

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE TEACHING PRACTICE MODEL OF COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN GHANA: THE CASE OF ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, BECHEM

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Abstract

This study aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the teaching practice model in the St. Joseph's College of Education, Bechem. The study was a descriptive survey. A sample size of 115 randomly selected third year student teachers of the 2018/2019 academic year was used for the study. A 30-item close-ended questionnaire with indicators of effectiveness as competencies acquired, supervision, duration and school-community relation of teaching practice was used as the data collection instrument. The results showed that generally, the teaching practice exercise in the St. Joseph's College of Education, Bechem was effective as more than 90 % of the student teachers agreed that the teaching practice gave them the opportunity to gain all the professional competences. Supervision was seen as very effective as college tutors went to supervise student teachers at least twice in a semester. To the student teachers, the duration of the teaching practice was enough even though they had to leave the classroom once in very month to attend lectures. The relationship of the school and the community with the student teachers was very cordial and student teachers felt at home in their schools of practice and communities of stay. It was recommended among others that the authorities in the St. Joseph College of Education, Bechem should be updating the expertise of the tutors as a way of professionally developing their competencies and that of the student teachers.

Keywords: Teaching Practice, Effectiveness, Competencies, Supervision, Duration, School-Community relation

Introduction

Teacher education is an important foundation of any educational system. It is through teacher education that the basis for good schools can be created because no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers (Endeley, 2014). Teaching Practice or practicum is a key component of a teacher training programme. It is the central pivot of the professional training (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi & Bajwa, 2010). The pre-service Teaching Practice in Colleges of Education in Ghana is a well-structured programme designed to provide an opportunity to develop and evaluate student teachers' competence in an actual classroom within school settings. In St. Joseph's College of Education, Bechem, student teachers undertake two months peer teaching in the second semester of the second year and spend their final year on pre services teaching practice in basic school.

Student teaching practice in colleges of education in Ghana is a kind of apprenticeship stage during which the students are sent out to schools to gain practical and professional experiences by translating all the educational theories they have acquired or learnt during training into practice (Endeley, 2014). It is a practical teaching activity by which the student teachers are given an opportunity in actual school situations to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skill over a period of one academic year. The term 'practice teaching' has three major connotations: the practicing of teaching skills and acquisition of the roles of a teacher; the whole range of experiences that students go through in schools; and the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies (Endeley, 2014).

Luukkonen, (2003) argues that real world experiences beat any textbook explanation of the classroom. So, one is not yet a teacher until they are induced into the teaching profession through teaching practice. Hall (1990) supports this assertion when he states that with regards to practicum, there are no alternatives relative to its priority amongst other components of a teacher education course. From interviews and follow-up studies of beginning teachers, Griffin (as cited in Everston, (1960) reports that student teaching is usually identified by new teachers as the most rewarding and useful aspect of their pre-service professional programmes and it is a culminating experience in teacher preparation. It provides an opportunity to beginning teachers to become socialized into the profession (Furlong et.al, 1988).

Whatever definition is given to Teaching Practice, the most important fact is that it is a professional exercise which is focused on helping the student teacher to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education and develop competence as well. In the process of bridging the gap between educational theories and practice, the student teacher, through a programme of cooperative and interactive guidance, acquires valuable skills in teaching and the management of teaching from experienced teachers thus improving their quality (Endeley, 2014).

The concept of teaching practice is deeply rooted in the drive towards the education and training of quality or competent and professional teachers. It should be seen as the central part of teacher education courses and given priority on the timetable. Even though there are other factors that measure quality in education (Huber & Hutchings, 2005), teaching practice is also a vital factor for the training of competent teachers (Nancy, 2007). Currently, there is a debate that among teacher education stake holders on the quality of teaching practicum in Ghana and throughout the world. Nelson (2007) therefore suggests that issues on teaching practicum should be a universal concern by all the stakeholders of education. The current study therefore sought to assess the effectiveness of the teaching practice model of St. Joseph's College of Education, Bechem.

Purpose and Objective of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out the effectiveness of the teaching practice model of the teacher education programme of the St. Joseph's College of Education, Bechem.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study:

1. How effective are pedagogic competencies student teachers acquire during teaching practice?
2. How effective is the supervision of student teachers during teaching practice?
3. How adequate is the duration of teaching practice for student teachers to acquire competencies?
4. How safe are the students regarding the communities used for the teaching practice ?

