

Exploration of Pre-service Social Studies Teachers' Perspectives on Supported Teaching in Schools: Implications for Policy and Practice

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Abstract

This study explores pre-service Social Studies teachers' perspectives on the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) programme in Colleges of Education in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. Grounded in a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the research combined quantitative data from 397 respondents with qualitative insights from interviews with 15 participants. The findings reveal that pre-service teachers hold generally positive perceptions of the STS programme, particularly regarding its ability to enhance their capacity to apply content knowledge and pedagogy, plan coherent instruction, set instructional outcomes, and design assessments. The programme also fosters a culture of learning and supports the development of professional competencies aligned with the National Teachers' Standards. However, challenges such as inadequate resources, inconsistent mentorship, and limited institutional collaboration were identified as constraints to its effective implementation. The study concludes that while STS significantly contributes to teacher preparation, strengthening mentorship structures and institutional partnerships is essential to maximise its impact. Policy recommendations are provided to improve the effectiveness of the programme and sustainability within Ghana's teacher education system.

Keywords: Supported Teaching in Schools, Pre-service Teachers, Social Studies Education, Teacher Professional Development, Ghana Teacher Education

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Introduction

Researchers and education practitioners underscore the central role of formal education in personal development and in the social, economic, and political advancement of countries. Ashun (2022) corroborates the claim that, globally, formal education is the pivot around which development revolves; hence, it is touted as the panacea of development in the 21st Century. Other scholars (Amajuoyi, 2022; Assumpta & Chimezie-Mathew, 2022) contend that education empowers individuals with relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes to contribute meaningfully to the development agenda of societies, live productive and healthy lives, and adapt easily to transformations in dynamic societies. Therefore, it is argued that education is a critical asset to individuals and countries (Hoque, Kenayathulla, Subramaniam, & Islam, 2020) with the hope that investment in it will yield the intended objectives. It could be inferred from the preceding assertion that developing countries are unable to attain a substantial level of development due to ineffective education for their citizens.

In Ghana, Agbenyega (2007) observes that the provision and support for education are enshrined in the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana as a basic human right for all Ghanaians. Understandably, developing countries are required to design and implement progress-driven education systems if they wish to compete and survive in this ever-changing knowledge-based economy and to safeguard the statutory rights of the citizenry. Accordingly, countries have developed policy initiatives to expand education for all citizens. In 1990, for instance, “Education for All (EFA) was launched in Jomtein, Thailand, as an international initiative to bring the benefits of education to every citizen in every society. Besides, with the adoption of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goal (MDG) on education (MDG 2), governments worldwide have prioritised the provision of primary education in policy programmes” (UNESCO, 2006). Like other countries, the government of Ghana is committed to achieving Universal Basic Education by ensuring that all children of school-going age can complete a full course of primary schooling. Since independence, Ghana has formulated and implemented policies to increase access to basic education. According to Akyeampong, Djangmah, Oduro, Seidu and Hunt (2007), “the central aim of the Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) strategy was to improve access to basic education by abolishing tuition fees. For the past decade, Ghana has implemented interventions such as the capitation grant, school feeding programme, free exercise books and uniforms to improve access to basic education.”

However, scholars such as Buregeya (2011) have observed that international and local educational policies have posed significant challenges to many education systems worldwide, including increased enrolment and poor academic performance. Intuitively, the essence of these policies would be negated if efforts are not made to improve other quality indicators, a view supported by Staff (2011), who notes that quantitative expansion to provide education to all children of school-going age under the EFA initiative should not compromise other quality indicators under any circumstances. Meanwhile, scholars observe that quality teachers are crucial in the realisation of educational goals. For instance, Warman, Poernomo, Januar and Amon (2021) maintain that teachers are vital in implementing school curricula by designing and executing classroom learning activities and programmes for learners. Donkor and Banki (2017) also emphasise that teachers implement educational reforms in the classroom, and that the extent to which these reforms are effectively implemented depends on teachers’ quality.

The point is made that quality teachers are required to implement educational reforms to realise educational goals. The role of the teacher is imperative, as teacher effectiveness is one of the key indicators that is globally used to assess the success and efficiency of educational institutions (Assumpta & Chimezie-Mathew, 2022). It is in this vein that Hoque, Kenayathulla, Subramaniam and Islam (2020) allude to the necessity to employ strategies to develop teachers professionally to meet the exigencies of their task. Therefore, for teachers to be well-trained and skilled to execute their jobs, their experiences with the practical component of their training need more attention (Camp, 2011; Maranan, 2017). Accordingly, policymakers should prioritise instilling high-quality personal and professional traits in teachers, given their significant responsibilities.

