

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPPORTED TEACHING IN SCHOOLS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION CURRICULUM: THE FACTS, FEARS AND MYTHS

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to deep dive into how effective Colleges of Education (COE) in Ghana practice the Supported Teaching Schools (STS) programme; the challenges faced in implementing the programme; and how the challenges are managed by COE to still train pre-service teachers to exhibit high standards in knowledge, conduct, and practice in the schools worthy of 21st-century teachers. A trend study was adopted with an exploratory design. A stratified sampling technique was employed to select 6 Colleges and a meta-analysis on 60 pre-service teachers' reflective journals for the study. It can therefore be concluded that pre-service teachers practice sole visits to schools for STS programme. Therefore, the pre-service teachers' reflective journals contain literature reports that might not necessarily reflect the activities observed or discussed. Some COE lack means of transport to convey pre-service teachers to and from partner schools. It is therefore recommended that, STS programme be organized for pre-service teachers to benefit from all the days' of teaching and learning, and co-curricular activities in a week in the basic schools. Training for all lead mentors, mentors and students to successfully implement the STS policy should be deepened. Also, the government of Ghana should supply the requisite logistics to COE for the successful implementation of the programme. Supervision by tutors of COE should be structured and intensified to pre-service teachers during the STS programme to make their reflective journals report to cohere into practicable daily school activities.

KEYWORDS: Supported, Teaching, curriculum, Fact, fears, myth,

Introduction

Basic teacher education in Ghana has undergone several changes (Buaben, et al (2020). These changes are not static but still undergoing restructuring in an attempt to produce teachers that will improve teaching and learning outcomes (Mereku, 2019). Researchers, Acheampong (2003); Amakyi and Ampah-Mensah (2014) described these developments in teacher education as chequered, as the programmes are designed to meet the emergencies and needs of the country. These needs of basic education are changing over time and therefore require more institutional training to upgrade the level of teaching.

Pre-school teachers require practical skills in teaching the core competencies in basic education (Mereku, 2019) for learners to develop conceptual understanding. Hence, one of the remarkable changes in the teachers' education reforms is the introduction of four year Bachelor of Education (B.ED) programme in the colleges of education. The curriculum of the programme in the colleges of education has a component that seeks to transform initial teacher education and secure the training of highly qualified, motivated new teachers who would be able to inspire their learners to achieve better outcomes in basic education. As a result, more practices are needed to equip the trainees with the requisite skills and expertise to fit in their vocation. Hence, the teacher trainees need to practice Supported Teaching in Schools (STS), one of the four pillars of the B.ED programme, to gain hands-on experience and build their confidence as teachers (Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL)/ Ministry of Education (MOE) (2018a). This STS involves being placed in a classroom under the tutelage of an experienced teacher-mentor to develop the requisite skills, knowledge and attributes essential for nurturing honest, creative and responsible citizens in Ghana's Basic Schools as appropriate evidence against the

three domains of the National Teachers' Standards (NTS) (T-TEL/ MOE, 2018a). All these are in line with the tenet of the domain of National Teachers' Standard (NTS) that seeks to improve teachers' professional attitudes and values, professional knowledge and professional practice (MOE, 2017a). The National Teachers Standards is a guidelines document that provides the required standards for both pre-service and in-service teachers in Ghana.

During the STS programme, the teacher trainees observe their mentor's teaching techniques, participate in classroom activities and lessons, and gradually take on more responsibilities, such as planning and leading lessons, grading assignments, and managing student behaviour (T-TEL/MOE (2020/2021a). According to T-TEL/MOE (2018a), the programme seeks to allow the teacher trainees to put theory into practice, receive feedback on their teaching and make adjustments to improve their skills. It also enables them to develop professional relationships with their colleagues and gain an understanding of the wider school community. Ultimately, supported teaching is essential for the successful development of teacher trainees and for the improvement of education as a whole.