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

The Teaching Practice exercise is based on the social constructivist theory's concept of *Cognitive Apprenticeship*. Cognitive apprenticeships mentor scientific thinking and skills, foster critical thinking, active construction of new knowledge, a collaborative climate, and intrinsically motivate learners (Pop, Dixon, & Grove, 2010). Learning in cognitive apprenticeship occurs through legitimate peripheral participation, a process in which newcomers enter on the periphery and gradually move toward full participation. According to Schunk (2004), much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skillful tutor. The tutor may model behaviours and/or provide verbal instructions for the child. Schunk refers to this as *Cooperative or Collaborative Dialogue*. The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the tutor (often the parent or teacher), then internalizes the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance. In the context of Teaching Practice the child represents the learner or teacher candidate while the tutor represents the supervisor who through collaborative dialogue, modelling, coaching or mentoring, guides the student teacher into acquiring teaching competencies. According to Brown (1998), "The central issue in learning is becoming a practitioner, not learning about practice. Collins, Holum and Brown, (1991) identify four important aspects of traditional apprenticeship: *Modeling, Scaffolding, Fading, and Coaching*.

Modeling, a form of demonstration followed by imitation, is frequently used as a way of helping the learner progress through the Zone of Proximal Development (Campbell, 2008). The work of Salisu and Ransom (2014) showed that modeling is a more efficient way of learning than trial and error. In modeling, the apprentice observes the master demonstrating how to do different parts of the task. The master makes the target processes visible, often by explicitly showing the apprentice what to do. Similarly, during Teaching Practice the student teachers observe their school supervisor or the cooperating teacher for a specified period of time before they begin teaching in order to be able to imitate the supervisor.

Scaffolding is the support the master gives apprentices in carrying out a task. This can range from doing almost the entire task for them, to giving occasional hints as to what to do next.

Fading is the notion of slowly removing the support, giving the apprentice more and more responsibilities. Usually, the student teacher works under the guidance of the supervisor who must vet their lesson plans and have pre and post conferences with the them to give them tips/hints and feedback respectively on their teaching. With time the students take increasing responsibility of their teaching (Collins, Holum & Brown, 1991).

Coaching and mentoring are sometimes used synonymously. A mentor, by its most basic definition, is one who mediates expert knowledge for novices, helping that which is tacit become more explicit. The two most common uses of the word *mentoring* are to describe: (a) a professional development relationship in which a more experienced participant assists a less experienced one in developing a career and (b) a guiding relationship between an adult and a youth focused on helping the youth realize his or her potentials and perhaps overcome some barriers or challenges. The master coaches the apprentice through a wide range of activities: choosing tasks, providing hints and scaffolding, evaluating the activities of apprentices and diagnosing the kinds of problems they are having. They also challenge them and offer encouragement, give feedback, structure the ways to do things and work on particular weaknesses. In short, coaching is the process of overseeing the student's learning. Some refer to mentoring and/or coaching as a form of scaffolding (e.g. McLoughlin, 2002), some refer to scaffolding as an aspect of coaching (Wilson, Jonassen & Cole, 1993), and others maintain that they are separate strategies falling under the larger classification of cognitive apprenticeship. Whatever the case may be, the common thread in all these strategies is to help novices become experts in various fields through real world experiences. At the center of apprenticeship is the concept of more experienced people assisting less experienced ones, providing structure and examples to support the attainment of goals which is the rationale for the teaching practice exercise.

Competencies Acquired during Teaching Practice

The competencies student teachers are expected to acquire during Teaching Practice are reflected in their intended outcomes or the goals and objectives. The goals of teaching practice focus on providing student teachers with the opportunity to learn the art of teaching in actual classroom situations, under the guidance of an experienced and professional teacher; providing student teachers the opportunity to demonstrate in real classroom situations, their mastery of teaching the subject matter and the methodology of imparting it to learners; providing students with professional development and fostering a positive attitude to teaching in them; assessing the extent to which students satisfy the requirements for the award of the certificate they are pursuing, and to enable colleges of Education to evaluate the adequacy or otherwise of the practical aspects of the teacher education programme (Amakyi & Ampa-Mensah, 2014). Teaching Practice enables the student teachers:

1. Develop skills and competencies of teaching;
2. Apply the principles learnt from the courses studied to teach in addition to bringing about meaningful changes in learners
3. Write schemes of work and lesson notes using appropriate concepts and generalizations that will facilitate learning
4. Select and use a variety of teaching strategies and instructional resources that are appropriate to achieve the objectives stated in their lesson plans
5. Study and diagnose learning difficulties of pupils and provide guidance and remedial instruction to those who need them
6. Apply the principles of evaluation in assessing the effectiveness of their teaching as well as the progress of the pupils, as a means of improving instruction
7. Acquire skills in democratic classroom management;
8. Participate actively and effectively in the various instructional and non-instructional programmes and activities of the school where they are posted for teaching practice
9. Establish good human relations with the students, staff, parents and other members of the community of the school and have the opportunity to participate in community activities which will enhance their professional growth as a teacher (Endeley 2014).

Responsibilities of the Mentoring Teacher

Literature reviewed indicates several roles of the mentor to facilitate the professional development of a mentee (Tomlinson, 1995; Hamilton, 2003; Portner, 2003; Campbell & Brummet, 2007; Michael & Ilan, 2008). A mentor's role is multifaceted and fulfilling a mentor's role should not be taken lightly (Maphosa, Shumba & Shumba, 2007). Mentors are referred to as counsellors, role models and advisers who share their experiences with inexperienced individuals and provide the mentee with information on the logistics of how the place of work functions. The mentor's primary role is to purposefully bring the mentees to a standard of acceptable professionalism (Portner, 2003). A mentor can function optimally in his/her primary role by assessing, relating, guiding and coaching. The last two functions "draw upon the eclectic body of knowledge that informs the mentoring process and are carried out through a variety of skills and behaviours" (Portner, 2003). A mentor typically assists the mentees to understand the realities of the workplace and how to utilize their strengths to best influence situations (Hamilton, 2003). Corbett and Wright (1993) sum it up and state that the school-based mentor's role is not merely an administrative one or attending meetings, but encompasses collaborating with the student teachers and lecturers. Also, mentoring teachers play the role of coach in that they assist the mentee to locate resources, to improve their understanding of subject knowledge and to expand their skill of teaching (Portner, 2003). The foregoing can be achieved if the mentoring teachers share their experiences of teaching, providing the student teachers with examples of teaching methods and creating a pathway where they can, through self-reflection, take ownership of improving their teaching. According to Hamilton (2003), coaches need to be knowledgeable regarding the skills involving recognizing what the student teachers are doing wrong and providing detailed steps for them to improve their performances. To achieve this, mentoring teacher should be able to provide feedback that the student teachers can understand, practice and be motivated to act on. Furthermore, the role of the mentoring teacher is to provide expert advice to the student teachers about the elements of their lesson presentation and to give suggestions for improvement. Similarly, Hamilton (2003) contends that the "wisest" role of the mentoring teachers would be to showcase their subject knowledge to a student teacher. For example, the mentoring teacher shows the student teacher how a lesson presentation is done following a particular teaching method, whilst the he/she observes the mentoring teacher who tells the mentee beforehand what the lesson will entail. The aforementioned is reflective of a teacher that models exemplary behaviour that is expected of a teacher. Another role of a mentoring teacher is to guide the student teacher as opposed to dictating how to teach (Oetjen & Oetjen, 2009). Mentoring teachers need to develop an understanding of how student teachers learn to teach specific subject content and generate skills to aid them effectively. In summary, the mentoring teachers Plan, Do and Reflect (P-D-R) together with the student teachers.

Roles of College Tutors (Supervisors)

The supervisor has an important role in practice teaching as a resource person, an adviser, a general morale booster, an interpreter of feedback and an assessor (Endeley 2014). The College supervisors work closely with mentoring teachers, support the student teachers, and visit the school sites often (Nti-Adarkwah, Ofori, Nantwi & Obeng, 2019; Beck & Kosnik, 2000).