To this end, scholars and practitioners in the education space (UNESCO, 2022; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2020; NAAC, 2021; Kamlesh, 2015) have noted that, in virtually every nation, pre-service teacher training institutions play an important role in shaping high-quality instructors by providing prospective teachers with training that fosters innovation, flexibility, and the competence to manage students. In the quest to enhance teacher quality and improve performance on the job, educationists and researchers recognise the role of pre-service teacher training programmes in preparing pre-service teachers to be competent and pedagogically ready to implement the curriculum and realise educational goals and objectives, a need that has become more crucial than ever. Jordan et al. (2018) support this claim, averring that initial teacher education programmes organised for pre-service teachers during their initial teacher training are crucial to producing teachers of high quality, dedication, and professionalism. In summary, the journey from novice teacher to confident and effective classroom practitioner demands a deliberate, well-supported process that equips teachers with the necessary personal qualities, professional competencies, and resilience to work effectively with diverse learners. As such, teacher education programmes must be continually evaluated to ensure they adequately prepare teachers.

In this regard, the introduction of the Supported Teaching in Schools Programme (STS) in Ghana has been identified as one of the key practical components of the New Four-Year B. ED curriculum designed to equip new pre-service teachers to effectively teach the core curriculum and improve the learning outcomes and life opportunities of all learners in Ghana by the National Teacher Standards (NTS). STS is explained as a practical school-based component of the teacher education programme, designed to allow pre-service teachers to observe, plan, and collaborate with peers and mentors in the schools to understand the approaches to teaching and learning of children with diverse socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Transforming Teaching, Education & Learning, T-TEL, 2018). Research over the years has gathered ample evidence that the STS programme aims to assist teacher trainees in using and developing skills, information, and understanding obtained during their college-based training in schools, with the help of mentors and link tutors (Danquah, Nyanko & Mensah, 2021).

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2017), STS aims to assist pre-service teachers in acquiring and applying professional values and attitudes, knowledge, and practice to satisfy the National Teachers' Standards for starting teachers. T-TEL (2018) avers that STS is characterised by extended periods of school-based placement spread across the four years of pre-service teacher training, and at the conclusion of each year, specific competencies must be met. Pre-service teachers are expected to spend 30% of their training in the field, for a total credit weighting of 48 (T-TEL, 2018). Therefore, this study agrees with researchers (Cakcak, 2016; Zeichner & Flessner, 2009) that STS is a critical teacher education model that provides situated instruction, in which

mentor teachers collaborate closely with pre-service teachers and that it is founded on the critical teacher education method, which emphasises field experience throughout teacher training.

Due to the crucial role that STS programmes play in the development of pre-service teachers, research on their benefits to pre-service teacher training has gained traction among academics and researchers in recent decades. According to Oparah et al. (2017), STS-based teaching practice is crucial to the professional development of pre-service teachers. Scholars observe that during pre-service teacher education, STS-based teaching practice enables student teachers to integrate educational theory with teaching techniques under mentoring and supervision, thereby supporting their professional development (Babaoglu, 2021; Grima-Farrel, 2015). Other theorists also underscore the relevance of teaching practice programmes in improving pedagogical knowledge among pre-service teachers, including lesson design, testing, and classroom management (Klein, 2017; Celen & Akcan, 2017; Qazi, Rawat & Thomas, 2012).

Therefore, Colleges of Education in Ghana, like other teacher training institutions in Africa and around the world, are keen on developing pre-service teachers' professional knowledge and practices through STS, hence reaping the benefits that accrue from its implementation. In addition to the benefits of teaching practice enumerated earlier, Hong, Greene, and Lowery (2017) posited that teaching practice shapes the pre-service teacher's professional identity, which is crucial and has a significant impact on their decision-making, philosophies, and professional aspirations. On their part, Thomas and Beauchamp (2007) noted that in today's dynamic and ever-changing world, pre-service teachers are made ready through teaching practices such as the STS to take on new roles, manage social diversification, and facilitate knowledge development, including access to new knowledge, hence, providing them with the opportunity to reinvent their professional identity to fit the contexts in which they work is critical to their success. It follows from these assertions that teaching practice, in the form of the STS programme, is crucial in many ways. The preceding discussions indicated that teaching practice in the form of the STS programme could have a positive sway on the overall professional development and identity of the pre-service teacher.

Therefore, off-campus teaching practice through the STS programme serves as an engine and hub for realising an ideal professional teacher. It is, therefore, pertinent that Colleges of Education in Ghana leverage the power of teaching practice, such as the STS programme, to achieve the ideals required of a pre-service teacher in the 21st century, who would be at the forefront of instilling 21st century competencies in students in an ever-changing society. In this regard, it is expected that researchers and educational practitioners be at the forefront of policy debates, formulation, and implementation, especially in implementing the STS programme to realise its benefits.

