching practice to them
3. To ascertain the challenges distance education teacher trainees face in their teaching practice activities.

Hypotheses

1. H₀1 Understanding teaching practice concepts do not significantly influence the delivery of teaching practice among distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast.
2. H₀2 There is no statistically significant difference between the Northern and Southern sectors of Ghana in terms of the challenges confronting teaching practice delivery among distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast.
3. There is no statistically significant difference in gender in respect to students benefiting from Teaching Practice in University of Cape Coast.

Theoretical Framework

This study was premised on the Theory of Learning as propounded by Edward Thorndike in 1920. The theory fits well in this study and seems generally applicable to the learning process and provides insight into what makes people learn most effectively. It relates to behavioral learning theories based on the connection between learning and practice.

Emanating from the theory of learning is the law of readiness which posits that individuals learn best when they are ready to learn and do not learn well if they see no reason for learning. Thus, trainees usually make more progress towards learning if they have a strong purpose, clear objective and a sound reason for learning than those who lack motivation.

The link between the law of readiness and teaching practice is that the teacher trainees' motivation for participating in the teaching practice process would depend on their level of readiness for the exercise. This may be physical, psychological, emotional or even financial. The teacher trainees are likely to perceive the teaching practicum opportunity positively, prepare adequately for it and participate fully if they are clearly aware of the purpose and importance of it. On the contrary, where they lack the motivation and eagerness to take part in the exercise their commitment towards the practicum is likely to be low.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design based at the trainees of the University Of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Table1: Sample Frame for the study

SECTOR	REGION	CENTRE	PROGRAMME	POPULATION	SAMPLE
Northern	Ashanti	KASS	DBE	454	115
		WESCO	PDE	210	53
	Northern	TATCO	DBE	76	19
	Upper East	BOGISS	PDE	31	8
	Central	UCC	DBE	430	109
SOUTHERN	Central	UCC	PDE	38	9
		Western	Holy Child	PDE	41
	Eastern	Oyoko	DBE	128	33
	Greater Accra	Accra High	DBE	300	76
		Tema	PDE	56	14
TOTAL			1,764	446	

Table 2 Perception of Students-Teachers on the Concepts of Teaching Practice (N=434)

Teaching practice (TP) is perceived as:	SA(%)	A	DA	SD	Mean	Std.	Rank
The practical aspect of teacher training	72.8	23.5	0.5	3.2	3.66	.65	2 nd
Requirement for becoming professional teacher	68.9	26.0	5.1	0.0	3.63	.58	3 rd
Means of making teachers effective in their job	28.6	56.7	14.5	0.2	3.14	.65	6 th
Prepares teacher trainee for effective delivery	79.3	19.6	0.70	0.5	3.78	.46	1 st
Enables trainees put theory into practice	48.8	40.8	9.7	0.70	3.38	.68	4 th
Develops deeper understanding of principles	20.0	56.7	22.6	0.70	2.96	.67	8 th
Effectively plan and prepare lesson notes	42.9	36.4	17.5	3.2	3.19	.83	5 th
Establish appropriate pupil-teacher relationship	24.0	60.1	10.1	5.8	3.02	.75	7 th
Total response on meaning of TP	78.8	21.2	0.0	0.0	3.79	.40	-

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; DA-Disagree; SD- Strongly Disagree

Table 3 Trainees Perception on the Importance of Teaching Practice (N=434)

The importance of Teaching practice (TP) is:	SA (%)	A (%)	DA (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std	Rank
1.Un-earths weaknesses in professional training	17.1	60.1	17.3	5.5	2.88	.74	7 th
2.Helps to identify the strengths of trainees	43.5	30.6	19.6	6.2	3.12	.93	3 rd
3.Equips trainees with requisite teaching skills	38.2	54.6	5.5	1.6	3.29	.64	1 st
4.Empowres trainees to be knowledgeable	35.5	35.0	28.3	1.2	3.04	.82	4 th
5. Inculcates positive attitude towards training	20.7	59.0	15.3	4.6	2.96	.74	6 th
6.Taps skills from experienced teacher mentors	49.8	28.1	7.8	14.3	3.13	1.06	2 nd
7.Exposes trainees to wider school environment	32.7	43.3	19.6	4.4	3.04	.83	5 th

Key: SA-Strongly Agree; A-Agree; DA-Disagree; SD- Strongly Disagree
Source: Survey Data, 2013

The entire final year Diploma in Basic Education and Post Diploma in Basic Education students who completed their Off-Centre teaching practice during the 2012/2013 academic year formed the population of the study. In all, 4,457 teacher trainees were targeted. However, the assessable population was 1,764. The Stratified Sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. In the first stage, the population was divided into two- Northern and Southern. The Northern sector comprised of four study Centres and the Southern Sector had five study centres.

