Challenges of Colleges of Education Internship Programme in Ghana: The Case of Gbewaa College of Education

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Abstract: The study sought to determine the challenges interns go through during internship, focusing mainly on curriculum resources, professional and academic issues, mentoring and supervision. The instruments for collection of data were mainly questionnaires and observations. These instruments were used to gather data from a sample size of 231 interns for the study. The main findings revealed that inadequate curriculum resources in the schools of internship, ill-funded internship programme, library facilities and ill-equipped classroom furniture militate against successful implement of the programme. The study further observed that interns lacked the skills of reflective practice, teaching of core subjects in the basic school curriculum and effective classroom management practices. Recommendations were made on the need to increase funding for curriculum material to schools by the Government, Donors, Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the Community concerned. A mechanism should also be put in place for interns to evaluate the system. As it stands now, interns, who are key stakeholds do not take part in evaluating the programme directly.

Keywords: Challenges, Interns, Internship, Mentor, Lead Mentor, Mentorship

1. Introduction

Studies over the years indicated that, the success of interns is normally associated with high quality training offered to teachers during training [14, 16]. Undoubtedly, recent technology coupled with socio-political and economic developments have contributed in making quality training of teacher a priority for governments and humankind the world over. According to Kemp et al. [15] the the influence of education in terms of boosting people's life style, creating wealth and happiness is the driving force behind why both governments and citizens to invest heavily in formal education. In this global economic scheme of things, Ghana, is not left out in this direction. Teachers are widely seen as the indispensable corner stones on which education thrives [20, 21]. Teacher training is crucial in building every nation because such training results in the production of a calibre of teachers with the right mix of not only subject matter and pedagogical knowledge [13] but curriculum knowledge as well as knowledge of learners and learning [13, 10]. It is the

national vision that such calibre of teachers would not only be able to deliver but would inspire learning that qualitatively epitomizes high quality education for the development of the nation [19]. For this reason, quality preparation of teachers in schools and quality Teacher Education appear to be intrinsically connected [16].

There are myriads of challenges facing the educational sector of most African countries. Among which but not limited to poor infrastructure - lack of, or shortages, of funds, insufficient provision of developmental resources and inefficiency of developmental labour as well as poor repair and maintenance [5]. For instance Baker, and Bernstein [4] reveal that the nature and state of the school buildings significantly impact on student health and performance.

Problems in schools not only affect academic performance, but they also infringe on the rights to education, as well as the rights to safety and health of learners as well as of teachers. The effects of poor infrastructure in schools can also be seen in learners' drop out rates and low-teachers retention rates.

To Parker [22], all the educational challenges facing African

countries, none is as persistent or as compelling as the one related to the preparation of capable and competent teachers. This observation still remains relevant as far as teacher preparation in Ghana and Africa is concerned. For one to get quality education, the person needs competent teachers who are well prepared and professionally motivated to discharge their responsibilities. Professionalism is one singular important trade mark of a competent teacher. Thus, the professionally certified teacher is one of the most influential school-based factors responsible for improving teaching and learning [6, 21]. As a result of this influence, it is necessary for the Ministry of Education in Ghana to ensure recruitment, training and retention of teachers in a manner that gives all learners the opportunity to be taught by the most competent teachers possible. In line with this, policy makers must have to address the training of teachers in the making. Nevertheless, the research base in this area is not strong enough because it does not specify what needs to be done to ensure effective teacher training program. To achieve this all basic schools in Ghana.

Initial Teacher education in Ghana has undergone a number of transformations all in the name of achieving quality teacher production for the basic educational level. In Ghana, basic education, which is focused at meeting the minimum learning needs of an individual consist of a two-year Pre-school, a six-year Primary School and a three-year junior Secondary School (2-6-3) [2]. For example, in 2005, all Teacher Training Colleges were upgraded into Colleges of Education. Again, in 2018, these Colleges of Education were further upgrade into degree awarding institutions. This means that the quest for teacher quality have been a topmost priority of Ghanaian educational system and its stakeholders.