Despite the evidence of the benefits of teaching practice programmes in moulding pre-service teachers, some researchers have documented varied evidence on the impact of field experience, such as STS, on the overall development of pre-service teachers. It is worth noting that the significance of field experience in shaping pre-service teachers is not emphasised by all academic specialists (Al Mohsem, 2022). For instance, Al-Qirim et al. (2017) discovered that pre-service teachers who participated in the observation showed no discernible effects from their field practicum experience on their course performance. This proved that teachers and observers on the final test completed the same tasks at the same level of performance. Furthermore, no difference was found between pre-service teachers' self-concept of teaching quality during the field experience and that of their counterparts who did not engage in the experience when the instructors were divided into groups and the results were analysed (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2014). The authors

concluded that pre-service teachers' attitudes and expectations regarding instructors' responsibilities and behaviours are not meaningfully affected by field experience. Before instructors' programmes incorporated field experience, another assessment was conducted to see if any observational methods were in place (Bassey, 1999). Therefore, evidence is required in context-specific settings such as pre-service Social Studies teachers in Colleges of Education in Ghana.

Despite ample evidence of the immense benefits of field teaching, such as the STS programme, for pre-service teachers' professional growth and development, there is a contention that the practice of field teaching is fraught with myriad bottlenecks that obstruct the full realisation of the field experience. For instance, studies have established that challenges such as language barriers, lack of resources, work overload from mentor teachers, and lack of discipline and respect among learners are the principal bottlenecks that impede the smooth implementation of teaching practice programmes such as the STS programme (Aldabbus, 2018; Mahmood & Iqbal, 2018). Amankwah et al. (2017) found that interactions with teacher trainees revealed inadequate time, poor preparation, lack of administrative support, and lack of appropriate orientation as the challenges encountered by pre-service teachers during the STS programme.

A survey of the literature indicates that these challenges include, but are not limited to, conflicts, a variety of experiences, viewpoints, convictions, and ideas about teaching and learning; a fundamental comprehension of the school environment and its role in education; student interaction; knowledge of instructional strategies; reflective thinking in the early phases of the pre-service academic programme; and useful teaching resources (Napanoy et al., 2021; Takaoglu, 2017; Abass, 2016). Another challenge faced by pre-service teachers during teaching practice is schools' unwillingness to host pre-service teachers (Nkambule & Mukeredzi, 2017; Nketsia, Opoku, Mohammed, Kumi, Twum & Kyere, 2021). Therefore, it is argued that failing to secure agreements with mentors and mentoring institutions is a drawback to the successful implementation of the teaching practice programme. It is against this backdrop that researchers such as Nadeem et al. (2021) and Boudersa (2016) recommended that teacher training institutions establish strong collaboration with schools where their pre-service teachers are mentored and monitored in the quest to realise the essence of the teaching practice programme.

Research on teacher education in Ghana has offered valuable insights into the overall implementation of the STS programme. However, there has been limited focus on subject-specific experiences, particularly within the Social Studies discipline (Coffie, Doe, & Tabi, 2021). The teaching of Social Studies necessitates an interactive and multidisciplinary approach, requiring pre-service teachers to cultivate skills in critical thinking, classroom management and student engagement (Ariza-Quinozes et al., 2021). Nonetheless, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the STS programme in equipping Social Studies teachers to fulfil these demands is lacking. In the absence of targeted interventions, Social Studies teachers may find it challenging to implement inquiry-based and participatory teaching strategies, which are crucial for promoting critical analysis and civic consciousness among learners.

A notable gap in the literature concerns the extent to which the Student Teaching and Supervision (STS) programme aligns with the National Teacher Standards (NTS) to promote professional growth among pre-service Social Studies teachers. Although the STS programme is designed to provide sustained, practical engagement in schools, research on its effectiveness in preparing Social Studies teachers for Ghana's evolving educational landscape remains limited (Nketsia et al.,

2021). Furthermore, the relationship between mentorship effectiveness and pre-service teachers' ability to transition into confident and competent educators has not been thoroughly examined. The quality of mentorship and supervision during STS placements can play a crucial role in shaping pre-service teachers' learning experiences. However, challenges such as inadequate mentor training, inconsistent feedback mechanisms, and insufficient collaboration between Colleges of Education and partner schools have been identified as barriers to effective teacher preparation (Nadeem et al., 2021; Boudersa, 2016). In light of these gaps, this study aims to explore pre-service Social Studies teachers' perspectives on supported teaching in schools.

This study is meaningful on several levels. It advances the literature on Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) by focusing specifically on Social Studies pre-service teachers, an area that remains understudied despite the discipline's key role in citizenship and values education. It offers discipline-specific insights into mentorship and practicum supervision frameworks, addressing gaps in mentor training, feedback, and school-college collaboration (Nadeem et al., 2021; Boudersa, 2016). In practice, the results will help Colleges of Education and teacher-training institutions improve STS programme design, particularly by addressing weaknesses in mentor preparation and feedback identified through pre-service teachers' experiences.

The study offers valuable empirical insights for policy and curriculum organisations such as the Ghana Education Service, the National Teaching Council, and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. It informs policies on practicum structure, mentor accreditation, and the strengthening of partnerships between institutions and schools, particularly regarding subject-specific pedagogical support. For mentor teachers, it clarifies what pre-service teachers require from mentoring, enabling more structured and consistent mentor training. For teacher educators, it provides guidance to improve pre-practicum orientation and post-practicum debriefing. Additionally, the study makes a significant contribution to the limited research on STS in Social Studies education, laying the groundwork for future comparative studies in other subjects and teacher education settings in Ghana.