In selecting the sample size, the researcher was guided by the suggestion made by Nwana (1992) that if the population is several hundred, a 20% sample size will do for a study. The sample size for this study therefore, was 446, which is more than 25.2% of the assessable population. Next, a simple proportion was used to distribute the sample size among the study centres sampled for the research. Finally, the simple random sampling method was adopted and used to select the respondents in each of the study centres. Table 1 depicts the sample frame.

PDE-Post Diploma in Basic Education; DBE-Diploma in Basic Education A structured 4 point Likert questionnaire was used to collect primary data from respondents for the study. The data was analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.00.Both descriptive and inferential analytical tools were used to describe the data. A t-test was used to determine difference between the Northern and

Southern sectors of Ghana in terms of the challenges confronting teaching practice delivery among distance education teacher trainees. A regression analysis was performed to determine difference between the Northern and Southern sectors of Ghana in terms of the challenges confronting teaching practice delivery among distance education teacher trainees.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Perceptions of Teacher Trainees on the Concept of Teaching Practice

The first task of this study was to analyze the perceptions of distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast regarding the concept of teaching practice. The response of the teacher trainees regarding the concept of teaching practice is exhibited in Table 2.

The data carried in Table 2 indicates that on the whole, all distance education teacher trainees have a fairly good understanding about the concept of teaching practice. The analysis show that over three quarters of all the respondents strongly agreed that teaching practice prepares the prospective teachers in effective lesson delivery.

In fact, this item was ranged first with a mean of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 0.46 confirming that these respondents were agreement regarding the use of TP in preparing them for effective lesson delivery.

The second highly rated function of TP, which had a mean of 3.66 and standard deviation of 0.65 is that it was the most practical aspect of teacher preparation. It was also evident that these teacher trainees conceived teaching practice as a major prerequisite for becoming a professional teacher (mean =3.63 and standard deviation= 0.58). This implies that trainee teachers perceive teaching practice as a way of preparing themselves for effective delivery in their professional career and constitutes the practical aspect of their training. This is in line with the findings of Kinggundu (2007) that the practical preparation for teaching practice provides the student teachers the opportunity to practice the theories they are taught. Again, Kinggundu and Nayimili (2009) support this view by noting that teaching practicum grants the student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment.

The fact that teaching practice helps teacher trainees to develop a deep understanding of educational principles was ranked least by the respondents, with a mean of 2.96 and a standard deviation of 0.67. On the other hand, the respondents were of the least perception that teaching practice helped to develop a deeper understanding of educational principles with a M=2.96 and SD=0.67.

The importance of teaching practice to them

The second research objective looked at the perception of teacher trainees on the importance of teaching practice to them. Their responses are as summarized in Table 3.

Table 4 Some perceived Challenges by Distance Education Teacher Trainees

Some perceived challenges faced by trainees:	SA (%)	A (%)	DA (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std	Rank
Difficulties in preparing appropriate lesson notes	9.0	31.6	33.9	25.6	2.24	.94	8 th
Maintenance of discipline in the classroom	21.7	14.1	38.0	26.3	2.31	1.08	7 th
Various TP activities imposing heavy workload	34.3	33.4	29.7	2.5	2.99	.86	2 nd
Lack of communication by university to principals	43.5	14.7	36.2	5.5	2.96	1.01	3 rd
Interference of school activities on teaching practice	39.4	23.5	16.6	20.5	2.82	1.16	4 th
Demand for transportation by supervisors and mentors	23.3	24.0	41.2	11.5	2.58	.97	5 th
Lack of discussion of supervision results by lecturers	22.8	31.8	14.7	30.6	2.46	1.15	6 th
Untimely visits by some supervisors during assessment	55.5	33.4	3.5	7.6	3.37	.87	1 st