There are concerns about the quality of this aspect of the new educational reform. Mereku (2019) identified generic and subject-specific competencies required by the basic school teacher to mentor the teacher trainees (pre-service teachers) as a challenge for the programme. Mereku also lamented the capacity of the colleges to meet the increasing demand for basic school teachers as a concern and as a worrying situation that needs attention. Buaben, et al (2020) identified the placement schools for the STS programme, as poorly equipped and inadequate mentoring staff as possible challenges that may affect the programme. Dankwah, et al (2021) in their study identified transportation, improper orientation programme, inadequate supervision and insufficient teaching and learning resources as challenges thwarting the success

of the STS. Azuuga and Aduko (2022) identified pre-service teachers' lack of skills of reflective practice, inadequate curriculum resources and ill-equipped classroom furniture as challenges militating the implementation of the programme. Turner, Calvert and Carlson (2019) viewed stakeholders' buy-in as barriers to the successful implementation of the programme. However, the colleges of Education in Ghana have defied all odds to embrace the four year B. ED programme with all its intended successes and all unforeseen challenges. The success of the STS programme depends on how these challenges are handled.

The purpose of the study was to deep dive into how effective Colleges of Education (COE) in Ghana practice the STS programme; the challenges faced in implementing the programme; and how the challenges are managed by COEs to still train pre-service teachers to exhibit high standards in knowledge, conduct, and practice in the schools worthy of 21st-century teachers.

Nature of Supported Teaching in Schools/Implementation of STS

The STS programme, which replaces the off-campus teaching practice, has about 30% (165) credit hours and assessments in the Colleges of Education Curriculum (T-TEL/MOE, 2018a). According to T-TEL/MOE, (2018a), pre-service teachers are allowed to do one day of supported teaching in schools every week for a 6-week duration in every semester from level 100 to 300 (first semester) to interact with teachers, mentors, pupils and discuss observations in the school (including challenges and recommendation) and put their findings into their STS journal for assessment. In the level 300 second semester programme, the pre-service teachers stay off campus for 6 weeks for co-planning and co-teaching programmes in partner schools. The level 400 extended teaching programme is characterized by 12 weeks of practice off the college

campus. These are the expected periods of College-Based, School Based Training for pre-service teachers across the duration of the study (T-TEL/MOE, 2018a).

Each academic year has its intended purpose/target which builds on the outcome of the previous year. According to T-TEL/MOE (2018a): the first year, termed as 'beginning in teaching' is characterized by the pre-service teachers' experiences in inclusive education as a cross-cutting issue in schools, school curriculum, and approaches to teaching, expectations for the learning and progress of learners in different subject. In the second year (developing teaching), the pre-service teacher is expected to identify and assess weaknesses and barriers to learning for learners and carry out small-scale action classroom inquiry under the guidance of mentors (T-TEL/MOE, 2018b). The third year, embedding teaching seeks to equip the pre-service teacher with the skills to co-plan and co-teach groups of learners and carry out small-scale classroom inquiries and provide evidence of working towards meeting the NTS (T-TEL/MOE, 2020/2021a). In year 4, extended teaching, pre-service teachers plan, teach, and assess their learners independently and with increasing consistency; exhibit the ethical codes of conduct, values and attitudes expected of a teacher; carry out extensive action research projects and provide evidence of meeting the NTS fully (T-TEL/MOE, 2020/2021b).

To accomplish all facets of the programme, each College of Education has its specific day(s) within the week in each semester, incorporated into the colleges' timetable, for students to visit respective partner schools for the programme and return for reflective practice (T-TEL/MOE, 2020/2021; Ananga, 2021). Priya, et al (2017) see the reflective practice as a tool for pre-service teachers to explore themselves to enable them to develop professionally. There is a need for all students to visit basic schools on the designated day(s) and report to account for the visit. Figure 1 presents the yearly programme and intended outcome of the STS