Methodology

Research design and sampling

The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. Morgan (2007) observed that the sequential explanatory design is the most commonly used mixed-methods approach in studies. Creswell (2009) explained that this design follows two distinct, interactive phases. It commences with the collection and analysis of quantitative data to address the research questions. This is followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data, which emanate from the findings of the first quantitative phase. Thus, qualitative data are collected and analysed second in the sequence and help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). From the preceding views, it is inferred that the sequential explanatory design involves both quantitative and qualitative approaches in a single study, and that qualitative data and analyses are derived from the quantitative results to validate the quantitative findings. However, there is an imbalance in the weight apportioned to the two phases, with more weight usually accorded to the quantitative element of the study than to the qualitative element (Andrew & Halcomb, 2009). In essence, the qualitative phase supplements the results attained in

the previous quantitative phase. This design was deemed appropriate for the study because the researcher believed that the views and experiences of pre-service Social Studies teachers already existed and could therefore be investigated through a quantitative approach. The qualitative approach was necessary to shed more light on their views and experiences, thereby informing the quantitative results.

The population of this study comprised all pre-service Social Studies teachers in the Colleges of Education in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. The forty-six (46) Colleges of Education in Ghana comprise five major zones. These are the EGA (All colleges in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana), the ASHBA (All colleges in the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions of Ghana), the CENTWEST (All colleges in the Central and Western Regions of Ghana), the VOTI (All colleges in the Volta and Oti Regions of Ghana), and the North Zone (All colleges in the Northern Region of Ghana). Of the five (5), only one zone was selected, namely the EGA zone, thus the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. Therefore, the total population for the study was all Level 300 pre-service Social Studies students in the Colleges of Education in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. The colleges within the population for the study were nine (9), with L300 students numbering approximately 4,630.

The Eastern and Greater Accra Regions were selected because of their cosmopolitan (peri-urban) nature and the presence of pre-service Social Studies teachers. Scientifically, research in this area was also dominated by colleges within the other four zones; hence the choice of colleges in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions. Accordingly, the sample for the quantitative phase comprised all 487 pre-service Social Studies teachers from the four (4) colleges purposively sampled from the nine (9) Colleges of Education within the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana (EGA). These were Presbyterian College of Education, Akropong; Mount Mary College of Education, Somanya; Abetifi Presbyterian College of Education; and Accra Colleges of Education. 24 pre-service Social Studies teachers were selected for the qualitative phase of the study. For the qualitative sample, fifteen (15) pre-service teachers were conveniently and purposively selected from the original sample of four hundred and eighty-seven (487) lead mentees from the four selected Colleges of Education in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions.

Instrumentation

In this study, data were collected using two primary instruments: a comprehensive questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire was designed with Likert-scale items, featuring closed-ended questions that allowed participants to express their levels of agreement with various statements. The response options provided a clear framework for evaluation, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), valued at 5, to Agree (A), valued at 4, Neutral (N), rated 3, Disagree (D), scored at 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD), valued at 1. This structured approach was intended to facilitate nuanced data analysis and capture a diverse range of opinions from respondents.

Validity and reliability

Before the main data collection, the instruments were given to course mates in the Doctor of Philosophy programme in the Department of Social Studies Education, University of Education, Winneba, to read through the items, and their views on the length of some items and on ambiguities were considered in fine-tuning the instruments. Therefore, the instruments were submitted to the supervisors to ensure that the questions reflect the concepts being studied and that their scope is adequate. These supervisors were lecturers and researchers who were deemed to have gained

sufficient research experience on the Supported Teaching in Schools Programme. Hence, they made suggestions on the adequacy of the instruments in measuring the variables outlined in the study.

In this study, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using internal consistency, which examines the extent to which the instrument's items are uniform and reflect the same underlying construct (Cooper & Schindler, 2011). Cronbach's alpha, the most commonly used statistic for measuring internal consistency (Field, 2005), was used for this purpose. Values of Cronbach's alpha between 0.7 and 0.8 are generally considered acceptable, while values above 0.8 indicate good internal consistency (Field, 2005). The results of the reliability analysis showed that the sections of the questionnaire demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency. For instance, the demographic information section yielded an alpha of 0.75, and the perceptions of the STS programme section recorded an alpha of 0.82.

Unlike quantitative researchers who rely on validity and reliability criteria to assess the quality of their research, qualitative researchers use trustworthiness criteria. Although researchers may differ in terminology, the most widely used criterion for evaluating qualitative research is trustworthiness, developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The purpose of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to support the argument that the inquiry's findings are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Initially, the trustworthiness criteria include credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The researcher ensured the credibility of the results by asking the interviewees to read the interview transcripts, which contained the information shared during the interviews, and by having them affirm that the transcripts accurately represented their views. To ensure dependability, the interview guide was pretested to ensure systematic data collection. That is, care was taken to ensure that the research process was logical, observable, and reflexively documented through a detailed account.