Supervision is the core of Teaching Practice exercise. Valid information on student teachers' performances is obtained only through the supervision of their live teaching. The role of supervisors therefore is of great importance in ensuring quality. Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi and Bajwa (2010) believe that the College supervisor's duty is not only to evaluate the lessons of teaching practice, but to apply their abilities to make the interaction results-oriented. They have meetings and conversions

with teacher educators, experienced teachers of the institution, educationists, concerned school head teachers (Lead Mentors) and other teachers, in a bit to make the best out of the student teachers. Demonstration lessons and orientation/Introductory lectures are organized by supervisors before the departure of student teachers to the practicing schools in order to acquaint the student teachers to the preparation of lesson plans and other assigned activities. During Teaching Practice it is the duty of supervisors to supervise their lessons, other assigned activities, carry out guidance and counseling as well as provide the student teachers with feedback to enable them to criticize and reform themselves (Nti-Adarkwah et al., 2019; Endeley 2014). Supervisors serve as a liaison between the practicing basic schools and the college, cooperate with school personnel in a manner that will enhance the partnership between the school system and the university, identify and recommend potential supervising teachers, recommend assignments of student teachers, initiate conferences with student teachers, supervising teachers and others concerned with the student's progress, all aimed at enhancing the continuing growth and quality of the student teaching program (Amakyi & Ampa-Mensah, 2014).

Duration of Teaching Practice

The duration of teaching practice varies from institution to institution and/or from country to country. Some Institutions provide for brief periods of classroom placement, others have yearlong internships, with students being assigned regular teaching obligations. In St. Joseph's College of Education, Bechem, student teachers undertake two months peer teaching in the second semester of the second year and spend their final year on pre services teaching practice in basic school. In the university of Cape Coast and University of Winneba, Ghana, final year student teachers go out for pre-service teaching practice for three academic months (1 semester). Nakopodia (2011), reports that the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) in Delta State Nigeria recommends a period of twelve weeks for the teaching practice and this is the practice in most Colleges of Education. In Pakistan, teaching practice duration is very short; it is about 4 to 8 weeks or teaching of 60 to 75 lessons (Gujjar, Naoreen, Saifi & Bajwa, 2010).

Some institutions manage to send their student teachers a day per week while some manage a block of practicum (Perry, 2004). In a study of practicum in nine universities around the world, Manzar-Abbas and Lu (2013), report that the University of Glasgow follows a more integrated practicum structure. In the first semester of the first year, the student teachers go to schools once in every week for the time of six weeks. In the second semester of the first year, they experience four full weeks in a middle or primary school. Again before the first semester of second year (overall 3rd semester), the students go to school for three full weeks and then one day every week for four weeks in the second semester of second year (overall 4th semester). Before the first semester of third year the students go to schools for four full weeks with the focus on moral and religious education. They again have four full weeks practice in the second semester of that year with the focus of expressive arts. In the last semester of the last year they have to teach in the schools for ten full weeks focusing on science.

Methodology

The study employed the descriptive survey that sought to ascertain the effectiveness and impact of the teaching practice model in the colleges of education in Ghana, using St. Joseph's College of Education as a case study. The study was done for the 2018/2019 academic year. Participants were randomly selected, consisting 115 level 300 (Final year) students. A closed-ended questionnaire made up of 30 items, adapted from Endeley (2014) with slight modifications, was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was made up of four areas; Pedagogic Competence, Monitoring and supervision, duration of practice and School-Community relationship. The items were rated on a four-point likert

scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data were analyzed descriptively, using percentages and presented in the form of table, bar and pie chart.

Results and Discussion

Distribution of Respondents

The respondents were randomly selected, with the majority of them being females as shown in Figure 1. The respondents were almost evenly distributed among the four Municipalities and Districts of the College’s catchment area. The Tano South Municipality had the highest number of respondents (32.2 %) and Tano North Municipality with the least number (17.4 %) (Figure 2)