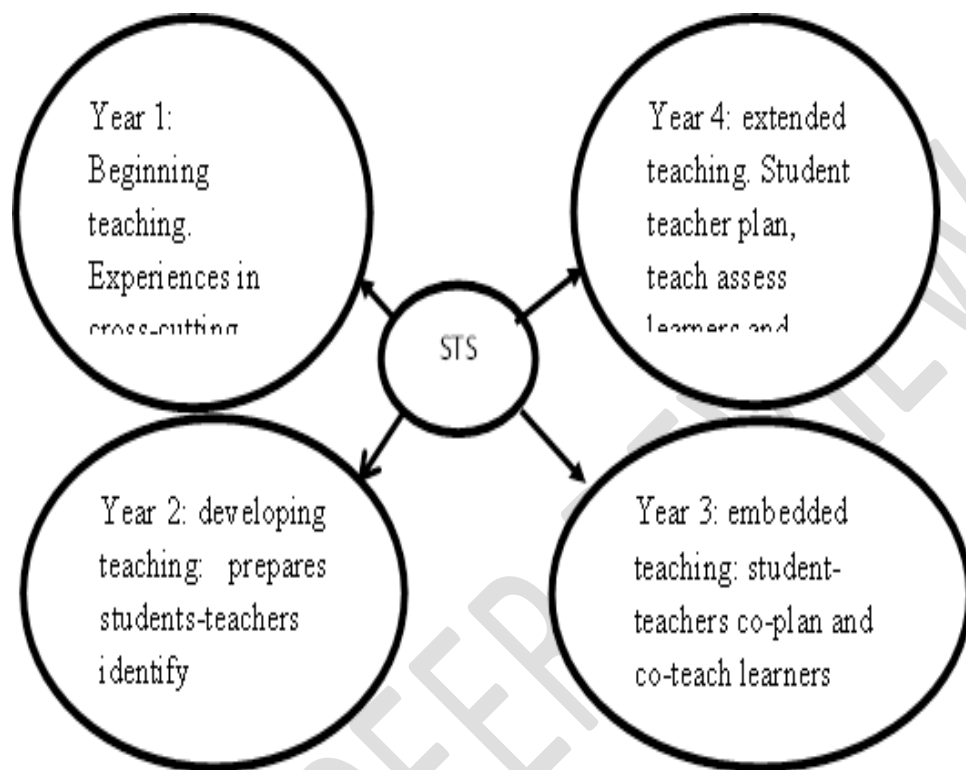


Figure 1: The yearly programme and intended outcome of the STS

Assessment of the STS in Colleges of Education (COE)

Assessment of the STS in COE is strongly guided by the National Teacher Education Assessment Policy (NTEAP) (MOE, 2017b). The NTEAP is planned to certify that all teachers completing their initial teacher training are assessed against the National Teachers' Standards (NTS), Ministry of Education (MOE), 2017a). Therefore, the policy provides a criterion for assessment and grading of pre-service teachers, teachers based on their professional values and attitudes, professional knowledge, professional practices and other cross-cutting issues (MOE 2017a.).

The policy directs that progression from one level to another in COE depends largely on passing STS (T-TEL/MOE, 2018a). Hence, an overall weighting of 30% is recommended for STS across the four years in terms of credit hours and assessment (MOE, 2017b). According to NTEAP, this weighting indicates the importance placed on extended periods of STS and the emphasis on a more interactive learner-focused approach to training teachers through formative assessment of coursework with focus on performance. According to Ananga, (2021), these are aimed at supporting pre-service teachers to provide the appropriate evidence against the three domains of the NTS in the classroom through the exhibition of the requisite skills, knowledge and attributes essential for nurturing honest, creative and responsible citizens in Ghana's Basic Schools. College tutors, lead mentors and mentors assess pre-service teachers based on the NTS and the NTEAP.

According to Ferdinand (2020), the assessment of students on STS each semester is based on their findings in the schools during the observations, which includes their challenges and recommendations. Therefore, pre-service teachers are scored and graded based on attendance to reflective practice seminars after visiting schools, reports from school in STS journals and punctuality to schools of practice.

Study Question

The study tried to answer the following question:

How effective is the STS programme and its accompanied reflections to improve teaching standards?

Methodology

A trend study was adopted with an exploratory design. Pandey and Pandey (2015) described a research design as the plan for a study that is employed as a guide in gathering and analyzing data. According to Pandey and Pandey (2015), exploratory research design is used when little is written on an issue that is studied. This design was considered appropriate for the study since the Supported Teaching in School (STS) Programme is the first of its kind in Ghana. The population for the study was all Colleges of Education in Ghana. A stratified sampling technique was employed to select 6 Colleges of Education affiliated with the University for Development Studies. These colleges have similar characteristics to their mentor university. They shared the same curriculum and submitted themselves to the scrutiny of the university in progress of pre-service teacher learning and skills acquisition across the study period, mentored placement, integration of subject-specific pedagogy of assessment of trainees. They equally have a shared pro-poor vision of training practically oriented, research and field-based teachers based on the NTS to contribute positively to make the new B.ED programme rich in content and practice. The common ideology of providing training that would equip teachers with innovative skills and knowledge that would have a positive influence on the children they teach.