Confirmability refers to objectivity, the potential for congruence among two or more independent observers regarding the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning (Polit & Beck, 2010). It is also described as the standard against which results can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochim, 2006). To achieve confirmability in this study, the researcher documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Trochim (2006) stated that transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised to other contexts or settings. The qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by thoroughly describing the research context and the assumptions central to the research, so that the person who wishes to transfer the results to a different context is responsible for judging how sensible the transfer is (Trochim, 2006). In essence, from a qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalising. Even though the researcher did not intend to generalise the findings of this study, the study setting was vividly described so that anyone wishing to generalise the findings to other contexts could identify similarities between settings.

Dependability refers to the parallel to reliability in quantitative studies. Dependability refers to whether the findings are consistent and would be repeated under the same circumstances or context. This is slightly different from reliability, where the same findings would be expected in a different context or by a different investigator, as is the case with a survey. Given these considerations, qualitative researchers tend to see reliability and validity as far fewer clear-cut concepts than quantitative researchers do. Dependability calls for recording all changes to produce a reliable/dependable account of the emerging research focus that can be understood and evaluated by others.

Data collection procedures and ethical considerations

The researcher had an introductory letter from the Department of Social Studies Education, University of Education, Winneba, which helped to gain access to the Colleges. The researcher contacted the College Principals, discussed the study's purpose with them, and sought permission to conduct it. Having secured permission, the researcher then visited the Department of Social Sciences and discussed the study with the Heads of Departments and the pre-service Social Studies teachers, after which their consent was sought.

The researcher distributed the questionnaires to respondents and encouraged them to complete and return them immediately. The researcher's presence during data collection ensured that any issues that arose were addressed. Prompt responses and the collection of questionnaires helped increase the response rate. However, some respondents were unable to complete and return the questionnaires on the same day. Therefore, the researcher made follow-up visits to the colleges to collect the questionnaires. The colleges were reminded by phone and text messages to assist pre-service Social Studies teachers in completing and submitting the questionnaires. The returned questionnaires were placed in envelopes and sealed.

After the questionnaires were administered, the interviews were conducted. They were held after school to avoid disrupting instructional time. The researcher and the interviewee agreed on a venue for the interview, which was carefully selected to ensure confidentiality. Before the interview, the researcher-built rapport with the interviewee by exchanging pleasantries and self-introductions. The researcher outlined the purpose of the interview and explained the procedure for the interactions. Based on the expert opinion that a face-to-face interview is more personal and affords easier exploration of respondents' experiences in depth (Macnee & McCabe, 2008), the researcher adopted a face-to-face interview protocol, in which the researcher asked questions and respondents provided their opinions. The face-to-face nature of the interviews also made the interaction more natural and conversational. To ensure the researcher paid attention to the interactions, the interviews were videotaped after obtaining the respondents' permission. The interviews were also audiotaped to serve as backup in the event of data loss or mechanical malfunction of the equipment.

However, the researcher made a few notes to supplement the video and audio tapes. After each interview session, the tapes were played back to the respondents to confirm that the opinions expressed during the interviews accurately reflected their views. The interviewees were allowed to alter their views or rephrase their opinions when they raised concerns. Once all necessary additions and modifications had been made and affirmed by the interviewees, the researcher thanked them and ended the sessions. Stringent ethical protocols were followed to ensure that the study's conduct aligned with the ethical principles set by the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) ethical review board. Written informed consent was obtained from all respondents before administering the questionnaire. In addition, written informed consent to publish the study was obtained. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Efforts were made to maintain the confidentiality of the responses. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that no one known to them would have access to the information provided.

Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted in phases. Quantitative data were analysed first, followed by qualitative data. The analysis was conducted in line with the research question. At the quantitative stage, the researcher reviewed all completed questionnaires and excluded those that were not answered or had extensive missing data. This was done to ensure that missing data would not distort the study's findings. The questionnaires were then coded. After collecting the quantitative data, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0 was used for data entry and cleaning. Data on participant demographics were analysed using frequency counts and percentages. Data on the research question were analysed using means and standard deviations. The qualitative data were analysed manually. The researcher played and listened to the recorded tapes, after which the verbal information was transcribed. The researcher therefore wrote the verbal information captured in the video and audio tapes into text data for analysis. After transcription, the researcher played the tapes, compared the information with the texts, and identified and corrected all omissions. The texts were read through thoroughly, and all spelling errors were corrected. Open coding was carried out by identifying recurring words, followed by axial coding. The thematic approach was used to analyse the text data. Braun and Clarke (2006) noted that thematic analysis involves a detailed method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. The thematic approach was chosen because the analysis of the interview data was conducted according to the research objectives and questions, which served as themes. The researcher identified patterns in the themes that emerged from the data and aligned them with the research objectives and questions.