It is very clear from Table 3 that majority of the respondents, 281 constituting 64.7 percent of the respondents shared the view that they strongly perceive teaching practice to be very important in the holistic training of the teacher. Another 134 constituting 30.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement. The table again shows that, item 3 ‘Teaching Practice helps to equip the teacher trainee with the requisite skills for effective delivery in his classroom’ and Item 6 ‘Teaching Practice creates the avenue for student teachers to tap knowledge from experienced teachers who act as mentors’ were ranked 1st and 2nd respectively with a Mean of 3.29 and 3.13 and a Standard Deviation of 0.64 and 1.06.

This position of the respondents conforms to the view of Perry (2004) that teaching practice inducts student teachers more fully into the professional work of the teacher. Thus, it affords the student teachers the opportunity to experience at first hand, the excitement of being a part of a real classroom setting, getting to know learners, planning and organizing the classroom tasks. Again, the findings agree with the view of Marais and Meier (2004) of supervisors as being exemplary role models who set a worthwhile example for the trainees to follow. It is worth noting however that 19(4.4%) of the teacher trainees disagreed with the statement. This group may

be part of the few who have a negative perception of the teaching practice concept because they might have faced some challenges during the conduct of the exercise.

Challenges Distance Education Teacher Trainees’ Face during Training

The final objective of the study was to diagnose some of the challenges student-teachers face during their teaching practice. Views expressed by the respondents are as shown in Table 4.

Them. Table 4 clearly depicts that the majority of the respondents 238(54.8%) are of the view that teaching Practice is confronted with a lot of challenges. Also, 131 (30.2%) respondents strongly agree with the statement. Prominent among these challenges is the fact that visits by some supervisors are not timely (Item 8). This view was ranked as the first with a Mean=3.37 and a standard deviation of 0.87., followed by item 3 ‘The activities I need to carry out before, during and after the teaching periods imposes heavy workload on me’ whose Mean=2.99, with a Standard Deviation of 0.86 which states that ‘the activities I need to carry out before, during and after the teaching periods imposes heavy workload on me’. In an informal discussion with some of the teacher trainees, it came to light that visits by supervisors to some of the schools coincided with other school activities such as sports and examinations. As a result of that, some teacher trainees could not have the requisite number of supervision. With respect to item 8 ‘Visits by some supervisors are not timely’,

the findings give credence to the position of Kinggundu & Nayimili (2009) that activities such as lesson plan and teaching aids preparation, assessment of work given by practicing teachers and preparing charts and models for lessons often exhaust

Test of Hypotheses

Test of Hypothesis 1

H₀1 Understanding teaching practice concepts do not significantly influence the delivery of teaching practice among distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast.

To test this, a regression analysis was performed .Regression analysis using the entry method was performed using SPSS to assess the relative contribution of understanding teaching practice concepts in the prediction of the extent to which teaching practice is ensured. It was established that an understanding of the teaching practice concepts explained 21 % (adjusted R²=0.21) of the variance in teaching practice delivery. The implication is that over three quarters of the variance in teaching practice delivery is explained by other factors rather than teaching practice alone. This would suggest that the present regression model is not a major predictor of

teaching practice delivery .Thus, there may be other factors that contribute to effective teaching practice delivery other than just the understanding of the teaching practice concepts.

The results in Table 5 produced no statistical significant difference in scores for male ($M = 3.60, SD = 0.55$) and Female ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.60$), $t(434) = -.11, p > 0.05$.

Table 5 Test of difference on the Benefit of Teaching practice between Male and Female Students

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std Dev	t-value	p-value	Decision
Benefit of Teaching Practice	Male	233	3.60	0.55	-1.11	0.91	Fail to reject
	Female	201	3.61	0.60			

Source: Survey Data, 2013

From the regression analysis results, the F-distribution of 10.338 with its associated significance value of ($p = .000$) was documented. This implies that the difference between the values is highly statistically significant at the alpha level of 0.001 or $p < 0.001$. Therefore, the null hypothesis that understanding teaching practice concepts do not significantly influence delivery of teaching practice among distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast is rejected. The implication of this finding is that there is a significant correlation between understanding teaching practice concepts and effective delivery of teaching practice among distance education teacher trainees at the University of Cape Coast.