According to Perry [23], there are five basics or fundamentals to consider in developing or evaluating teacher preparation programs as opined. These are program purpose, requirements for subject-matter knowledge, requirements for professional knowledge, clinical and field experiences, and faculty qualifications. Among all these basics, field experiences (internship) which dawns to interns the realities of the teaching profession was the centre of interest of the current study. Moreover, as noted earlier, all the efforts to improve teacher quality have largely centred on subject-matter knowledge and faculty qualifications. Though laudable, attention ought to be given to students teachers internship as part of an all-round quality improvement.

The concept of internship is embedded on the theory of social constructivism and based on *Cognitive Apprenticeship.* [8, 18]. This cognitive apprenticeship fosters critical thinking, mentors scientific thinking and skills, ensures collaborative climate, encourages active construction of knowledge as well as ensuring intrinsic motivation of learners [29, 25]. Learning through cognitive apprenticeship takes place when there is legitimate peripheral participation. In this process, new comers would always enter on the periphery and later gradually move towards full participation. Schunk [28] opined that the bulk of learning a child goes through takes place when there is a social interaction between the child and a skillful teacher. The teacher in this case either models behaviours and/or provides verbal instructions for the child. Schunk [28] refers to this as *Cooperative or Collaborative Dialogue.* The child seeks to understand the actions or instructions provided by the parent or teacher, then internalises the information and uses it to guide or regulate his own performance. In the context of internship, the child represents the intern, while the parent or teacher represents either the college tutor, college supervisor or partnership school mentor and lead mentor who through collaborative dialogue, modelling, coaching or mentoring, guides the intern into acquiring teaching competencies.

According to Campbell and Brummet [8] and Michael and Ilan [18], the main aim in this type of learning is becoming a practitioner, not necessarily learning about the practices. Wilson, Jonassen and Cole [30] identified four important aspects of traditional apprenticeship. These include Modeling, Scaffolding, Fading, and Coaching.

Modeling is a type of demonstration which occurs after imitation and is usually employed to help a learner to transcend the Zone of Proximal Development [7]. Zone of Proximal Development is simply the gap between what a learner is capable of doing without help and what the same learner can do when helped. Salisu and Ransom [27] indicated that, modeling is a better way of learning as compared to trial and error method. Endeley [9] noted that when the learner is given the opportunity to observe the master demonstrates how to accomplish different parts of a given task for sometime. The master usually ensures that the target processes are made understandable. He does this by explicitly showing the apprentice what and how to perform the task. Similarly, during internship, the interns observe their college tutor or partnership school teacher for a given period of time before beginning to teach so as enable the intern to imitate the mentor. This form of support is referred to as scaffolding [1]. To Aduko [1], scaffolding refers to the support offered to an apprentice to carry out a given task. This can be in the form of complete execution of the whole task for the learner or giving cues and hints from time to time regarding what to do next.

Fading as a concept means gradually removing the support being given to an apprentice whilst increasing the responsibilities of same. Usually, the interns works under the tutelage of a supervisor who is mandated to inspect their daily lesson notes and holds conferences with them before and after lessons in order to equip them with useful cues and feedback respectively on their teaching. As time goes on the interns take increasing responsibility of the job of teaching [30].

Coaching and mentoring are sometimes used interchangeably. A mentor is simply defined as the one who mediates expert knowledge [13, 10] for novices and in this way helps that which is tacit to become more explicit [26]. The two most common uses of the word *mentoring* are to describe: (a) a professional development relationship in which a more experienced partner helps a less experienced one to develop a career and (b) a guiding relationship between an adult and a young one geared towards helping the latter realise his potentials and possibly overcome some barriers or challenges militating against his total development

[26]. The master coaches the apprentice through a variety of activities. These include choice of tasks, provision of hints and scaffolding, evaluation of the activities of apprentices and diagnosis of the kinds of problems they may have, challenging and giving them encouragement, giving feedback, structuring the ways things are done and work on particular weaknesses [9, 12].