Results

This section of the article presents the results of the data collected from the respondents. Particular attention was paid to the synergy between the research questions and their corresponding results to ensure proper interpretation.

Response rate

In this study, a commendable response rate of approximately 81.5% was achieved, indicating robust engagement among participants. Of the 487 questionnaires distributed, 397 were deemed suitable for inclusion in the analyses. The response rate was calculated by carefully excluding 55 questionnaires that were not returned and 35 that were poorly completed and thus could not provide valuable data. Despite these exclusions, the resulting response rate is considered appropriate for conducting statistical analyses. This finding aligns with Dillman's (2000) assertion that a response rate of at least 70% is generally considered adequate to ensure the reliability and validity of survey results. This level of participation enhances the overall robustness and credibility of the study's findings.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Results on demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Female	202	50.8
	Male	195	49.2
	Total	397	100.0
Age	Less than 20 years	49	12.3
	21 to 25 years	206	51.8
	26 to 30 years	95	24.0
	31+ years	47	11.9
	Total	397	100.0
Nature of Entry	WASSCE	238	60.0
	Total	238	100.0
Nature of College	Mixed Sex	295	74.3
	Single Sex	102	25.7
Total		397	100.0

As indicated in Table 1, shows that the study involved a fairly balanced number of male and female pre-service Social Studies teachers, with females slightly outnumbering males (50.8% and 49.2%, respectively). The age distribution revealed that the majority of respondents (51.8%) were within the 21–25 years bracket, followed by 24.0% who were between 26–30 years, 12.3% who were below 20 years, and 11.9% who were 31 years or older. With regard to entry qualifications, more than half of the respondents (60.0%) entered the Colleges of Education with WASSCE results. Regarding the type of college attended, most respondents (74.3%) were from mixed-sex institutions, while about a quarter (25.7%) were from single-sex colleges.

The demographic distributions of the pre-service Social Studies teachers were crucial to the study because they indicated that respondents came from diverse backgrounds, making the data rich and free of bias. This enhanced the authenticity of the data and the findings.

Pre-service Social Studies Teachers' Perception of the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) Programme

This research question examined pre-service Social Studies teachers' perspectives on the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) programme. The perspectives were conceptualised as knowing and valuing students, applying knowledge of content and pedagogy, setting instructional outcomes, using resources effectively, planning coherent instruction, designing and analysing assessments, fostering a culture of learning, and supporting positive student behaviour. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Perspectives on Pre-service Social Studies Teachers on STS

Nature of View	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Applying Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy	397	1	5	3.90	1.30
Planning Coherent Instruction	397	1	5	3.81	1.15
Setting Instructional Outcomes	397	1	5	3.75	1.18
Designing and Analysing Assessment	397	1	5	3.70	1.12
Fostering a Culture for Learning	397	1	5	3.68	0.90
Supporting Positive Student Behaviour	397	1	5	3.58	0.88
Effective Use of Resources	397	1	5	3.50	0.77

The results in Table 2 revealed that the pre-service Social Studies teachers rated applying knowledge of content and pedagogy highest ($M=3.90$, $SD=1.30$), followed by planning coherent instruction ($M=3.81$, $SD=1.15$), setting instructional outcomes ($M=3.75$, $SD=1.18$), designing and analysing assessment ($M=3.70$, $SD=1.12$), fostering a culture of learning ($M=3.68$, $SD=1.90$), supporting positive student behaviour ($M=3.58$, $SD=0.88$), and effective use of resources ($M=3.50$, $SD=0.77$). The findings indicated that the pre-service Social Studies teachers held diverse perspectives on supported teaching in schools' programmes. However, applying knowledge of content and pedagogy was the most prevalent perspective, while the effective use of resources was less prevalent among pre-service Social Studies teachers. Based on the 5-point Likert scale used in the questionnaire, where the mean score is 3.0 ($1+2+3+4+5/5$), the standard deviation of ± 3 indicated data variability, and therefore the data were normally distributed. As such, it could be said that all the perspectives outlined in the study were rated above average. This implied that all the types of perspectives were common among the pre-service Social Studies teachers.

The qualitative data obtained from student-teacher interview responses were used to support the quantitative data. The following seven themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis. Further analysis was conducted based on interview responses regarding the Pre-service Social Studies teachers' perspectives on STS. Among other things, the following major themes strongly emerged from the individual interviews and focus group discussions:

1. Applying Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
2. Planning Coherent Instruction
3. Setting Instructional Outcomes
4. Designing and Analysing Assessment
5. Fostering a Culture for Learning

Theme One: Applying Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy

With reference to pre-service teachers' perspectives on the STS programme, the interview sessions revealed that the application of content and pedagogical knowledge emerged as the highest priority. The interview sessions also revealed that the various courses students take before and during STS broaden their knowledge base and deepen their content mastery for the profession. It was further revealed that pre-service teachers become familiar with the topics in the syllabi, thereby aiding their teaching output. The teaching approaches, techniques, and strategies learnt by the participants were applied in their lessons, thereby helping them accommodate every learner while ensuring an enabling learning environment for all. During the probing for the interview sessions, a pre-service teacher was emphatic that:

My experience with the STS programme has given me the practical feeling of how teaching is actually done. During lectures, you are taught the theoretical aspects of how teaching is supposed to be, but experiencing the STS programme has shown me how knowledge gained in lectures can be applied in the actual classroom (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #3).