Open-ended questions were used to elicit information from 6 STS coordinators on the STS programme in Colleges of Education, challenges faced by pre-service teachers in the practice of the programme and suggestions for the way forward for the programme in Colleges of Education in Ghana. A meta-analysis was also done on 60 pre-service teacher's reflective journals to ascertain coherence with daily school activities. The information obtained was put into themes to describe the situation at hand.

The information obtained from the interview was transcribed and analyzed thematically. The results of pre-service teachers' observations as in the reflective journal were coordinated and

reported narratively. The results were aggregated for comparable studies into a coherent account to discover the main effect of the STS.

Practicing STS in Colleges of Education

Information from colleges of education indicated a COE choosing just one specific day in a week for the STS programme for all levels throughout the year. For instance, information from College 1 states that: "...All pre-service teachers move out for the STS programme on only Wednesday, a day tutors hold their Professional Development Session (PDS)". In some COE, one specific day in a week for each level is selected for the STS programme throughout the year. According to Colleges 2, 3, 4 and 6 respectively. "levels 100, 200 and 300 students move out for the STS programme on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays respectively. From College 5, "First year pre-service teachers move out for the STS programme on Monday while the second year pre-service teachers move out on Thursday". The selection of a particular day in the week for the programme can make the expected observations, discussions, reporting and recommendations inflexible, as the same information will be provided every day and week.

All COE rotate the partner schools for the pre-service teachers every semester while maintaining the specific day for the programme. The idea of allowing pre-service teachers to practice the STS programme in more than one school for a year can help them encounter different experiences in different learning environments.

The statements: "*Pre-service teachers report to partner schools late because of distance*". They are posted to such basic schools to ease congestion and also to improve their

interaction with mentors and pupils" (Colleges 1, 2, and 6) are suggesting that some partner schools are far from the COE. Also, "*Some pre-service teachers walk more than 5 kilometres to and from their partner school every STS day*". All these problems suggest that some COE do not have buses or they have them but no fuel to convey pre-service teachers to and from schools of practice. The far distances have the propensity to make the pre-service teachers tired, which can affect their performance and reflection.

The lead mentors and mentors in the partner schools are trained a day, due to time, resources and the mentoring requirements. The training might not be enough to equip them with the guiding principles of the programme. The mentors might not be able to critically guide the pre-service teachers' experiences in cross-cutting issues, co-planning, co-teaching, planning and teaching.

Academic counselors hold reflective sessions with the pre-service teachers after STS programmes. Each pre-service teacher always presents an elaborate STS reflective journal to be scored and graded at the end of the semester.

A cursory study of some pre-service teachers' reflective journals revealed that activities in the reports which are supposed to be similar in content in the partner schools have varied information. For instance, in school 'A' a student-teacher reports "*organize general quizzes, sports competition, observe special days in the school*" as the wider school life". A second student in the same school indicated that "*sporting activities are frequently organized to enhance the physical fitness of students; opening days, speech and prize-giving days, graduation ceremonies and PTA meetings are also organized. Awards are also given out and or awarded in the various games and ceremonies carried out*". The question is, are all these activities carried out on the Tuesdays that they visited the schools? On staff meetings, while some pre-service

teachers were explaining the concept of staff meetings, some were describing vividly what transpired. Some pre-service teachers who attended the same partner schools equally presented varied co-curricular activities. When some pre-service teachers indicated activities such as *"sports, competitions, debates, cultural activities and quizzes competition with another school"* others indicated excursions, speech and prize given day, school sports, mock trials and debating clubs. These reports suggest that the pre-service teacher might not have understood the content of co-curricular activities. Some of the activities mentioned can best fit academic activities. In addition, the reports indicated scheduled weekly, monthly, termly, and yearly activities instead of daily routine activities. The content of the reflective journal might consist of information that might not necessarily reflect the observed experiences in the partner school; as the visits are days specific in nature.