Finally, coaching is the process of over seeing the student's learning. Some refer to mentoring and coaching as other forms of scaffolding [17, 26]. Nonetheless, others refer to scaffolding as an aspect of coaching [30]. However, another group of scholars maintain that the two concepts are different strategies falling under the larger classification of cognitive apprenticeship [18, 8]. In all these propositions, what matters is the commonality is that, both strategies 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 internship programme.

Internship is indeed the most important aspect of teacher preparation because it basically aims at providing opportunities for interns to develop and evaluate their competences and skills in the major areas of teaching [11]. In the same vein Allen [3] opined that, internship provides opportunities for the teacher in the making to develop and evaluate their teaching competencies.

However, according to Pop, et al [25], during internship, interns are bound to face a number of challenges including lack of curriculum materials, inadequate supervision, and mentors' neglect, and other socio-economic problems that may interfere with their professional development and even adversely affect their attitudes towards the teaching profession. As a result of that, this reduces the quality of the graduate teachers who in essence ought to spearhead quality education in schools. Thus, based on this scenario, the current research sought to investigate the actual challenges and problems faced by interns during internship using a sample of students from Gbewaa College of Education, Pusiga District in the Upper East Region of Ghana during the period of October to December 2021.

The study sought to identify and describe possible challenges militating against interns in their professional development during internship, thus, jeopardizing the quality of their training as efficient prospective teachers. Specifically, the study centred on challenges associated with the availability of curriculum materials, professional and academic performances, mentorship and supervision concerns during the internship.

The study was guided by the following research questions:
i.   What challenges militate against interns with respect to the availability of curriculum materials?
ii. What professional and academic challenges do interns encounter?
iii. What are the perceptions of interns on the mentorship and supervisory roles of partnership school mentors and college tutors on teaching practice?

2. Materials and Methods

This research adopted a case study design which employed a self-administered questionnaire to examined distinctive challenges facing student teachers of Gbewaa College of Education, Pusiga in the Upper East Region of Ghana on internship and how they were coping with the varying circumstances in their internship in various district in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The sample consisted of 231 students (112 males and 119 females) who were visited at random in their schools during the internship period.

Two main instruments were employed for data collection. These included observations and questionnaires. The observation was strictly used by the researcher to collect data about the interns for which the interns themselves would not feel comfortable to divulge. The interns were again given a self-administered questionnaire eliciting from them about availability of curricular materials, professional and academic challenges, level of supervision and mentorship issues they faced in the field. The questionnaire were closed ended items formats and contained 'yes' or 'no' on one set and 'enough', 'not enough' and 'unavailable' on another set. The data from the questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics based on frequencies and percentages, displayed in the form of charts. The results of the analysis are discussed below.

3. Results and Discussions

The results of analysis are discussed under curriculum material availability, professional and academic requirements and perceptions about mentors and tutors.

3.1. Availability of Curricular Materials

The first research question sought to find out the challenging confronting interns on teaching internship with regard to the availability of instructional resources as well as suitability of teaching learning environment in the partnership schools. Figure 1 provides the analysis of findings and basis of discussions in this respect.

Figure 1 indicates that the essential curricular resources were not available in most of the partnership schools for the 2020/2021 academic year. These included pupil's textbooks (82%), teaching syllabuses (68.8%) and teacher manuals/Handbooks (68.5%). From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that few schools within the research scene have the requisite supply of resource and curriculum materials. The problem of curricular materials in many schools in Ghana as a whole has become a source of worry following the inception of the new educational reforms in 2019. This presupposes that if high calibre teachers are to be produced, much more needs to be done by the stakeholders in education as far as supply of curricular materials to schools is concerned. It was further seen that most of the partnership schools were ill-equipped with classroom furniture. The poor state of infrastructure seriously impact on the quality of teaching and learning as corroborated by Barrett et al [5] who found clear evidence that extremes of environmental