The above comments suggest that the pre-service Social Studies teacher's perspective on the STS programme focused on applying content to pedagogy. They learn how to employ or utilise effective classroom instruction. Another participant also indicated in his response that, as far as STS in Social Studies is concerned, relating topics appropriately to pedagogy is unique because there is a constant practice of trying teaching techniques to weigh their strengths and weaknesses. He has this to say:

Most of the time, I find it difficult when I explain something and the students don't get it. I quickly go back to my notes and adjust the teaching strategy to improve understanding. Hereafter, I have experience in managing teaching techniques in a particular lesson to enable full student participation (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #1).

Theme Two: Planning Coherent Instruction

The interview responses from the Social Studies teachers revealed that research and the application of theoretical knowledge acquired during teaching and learning are fully utilised for planning coherent instruction before teaching. Additionally, to ensure coherent instruction, Social Studies pre-teachers must align learning activities with clear instructional objectives, sequence them logically, and ensure they connect to previous and future learning outcomes. It was also identified that there are occasions when the teacher is unable to prepare well, which tends to affect their teaching. A pre-service Social Studies teacher also gave an account of his experience with the STS programme:

My experience with the STS programme has enabled me to realise and develop the skill of planning coherent instruction. I say so because I have experience using appropriate instructional activities that cater for diverse learners in the classroom. Hence, I have experience structuring a lesson that allows for varied engagement with diverse learners (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #1).

This excerpt suggests that pre-service Social Studies teachers' perspective on planning coherent classroom instruction is to deploy instructional activities that meet learners' diverse needs.

Effective planning requires considerable time, but when done well, lessons are delivered systematically and engage diverse learners. It helps me select appropriate resources and rehearse incorporating them for effective teaching and learning. I have experienced and reflected on several lessons. I can confidently say that the objectives were achieved because the instructions were well planned (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #5).

Another pre-service teacher who was interviewed indicated that, most often, they guide instructional planning at the school and then vet their notes before presenting them to their mentors for the teaching sessions. This allows them to be conversant with the plan before the main teaching exercise, thereby avoiding many mistakes. In addition, pre-service Social Studies teachers are sometimes asked to practise the planned instruction with their peers to gain firsthand experience of instructional processes before going out.

Theme Three: Setting Instructional Outcomes

Regarding the setting of instructional outcomes, the majority of focus group participants reported having extensive experience in setting appropriate outcomes. This is indicated in the extract below:

I have experienced that the outcome of any lesson should reflect the important knowledge, competencies, and skills my learners need. Besides, I have found that learning outcomes must be clear to address learners' diverse needs. Besides, my experience with the STS programme over the years has exposed me to the fact that, in setting instructional or lesson outcomes for our learners, it should touch on what the learners truly need; thus, the knowledge to be gained, as well as the competencies and skills enshrined in the curriculum for them. This will make the curriculum fit for purpose (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #4).

The remarks above revealed that, through the STS programme, pre-service Social Studies teachers have come to understand that learning outcomes must reflect the intended knowledge, as well as the core competencies and skills required to navigate this knowledge society, where 21st-century competencies are crucial for survival. It could be inferred from the comments that the STS programme is intended to enable pre-service Social Studies teachers to design learning outcomes that reflect the embedded knowledge, skills and competencies enshrined in the curriculum.

Another pre-service Social Studies teacher commented that:

Through the STS programme, I have learnt to design appropriate learning outcomes that align with topics and my teaching activities. Additionally, the STS programme has exposed me to outcomes that clearly define my teaching objectives and the instructional materials and resources (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #8).

Clearly, the position of the above participant in the STS programme is not only that she is able to set good learning outcomes, but also that it helps her map the teaching objectives, activities, and teaching and learning resources to appropriate outcomes.

Theme Four: Designing and Analysing Assessment

Regarding the views of pre-service Social Studies teachers on designing and analysing assessment for teaching, the interview sessions revealed that, more often than not, the teachers in their various colleges vet their notes and help them select appropriate assessment techniques for their instruction. Further interaction with the one female pre-service teacher revealed that, throughout the STS programme, they collaborate with their mentors in various schools and employ the appropriate assessment techniques suggested in the teaching manuals to assess their learners. A pre-service teacher had this to say:

Our students are taught how to design and select appropriate assessment tools for each topic. Students are also guided through the steps for assessing learners' work and aligning teaching objectives with corresponding assessment strategies to facilitate understanding of the content (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #2).