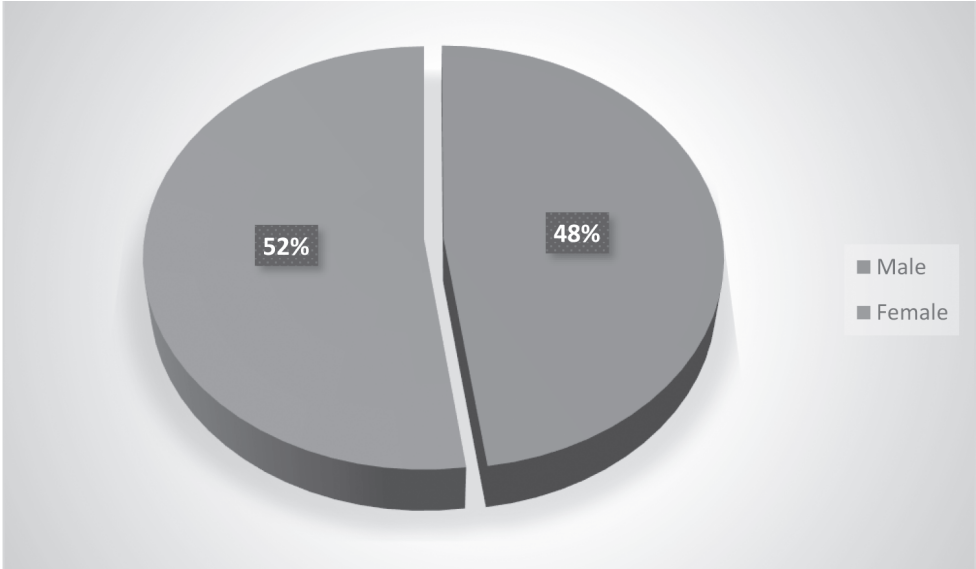


Figure 1: Sex distribution of Respondents

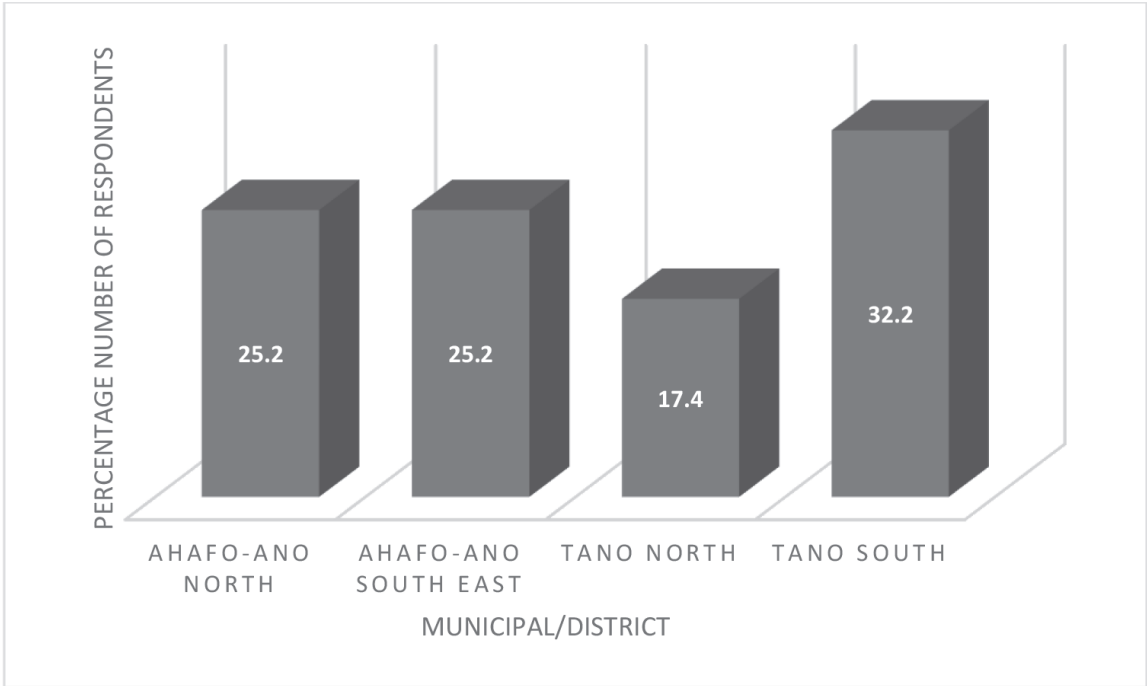


Figure 2: Municipal/District level distribution of Respondents

Table 1: Percentage Responses to Questionnaire

S/N	Statement	Percentage Responses (%)				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
Pedagogic Competencies						
1	Teaching practice helped me apply the teaching skills I learnt in class	84.3	13.9	0.9	0.9	0.0
2	Teaching practice helped me acquire problem-solving skills when I met situations that differed from what I was taught in class.	48.7	47.0	3.5	0.0	0.9
3	Teaching practice made me master my subject matter	55.7	37.4	4.3	2.6	0.0
4	I learnt to use a variety of teaching methods	61.7	34.8	2.6	0.9	0.0
5	I learnt to use a variety of teaching-learning materials	58.3	35.7	3.5	2.6	0.0
6	I improved on my classroom management skills based on feedback from my supervisors	57.4	33.9	4.3	3.5	0.9
7	I took part in giving tests, marking and recording.	76.5	21.7	1.8	0.0	0.0
8	I was able to identify students who have difficulties and attended to them	53.9	39.1	6.1	0.9	0.0
Effective Mentoring and Supervision						
9	During teaching practice I discussed my lesson with my Mentoring teacher before preparing my lesson.	57.4	33.0	4.3	3.5	1.7
10	I always presented my lesson plan and notes for vetting before teaching.	68.7	26.1	2.6	1.7	0.9
11	My Mentoring teacher was always present in class when I was teaching.	39.1	35.7	13.9	7.8	3.5
12	I was not allowed to teach when my Mentoring teacher was absent.	16.5	22.6	8.7	26.1	26.1
13	My Mentoring teacher always held a session to discuss my lesson after every class.	26.1	42.6	12.2	13.0	6.1
14	My Mentoring teacher always helped me to make entries in my Teaching Practice Journal (TPJ).	28.7	28.7	16.5	16.5	9.6
15	My Mentoring teacher insisted on the use of Teaching Learning Resources (TLR) in every lesson.	46.1	40.0	2.6	6.1	5.2
16	I observed my Mentoring teacher teach for a while before I was allowed to teach	65.2	24.3	2.6	4.3	3.5
17	My mentoring teacher helped me prepare and use teaching and learning materials/resources	43.5	42.6	6.1	5.2	2.6
18	My college supervisor came around twice to supervise me in a semester.	63.5	20.9	5.2	5.2	5.2
19	My college supervisor held a session to discuss my lesson after every supervision	65.2	21.7	3.5	3.5	6.1