elements affect learning. They further found that pupils' health and learning were positively affected by good indoor air quality, thermal comfort, good acoustics, well-maintained systems, and clean surfaces.
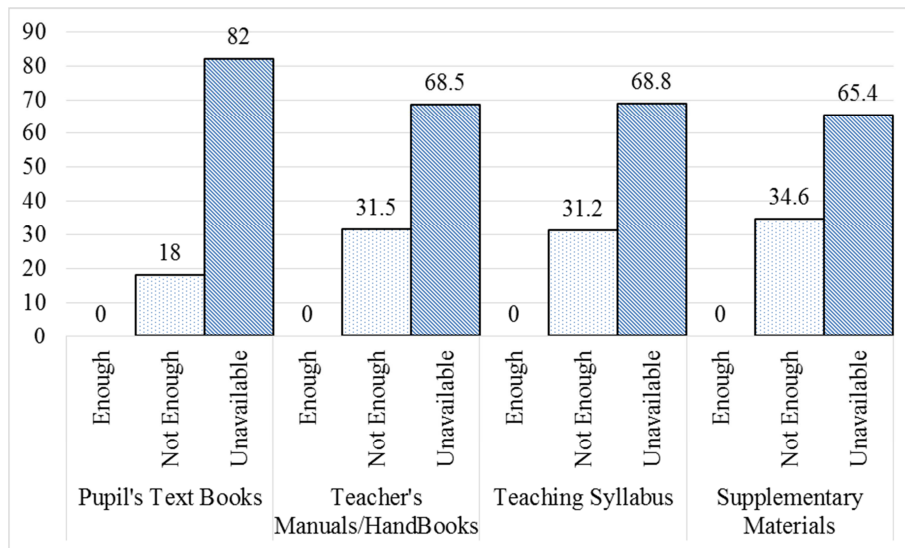

Figure 1. Curricular Resources.

In order to manage the challenges faced by the interns by unavailability of curricular materials, they were asked whether they purchase some of these materials. The findings showed that an overwhelming majority of the trainees (72%) use their own meager resources to procure curricular materials to supplement as shown by figure 2. This is a desperate move by the trainees to satisfy their need for curricular materials, given that they do not earn salaries during this internship period and the only source of income is their internship allowance and family support.

The results of analysis presented in figure 3 shows that library facilities and classroom furniture pose problems to trainees in their field internship; because only (51.1%) of the classrooms observed were well enclosed and (50.2%) were classrooms well ventilated. Indeed it is not uncommon to college tutors during teaching practice supervision to find learners sharing or squeezing themselves on one desk or seat in class in his/her trainees classes. However, some improvements can be appreciated in the classroom buildings well enclosed which have windows as indicated by 51.1% and 50.2% respectively of the respondents, which is appropriate and conducive environment for teaching-learning processes.
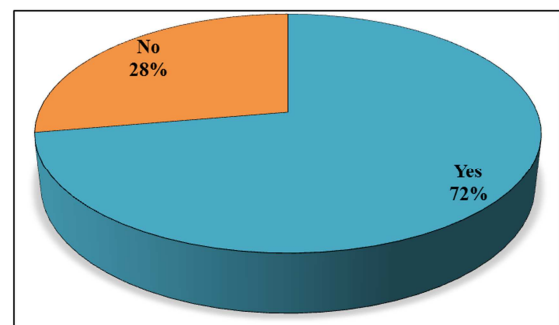

Figure 2. Curriculum Resources by interns themselves.
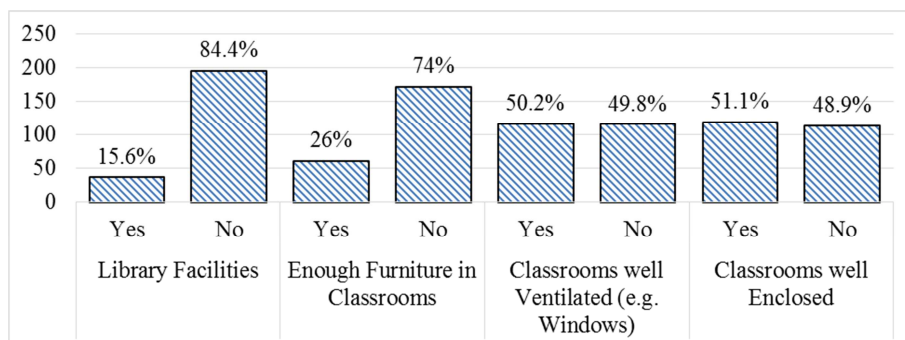

Figure 3. Learning Environment Suitability.