According to the interview responses, pre-service teachers' ability to systematically design and measure students' learning effectively includes clearly defining learning objectives, selecting appropriate assessment methods, and developing clear evaluation criteria, which ultimately help analyse outcomes to inform future teaching and learning.

Another pre-service Social Studies teacher commented that:

Through the STS programme, I have come to understand that the assessment approaches deployed in a lesson must reflect the intended learning outcomes. Additionally, my experience with the STS programme has exposed me to the idea that assessment approaches used in teaching should be useful for planning future lessons (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #2).

The comment above highlights how a pre-service Social Studies teacher perceives the process of designing and analysing assessments.

Theme Five: Fostering a Culture for Learning

During the interview phase with pre-service social studies teachers, a significant observation emerged: a majority of participants strongly agreed that the Science-Technology-Society (STS) programme actively cultivates a vibrant culture of learning among students. This overarching theme revealed two distinct sub-themes that further illuminate how the STS programme influences educational dynamics.

- a. Fostering a culture for learning among pre-service teachers
- b. Fostering a culture for learning among learners

During the interview session, it was discovered that pre-service teachers' views on the STS programme do not end with the student teachers; they also extend to the learners they teach.

Theme five sub-theme 1: Fostering a culture for learning among pre-service teachers.

During the interview phase with the Social Studies teachers, it emerged that pre-service teachers are expected to take responsibility for reading widely and discussing how to improve their lessons among themselves. The STS programme helps pre-service teachers develop a culture of learning from one another through effective interaction and peer teaching. They are also motivated to learn

and to develop a culture of adequate preparation before teaching. As such, a participant had this to say;

We can learn from one another and discuss instructional processes before going out to the various practice schools. Students develop an environment, values, and practices that help them to prioritise and support group learning. (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #1).

To this pre-service teacher, the culture of learning is fostered not only among themselves but also among learners in their various practice schools. It encompasses shared personal beliefs and attitudes within the school and across their various communities, behaviours that encourage individuals to seek knowledge from within and beyond their environment to improve their skills, and the ability to adapt to change. In essence, the culture of learning adopted and adapted promotes continuous growth and improvement, both individually and collectively.

Theme five sub-theme 2: Fostering a culture for learning among learners

Another sub-theme that emerged from the culture of learning is that pre-service teachers in the STS programme foster a culture of learning among the learners they teach. Another pre-service Social Studies teacher remarked:

I have experienced a culture that fosters learning by expecting learners to take pride in themselves and their work, participate in class, and pay attention to instruction to attain the highest expected knowledge and competencies. (Pre-service Social Studies teacher#1).

This excerpt shows how a pre-service Social Studies teacher views the STS programme as a tool to instil a culture of learning among learners. It is inferred from the comment that experiencing the STS programme is crucial for pre-service Social Studies teachers, as it could serve as a conduit for fostering learning among learners. Reacting to their experience of the STS programme, a participant had this to say:

I have realised from my experience with the STS programme that teachers are expected, and indeed obliged, to use preventive, indirect, and appropriate measures to monitor learners' behaviour. Besides, they are to use appropriate and effective methods to correct misbehaviour among learners. Besides, my experience with STS has made me aware of classroom resources designed to serve as conduits for eliciting learning and understanding among learners (Pre-service Social Studies teacher #2).

The analyses of the qualitative data showed that the pre-service Social Studies teachers have had an array of experiences in the STS programme. The experiences included applying content and pedagogical knowledge, planning coherent instruction, and setting instructional outcomes. Designing and analysing assessments, fostering a culture for learning, supporting positive student behaviour and ensuring the effective use of resources.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Pre-service Social Studies teachers in Colleges of Education across the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana have had varied experiences with the Supported Teaching in Schools (STS) programme. These experiences mainly involve understanding and appreciating students'

diverse backgrounds and needs; applying pedagogical skills alongside subject knowledge effectively; setting clear instructional goals; utilising resources to improve learning; planning engaging and coherent lessons; designing and evaluating a range of assessment types; nurturing a positive learning environment; and promoting constructive student behaviour.

The manifestation of these experiences has been closely linked to strong self-efficacy beliefs among pre-service teachers, indicating their confidence and ability to teach effectively. The varied nature of their experiences suggests that these teachers have not only benefited from the STS programme but also possess a solid understanding of its principles and practices, which are essential for their professional development and training as future educators.

Moreover, it can be inferred that pre-service Social Studies teachers are adept at managing and understanding the complexities of classroom dynamics. This understanding is vital to their effective functioning in teaching roles, enabling them to navigate challenges and create supportive learning environments.

To further improve the effectiveness of the STS programme and support the ongoing professional development of educators, the Colleges of Education in the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana should collaborate with teacher education experts. This partnership should focus on creating customised professional development initiatives for their Professional Development Sessions (PDS). Moreover, launching refresher training programmes based on the STS framework will be essential. These efforts are intended to maintain, enhance, and deepen the various aspects of the STS programme identified in the study, ultimately resulting in more effective teaching and improved learning experiences for students.

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