20	My college supervisor talked to my Mentoring teacher to find out about my progress	48.7	27.8	12.2	5.2	6.1

Duration of Practice						
21	I had less than ten periods a week to teach	35.7	35.7	11.3	10.4	7.0
22	I taught less than three subjects in an academic term.	43.5	22.6	4.3	19.1	10.4
23	I sometimes missed teaching practice to attend classes in the college.	13.0	16.5	13	23.5	33.9
24	The duration of the teaching practice exercise was shorter.	26.1	24.3	16.5	14.8	18.3
School-Community Relationship						
25	A forum was organized to welcome and orient me on the school	62.6	20.0	4.3	7.0	6.1
26	I had a very cordial relationship with my mentor, lead mentor and the teaching staff	77.4	15.7	6.1	0.9	0.0
27	I was permitted to take part in co-curricular activities	75.7	20.9	2.6	0.9	0.0
28	Helped me feel I belong in the school, the profession and the community	69.6	27.8	2.6	0.0	0.0
29	Makes me feel I have something to contribute	56.5	36.5	4.3	1.7	0.9
30	My community was not safe for mentees	5.2	9.6	9.6	22.6	53.0

Acquisition of Pedagogic Competences

Table 1 highlights results of responses. Results on competencies acquired from teaching practice are incorporated in items 1-8. Over 90 % of the student teachers agreed or strongly agreed to all the 8 items. This indicates that the aims of the teaching practice exercise are being achieved as it allows students to acquire the necessary competencies to a very large extent. Bourgonje and Tromp, (2011) report that competence standards (competence-based education) have been employed as a basis for teacher education curriculum and for programme approval for teacher assessment, appraisal, certification and more. As such they work as a control mechanism and ensure quality. Endeley (2014) recorded a similar result as she recorded an average score of 3.3717 above the decision point of 2.5 for same competencies, conducted on 130 students of the University of Buea. Before student teachers left for the one year teaching practice, they were given one week orientation, where they were taken through the various competencies they should look out for. The teaching practice committee on monitoring also ensured the student teachers were doing the right things. Based on the above results it is asserted that St. Joseph's College of Education ensures effective teaching practice procedures and produces teachers of good quality.