3.2. Professional and Academic Challenges

Research question two focused on professional and academic issues and requirements faced by the interns and the analysis of their responses is presented in figure 4.
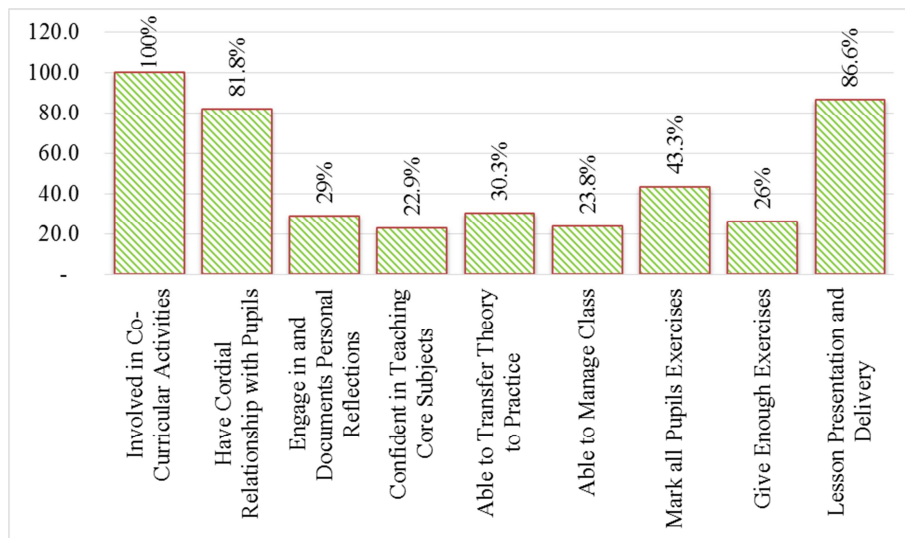
Figure 4. Professional and Academic Issues.

The general picture shown in figure 4 reveals that the interns appeared to fair on well with the professional and academic aspects in the middle of challenges posed by lack of adequate curricular materials and inappropriate learning environment (as presented in figures 2 and 3). Remarkable successes were observed in the areas of increased involvement in co-curricular activities and cordial relationship with pupils, all of which were achieved by 100% and 81.8% of the respondents respectively. These achievements might be attributed to good professional mentorship, supervision and quality support given to the interns by basic school mentors and college tutors.

However, the following damning revelations were observed (in figure 4) as far as the interns professional and academic challenges are concerned. Interns did not document their personal experiences and reflections in their Students Reflective Journals (SRJ) as figure 4 shows that only 29% did so. Moreover, only 22.9% of the intern in this study scene demonstrated minimum level of confidence in teaching the core subjects in the basic school curriculum. This implies that majority of the interns lacked the confidence in teaching the core subjects. It was further observed that majority of the interns could not practicalise theoretical knowledge gained as they failed to appropriately transfer it in their classrooms.

Classroom management was also found to be problematic among interns as only 23.8% met the minimum acceptable standards of classroom management practices as contained in students' handbook provided by the Ministry of Education, Ghana [19]. Again, only 26% and 43.3% respectively were found to have administered adequate number of exercises and promptly marked same.

3.3. Mentorship and Supervision

Respondents were asked about the nature of support they gained from their mentors at the basic school and college tutors and the results of analysis are shown in figures 5 and 6.
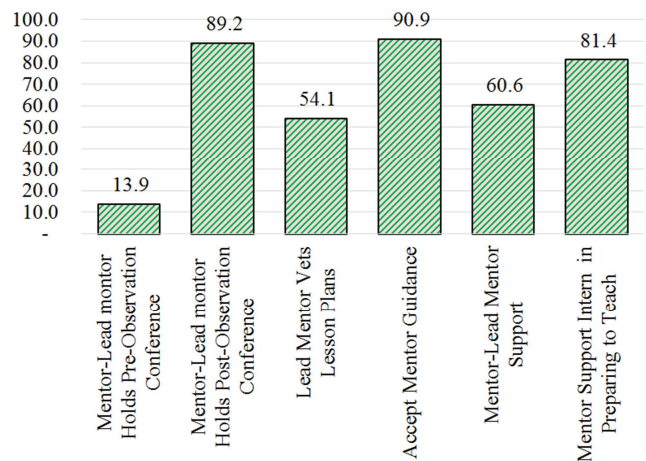