This position is supported by Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba (2007) who contend that teaching practice as an integral component of teacher training. Thus, in their opinion, a student teacher is required to do teaching practice in at least two schools in order to achieve the standards required for qualified teacher status. Similarly, this finding finds support in the works of Perry (2004). In this regard, teaching practice inducts student teachers more fully into the professional work of the teacher. It therefore affords the student teachers the opportunity to experience at first hand, the excitement of being a part of a real classroom setting, getting to know learners, planning and organizing the classroom tasks. Finally, teaching practice experience helps the student teacher to learn the skill of controlling and managing learners in the classroom situation. Thus , it affords the teacher trainee the opportunity of establishing close working relationship with mentors and supervisors who would point out the trainee’s strengths and weaknesses in the classroom delivery to him and guide him to improve on his subject delivery in the classroom(Perry,2004).

Test of Hypothesis 2

H₀₂ There is no statistically significant difference between the Northern and Southern sectors of Ghana in terms of the challenges confronting teaching practice delivery among distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast.

To test whether there was statistically significant difference in the challenges faced by the teacher trainees in the Southern Sector compared to those in the Northern Sector, independence –sample t-test was performed. The results of this test revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the two sectors ($t = -.448, df = 432, p = 0.05$ two tailed). Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between the Northern and Southern sectors of Ghana in terms of the challenges confronting teaching practice delivery among distance education teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast.

This indicates that there is no significant difference in gender in respect to benefit of Teaching Practice. Therefore null hypothesis 2 is maintained. The implication is that both males and females perceive teaching practice as being very beneficial to the as prospective teachers who should fit in all aspects of school life, activities and processes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study’s primary goal was to establish the perceptions of distance education teacher trainees on the concept of teaching practice, importance of teaching practice and state any challenges encountered by teacher trainees during their teaching practice sessions. The the study revealed that teacher trainees of the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, perceive teaching practice to be an opportunity for them to practice what they are taught and acquire practical experience on the job. In effect, they are of the view that teaching practice inducts student teachers more fully into the professional work of the teacher. Teacher trainees on the Distance Education programme at the University of Cape Coast see teaching practice as a means of preparing teacher trainees for effective professional delivery. Teacher trainees view teaching practice as a worthwhile exercise because it equips them with the requisite skills, knowledge and abilities to teach effectively.

In addition, the study discovered the benefits, challenges and the strategies to be employed to further improve the conduct of the teaching practice exercise. Student teachers on distance education agree that challenges such as untimely visits by some supervisors, heavy workload and the failure of the university authorities to inform the heads of their schools formally, about the exercise impedes the smooth conduct of the exercise. The study also revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the challenges faced by students in the Southern sector and their counterparts in the Northern sector. The implication being that the teaching practice is being offered and evaluated uniformly across all the regions of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Again, it was revealed through the study that understanding the teaching practice concepts impacts positively on the teaching practice delivery of student teachers on the distance learning programme of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Finally, the research also established that there is no difference in gender in respect to benefit of Teaching Practice to the teacher trainees. Thus, teaching practicum is beneficial to all teacher trainees of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana, irrespective of whether male or female.

From the research findings of this study as well as discussions and conclusions based on researches conducted by other scholars in this area of teaching practice, the following five recommendations are made:

1. Teaching practice supervisors should be given adequate resources to do their work as expected since teaching practice is a worthwhile experience which equips the teacher trainee with the requisite skills for effective professional delivery
2. Supervisors should endeavor to discuss their observations with the practicing teachers after their supervision exercises, pointing out their weakness and strengths to encourage them improve on their lesson delivery.
3. Appropriate steps should be taken by the University authorities to inform the heads of schools where student teachers practice. This should be done far in advance to enable them factor the teaching practice period into the academic calendar of their schools.
4. All efforts should be made to thoroughly train student teachers in the preparation of teaching lesson notes. This will go a long way to sharpen their skills, knowledge and abilities for their chosen career and improve their preparedness for the task of imparting knowledge in their pupils.
5. Based on the finding that teacher trainees perceive teaching practice to be a means of acquiring basic skills and knowledge in teaching, there is the need for the managers of the educational sector to provide teacher trainees with training kids to aid them prepare adequately for their teaching practice.
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