Effective Supervision and Monitoring

Items 9-20 of Table 1 were geared towards assessing the effectiveness of supervision and monitoring during teaching practice. Eleven of the items (9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20) had majority of the student teachers either agreeing or strongly agreeing. This implies mentoring teachers were there to support student teachers in lesson notes preparation, entries into their Teaching Practice Journals (TPJ) and holding reflective sections with student teachers. College supervisors went to supervise student teachers at least twice in a semester, held reflective sessions with student teachers after supervision, and contacted mentoring teachers on the progress of student teachers. According to Beck and Kosnik, (2000), and Nti-Adarkwah et al., (2019), the College supervisors work closely with mentoring teachers, support the student teachers, and visit the school sites often.

Endeley (2014), says that during Teaching Practice, it is the duty of supervisors to supervise their lessons, other assigned activities, carry out guidance and counseling as well as provide the student teachers with feedback to enable them to critique and to reform themselves.

As the usual practice, before the start of 2018/2019 teaching practice section, the Teaching Practice Unit of the college, organized a two day workshop for Head teachers (Lead mentors) and selected Mentoring teachers from the partner basic schools and a day workshop for college supervisors. This was to remind them of their responsibilities as mentors and supervisors. 52.2 % of the student teachers however disagreed on item 12, meaning student teachers were allowed to teach sometimes in the absence of their mentoring teachers. During the workshop, mentoring teachers were made aware that the student teachers are yet to be teachers and should not be left to teach in the absence of their mentoring teachers. Out of this number, majority (32 % each) were from Ahafo-Ano South East District and Tano South Municipal (Figure 3).

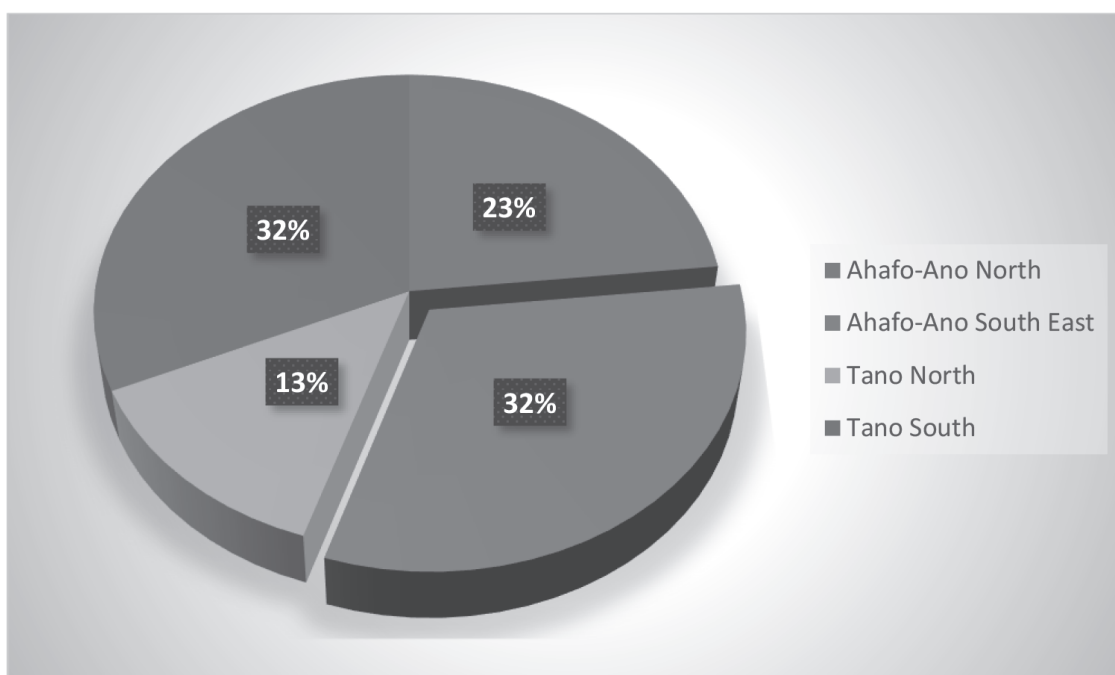


Figure 3: Percentage District level representation of student teachers who disagreed with the statement, 'I was not allowed to teach when my Mentoring teacher was absent.'