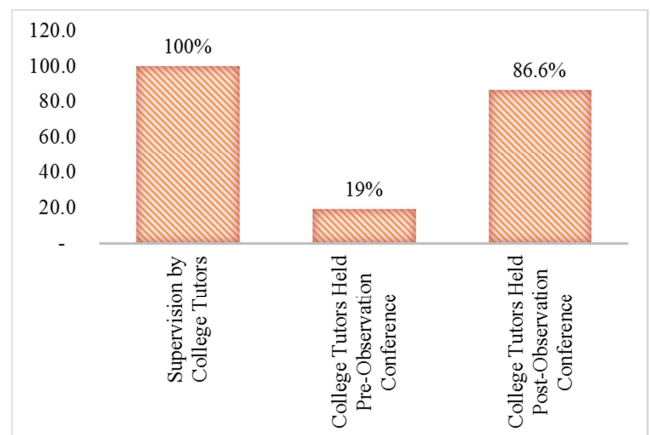*Figure 5. Basic School Mentorship Support.*

Figure 6. College Tutors' Support.

Figure 5 shows that interns benefited a lot when it came to acceptance of both lead mentors and mentors guidance (90.9%), holding of post-observation conferences (89.2%) as well as supporting interns in preparing to teach. These forms of support are crucial to interns as they enhance professional

and academic growth and development on the part of the trainees. However, more need to be done in the areas of holding of pre-observation conferences (13.9%) and vetting of lesson plans by lead mentors.

The results presented in figure 6 reveals that all the interns were mandatorily supervised adequately by their college tutors. This implies that every intern was supervised three times. Just as observed in (figure 5), the college tutors did not equally hold sufficient pre-observation lesson conferences (19%) with the interns.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that there are factors on the ground which could jeopardize the training of high quality interns, hence contributing to low academic achievement in pupils at the schools. Factors that need attention include availability of curricular materials, properly financed internship programme, library facilities and ill-equipped classroom furniture.

Significant successes were observed in the areas of interns involvement in co-curricular activities and highly cordial relationship with pupils. However, professionally and academically, a lot needs to be done on personal reflective practice. Interns confidence to teaching the core subjects in the basic school curriculum as well as helping them to transfer theoretical knowledge to classroom setting and exhibit good classroom management practice still require serious boost.

Largely, interns had positive perceptions towards basic school mentors, lead mentors and college tutors as far as guidance assistance interns receive is concerned. However, basic school lead mentors as well as college tutors need to step up efforts on pre-observation lesson conferences.

5. Recommendations

In order to improve the quality of interns on internship programme, the following recommendations are suggested:

There is a urgent need to increase the supply of adequate curriculum materials, and relevant supplementary materials such classroom furniture, library facilities to schools by the Government, NGOs, Donors and the Community.

There is need for the interns to have increased financial and regular support from the Government, NGOs, and voluntary donations.

College tutors and mentors from the partnership schools should ensure that the clinical supervision that they do pass through the three-tiers: pre-observation lesson conferences, actual observation and post-observation lesson conferences.

Subject tutors at the college level should step up efforts in helping interns to imbibe the core skills of classroom managements during college training.

The internship system should put in place a feedback mechanism to obtain feedback directly from interns. This should be done in such a way that the identity of interns are concealed during feedback. As it stands now, such a feedback channel is adhoc based and saddled with fear of victimization

by interns. The system only rely on reports of tutor supervisors, mentors and lead mentors as well as college management team led by the Principal and/vice principal and internship coordinator.

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