Implications

The key objective of the Supported Teaching in School Programme (STS) is to adequately assist pre-service teachers in developing professional skills, attitudes and values, professional knowledge and professional practice of teaching including knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners learning progress in the classroom. However, the implementation of the STS programme can be subject to several criticisms, the most common of which concerns the method of selecting days for the visit. Pre-service teachers visit partner schools once a week on only one specific day(s) for a whole year. Therefore, the pre-service teacher reports on only what is observed on only one day continuously for every semester and or the whole year. Reporting on tasked activities for just one specific day in a week continuously, over some time is likely to make the student teacher a one-way learning process teacher. Pre-service teachers who visit partner schools on days that they do sports, have staff meetings, have English language or

any subject on timetable would only be reporting on that specific event for the whole semester/year. There is therefore the great fear that reports on pre-service teachers' reflective journals will only comprise literature reports and not observed information. Therefore the idea of sound grounding of teachers both in academic disciplines, pedagogy mastery and subjects-based methodologies would be affected.

Factually, pre-service teachers are detailed to observe school routines and how they are managed. Meanwhile, some pre-service teachers report late to partner schools because the distance is far or the college lacks means of transport to send them. There is the fear that some parts of pre-service teachers' report on reflective journals would be fictitious which might not be accurate with what would be observed.

Empirically, for pre-service teachers to learn well, the mentors must be sufficiently trained to be capable of imparting and modeling desired knowledge, skills and attitudes in the mentees. However, most COE trained the lead mentors and mentors for only a day. The insufficient training given to mentors has the potential to negatively affect the guiding principles underpinning the STS programme. Therefore, mentors may not be well equipped to be able to discuss the basic school curriculum effectively with mentees.

The myth of the programme is that pre-service teachers write and present concrete STS reflective journals which cover all facets of what is to be learned in each trimester or semester for scoring and grading. Therefore, the fear is that reports of the programme on reflective journals might be fictitious, which may impede the pre-service teachers' development of professional values and attitudes, professional knowledge and professional practice. It can therefore be inferred that pre-service teachers practice sole-day visits to schools for STS programmes. Also, the report in their reflective journals might not reflect the activities observed

or discussed. There is therefore the possibility that the pre-service teachers' reflective journals contain literature reports.

Conclusion

The Supported Teaching in School Programme (STS) aims to assist pre-service teachers in developing professional skills, attitudes, values, knowledge, and practice of teaching. This includes knowledge of inclusivity, equity, and support for learners' progress in the classroom. However, the method of selecting only certain days for visits has hindered the quality of the programme. Pre-service teachers are required to report on a particular day's activities for every semester or the entire year. This can make them feel overwhelmed and ineffective. The mentors also face a lack of sufficient training, which makes them ill-equipped to provide the necessary support based on the guiding principles of the STS programme. Transportation problems in Colleges of Education and distance can cause pre-service teachers to report late to partner schools, affecting their grounding in academic disciplines, pedagogy mastery, and subject-based methodologies. Moreover, pre-service teachers' reflective journals may contain inaccurate information about school activities. In conclusion, the pre-service teachers' practice of visiting schools for only one day makes it difficult for them to achieve the full benefits of the STS programme. They often have to rely on literature to complete their reflective journal reports.

Recommendations

The STS programme should be organized for pre-service teachers to benefit from all the days' of teaching and learning, and co-curricular activities in the basic schools. Colleges of education can select one week from the semester for STS programme which each student teacher would be able to experience and report on daily routine teaching and learning activities and co-curricular activities in the schools rather than the sole reporting every semester. Alternatively, the STS days on the colleges' timetable can be varied from day to day to enable them to benefit from each day's activities. In terms of the STS policy, there is a need to deepen further training for all lead mentors, mentors and student teachers if they are all expected to practice and implement the STS programme as intended. There is also the need for the government of Ghana to do the needful in supplying the requisite logistics such as buses for the successful implementation of the programme. Supervision by tutors of COE should be structured and intensified to pre-service teachers during STS programme to make their reflective journals report to cohere with practicable daily school activities.

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