Duration of Practice

Items 21-24 contain the percentage responses on the duration of the Teaching Practice. All the four items had positive connotation. Majority of the student teachers said that the one academic year (9 calendar months) was enough for them to acquire the necessary competences and pedagogic skills. In Colleges of Education in Ghana, final year student teachers spend 9 calendar months on teaching practice in public basic schools which provides them the opportunity to learn to teach by. Apart from practical teaching, they are also exposed to practical issues such as school management, disciplinary procedures, and staff relations, as well as appropriate professional behaviour development both inside and outside the classroom (Amadu & Donkor, 2014). Sufficient duration of practicum allows pre-service and practicing teachers time to utilize specific evidence-based teaching strategies in their practicum placements and to offer active experiential learning opportunities (Brownell,

Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005). Duration has also been a predictor of special education teacher retention (Connelly and Graham, 2009).

Majority of the student teachers agreed that they taught less than three subjects at a time and had less than 10 periods within a week. To ensure that student teachers had enough time for their action research work, and study for their two remaining courses (i.e. Trends in Education in Ghana and Guidance and Counselling), they were advised at college, to handle a maximum of three subjects at a time and a maximum of 10 periods per week. The above result implies that the student teachers were not overburdened. Student teachers had ample time to observe and learn more from their mentoring teachers and the community and also carry out their research work.

They agreed that they did not have to leave their teaching practice to attend lectures at the college. It is the policy of the college that, student teachers on teaching practice, are permitted to come to the college for whatsoever purpose only after basic schools have closed for the day. This was to ensure that student teachers do not leave the classrooms of practice for any reason and to have full concentration on their teaching practice with no interference from the college.

However, one day in each month was set aside for cluster meetings with tutors handling the Trends in Education and Guidance and Counselling. Tutors travelled to the various cluster centres to hold meeting with student teachers.

School-Community Relationship

Items 25-30 of Table 1 assessed the student teachers' relationship with their school and communities. Over 80 % of the student teachers agreed that their schools of attachment organized an orientation session for them where they familiarized with the school culture. Head teachers (Lead mentors) had been encouraged to organize orientation sessions for student teacher on the first week of their practice to help them familiarize themselves with the school culture. This helped in their smooth incorporation into the school and community.

About 92 % of the student teachers said they had very cordial relationship with their mentoring teachers. A problem that faces many beginning teachers is that of isolation in the classroom. Teachers work in settings where the actual building does not allow easy interaction between the teachers. These "invisible walls" create a sense of autonomy between the teachers (Rogers & Babinski, 1999). Many teachers feel a sense of isolation in their classrooms. This isolation can leave a novice feeling alone and abandoned by the school system and other teachers. Many teachers begin their careers with very little interaction except with the students in their classroom (Boss, 2001). Research shows that creating supportive and meaningful relationships can lessen this feeling of isolation. "Teachers grow professionally when they seek out peers for professional dialogue and turn to each other for constructive feedback, affirmation, and support (Danielson, 2002).

Over 90 % of the student teachers said that, they were made to feel they belonged to the school and the profession. They also agreed that they were made to feel they had something good to offer even though they were yet-to-be teachers. They were also allowed to take part in co-curricular activities in the school including, sports, culture and games.

On the relationship and safety of the communities where the schools were located, 75.6 % said their communities were safe for student teachers and that they had very cordial relationship with the various communities. Majority of the student teachers who felt that their communities were not safe for them were from the Ahafo-Ano South East District. This could be attributed to the fact that, in the year of review, there were some cases of attacks on the student teachers, especially during their annual inter school games.

Conclusion

Field-based experiences influence student teachers' professional development profoundly as it gives them opportunities to experience real classrooms and put into practice the theories they have been taught in their preparatory class. (Farrell, 2008; Ngidi & Sibaya, 2003; Ontario College of Teachers, 2014). Over 90% of the student teachers agreed that the aims of the teaching practice exercise were achieved as it allowed students to acquire the necessary competencies to a very large extent. Mentoring teachers were there to support student teachers in lesson notes preparation, entries into their Teaching Practice Journals and holding reflective sections with student teachers. College supervisors went to supervise student teachers at least twice in a semester, held reflective sessions with them after supervision, and contacted mentoring teachers on their progress. Majority of the student teachers said that the one academic year (9 calendar months) was enough for them to acquire the necessary competences and pedagogic skills. The relationship between the student teachers and their schools of practice as well as the communities they stayed in was cordial and safe for them.



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